

# GIMBLE 3



GIMBLE #3

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# GIMBLE

#3, is published rarely by Ted Johnstone, temporarily at 5337 Remington Road, #231-2; San Diego 15, California, and serves as a vehicle for the relation of certain quasi-current events in Coventry. Any comments?

## OVERTURE TO A PRELUDE

Bradley's, Ltd., Tobacconists, of 12, Imperial Street, Michel Delving, was proud of its exclusive clientele; so the short, red-faced clerk was unconcerned by a lack of customers at an otherwise commercial hour. Only the rattle of numerous cabs and omnibuses, a distant barrel-organ, and the twitter of starlings and street-boys might have drawn him from an apparently rapt contemplation of a sizeable quantity of his own wares. Eventually there came the soft tinkle of a spring-bell, and a powerful figure entered whose air of authority and impeccable afternoon dress marked him as an officer of the Guard.

"Ah, good afternoon, Colonel Calverley," the clerk beamed. "May we be of some service today?"

"Noon, Thompson," the Colonel replied. "Just stopped in for a fresh supply of the Arcadia mixture."

"Certainly, Colonel; it's all prepared. If you'll just step this way with me, please..."

When Thompson returned he was alone, and the shop was again silent.

\* \* \* \*

Commissioner John F. Teal was dozing at his desk at New Buckland Yard when he noticed that the crystal top of the middle pen of his bronze-and-ivory desk set was glowing softly. Quickly ascertaining that he was alone, he moved the base-plate of his call-buttons up, then back. A section of oak files wheeled aside and revealed a small brass-caged lift. Colonel Calverley emerged and saluted smartly. Commissioner Teal, who tended to forget his rank of Major General in the New American Defense Command, returned the salute clumsily. He pressed two buttons on the desk and extended his hand.

"Well, Colonel, you're back," he chuckled. "Enjoy yourself?"

"As much as might be expected. I figgered with the lad safe at the Hall, I might as well let the boys there take over."

As he spoke, the door opened and two men entered. "Here's your man, Toby," Teal said to Assistant Commissioner Tobias L. MacDonald of the Michel Delving Constabulary. "Safe and sound is the fair-haired boy of the M. D. C."

"Hullo, Hugh," said MacDonald. "How's the Minstrel Watch?"

"Good, sir, except for being bitten by the Duke's baggage; but you got my reports?"

"We did; and your expense accounts."

"I trust you approved the thousand silvers I lost at the Captain's Balls in Conqueror?"

"I did not. I don't doubt that you lost it, but you're a good gambler yourself, Hugh, as your mates at the Tankerville will attest. When you report your winnings, we'll pay your losses. Surely you won a few bets from his Lordship?"

"It's not easy, sir; he cheats."

"But so do you, Colonel."

"The Colonel has something for me, I believe," broke in the other man, an angular, dome-headed man in a white jacket: C. Thorndyke van Dusen of Laboratories.

"Oh yes, Craig," Teal answered. Calverley produced a broken dagger. "The incident is covered in this report," Teal added, producing a folder.

"Witchcraft, sorcery; I'll turn this over to Verner of Alchemy and Thaumaturgy Division," van Dusen muttered.

"By the way, General; why are we following the Duke?" Calverley asked.

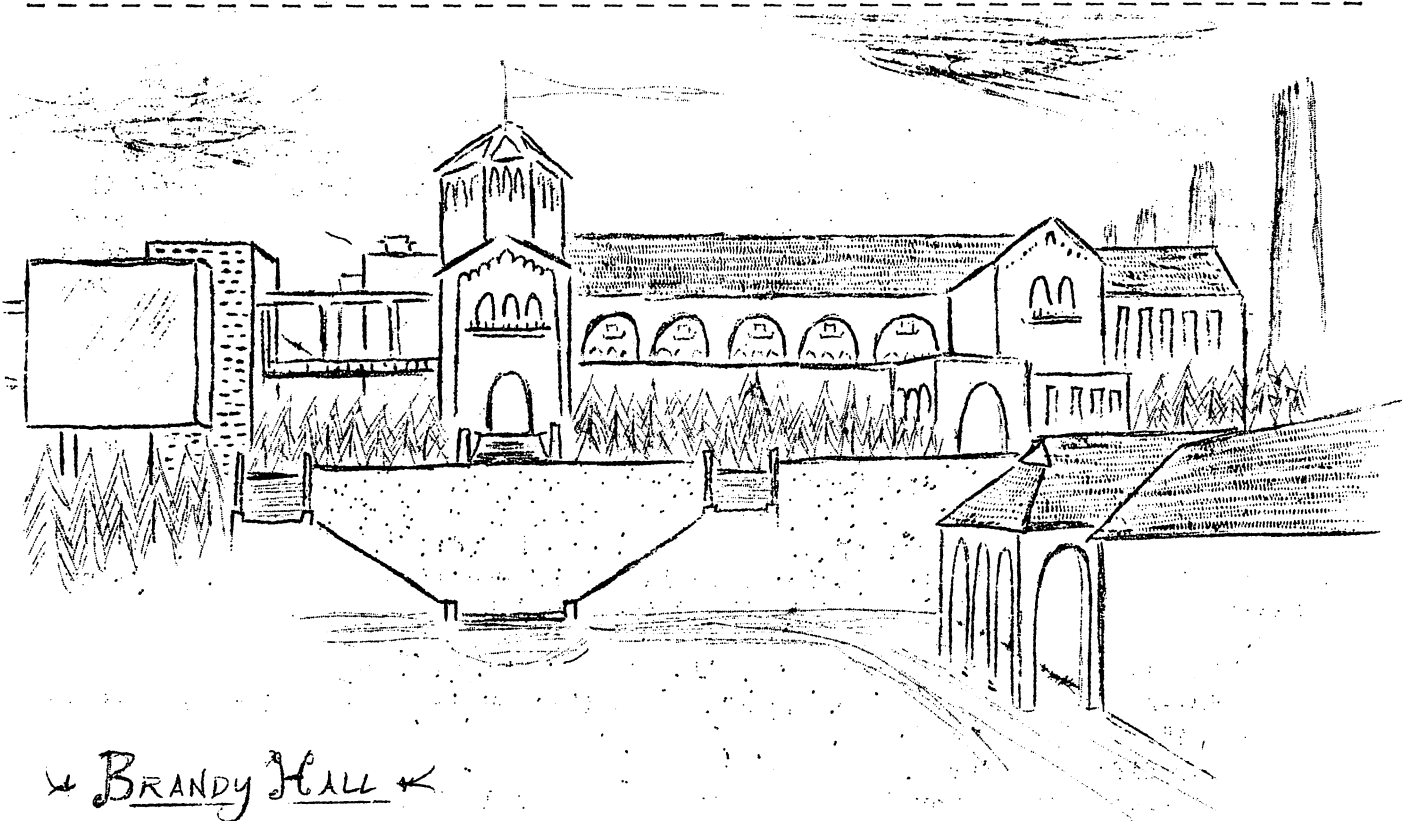
"Executive orders," answered Teal.

"A hobby horse of Old Baldy's, then?"

"He'd have your Gates for that, Colonel. Remember, Old Baldy, Lord Mayor Baldwin heads up I-2. And now, gentlemen," he continued, "since none of us have any further duties this afternoon, shall we pop down to the Players' for a pint? That is, if Craig will refrain from pinching the barmaids." For half a second the ascetic van Dusen tensed with anger, then relaxed to let his own dry laughter join the others.

Some minutes later the sober citizens of Michel Delving were treated to the sight of four august officials linked arm in arm, rolling with their laughter across the broad Parade Mall of the Royal Mount of Michel Delving.

---Dean W. Dickensheet, Feb. 1961





# PRELUDE TO A WAR

## TED JOHNSTONE AND PAUL STANBERY

Hunting horns sounded off in the distance. They echoed over the green hills that rolled down to the river, and rang over the whispering pines, the quiet cottages, and the factories of the Marish. Tedron heard the haunting melody drift down from the hills to the Brandywine as he stood at the rail on the upper deck of the steamboat. It mixed in with the tingling spray from the great paddlewheel of the awkward white craft which made its way north along the river.

The western bank of the river was lined with rolling hills and patches of forest and small prosperous farms. The eastern bank held the mountainous area of aristocratic Buckland, shielded from the sea to the east by rocky cliffs that dropped hundreds of feet to the narrow beach. And Tedron was looking up the steep green slopes to the wide curving grey stone wall that was the West Face of Brandy Hall, at the five flying spires that rose above it, their golden peaks gleaming in the sunlight.

A piercing blast of steam shot up from the ship's whistle and a shout came from the wheelhouse -- "Brandy Hall!" The lumbering steamer began to bear toward the eastern shore and passengers started drifting to the lower decks, carrying baggage and a jumble of conversation as they prepared to disembark. Tedron detached himself from his stateroom on the rail and started down the stairs of the opposite side. From there he could see two small obelisk-like towers set back a hundred yards from the western bank; a road came from far away through the grass and led between them to end at the river. A crewman was pointing them out to the eager sightseers. "Them's the Elven Markers. Harkness found 'em here when 'e and 'is Star Rangers came to Brandy Hall back 'bout 1450, when the Trensinians claimed the throne. But Harkness showed them a thing or two..."

Now they were drawing in to an old grey stone fortress on the east bank with a wooden house alongside. A man ran out of the house and waved to the boat. Other men came out of the old stone keep, some in uniform, and threw a line to the boat, shouting back and forth with the crew as they did. Slowly they pulled the white steamboat in to the wooden pier alongside the moss-covered fortress.

Just then another fanfare floated down the wind. It was clear and stately and dynamic. It sounded once, and then again, and the trumpeter broke on the last note. "This is it," Tedron sighed, joining the group milling about the main deck. With a heave and a thump, the heavy gang-plank dropped onto the pier, and the passengers began to shuffle ashore. There were the usual crowds of people drifting here and there about the park-like area surrounding the fort -- men on business, clad in garb ranging from the cloaks and hoods of Collinsia to the broad-brimmed hats and riding clothes of the Stanberian desert cattlemen; lovers, strolling hand in hand along the embankment; soldiers in the grey uniforms of the New American Middle Guard and a few in the blue of the High Guard; but no one seemed to be paying much attention to the arrival of the river-boat, or to its distinguished passenger. True, Tedron thought, he was incognito. But it was a little disappointing not to have a full-scale reception complete with a military band, as he had had the last time he arrived at Brandy Hall.

Towering above the boat, the dock, and the fortress, where the grassy slope seemed to level out, was the striking Main Gate of Brandy Hall -- added during Edwardum II's long reign in the early 17th Century -- it medieval buttresses and towers stabbing into the sky, flags and pennants flying. To both sides of the gay gate were stone walls of drabber colors and contours, dating from the first period of the Empire of Coventry, about 1000 A.D., arranging themselves in tete du ponts around the whole fortress, with here and there a tower placed along the stretches of wall. Within these walls lay the administrative buildings; on the north, of the Union of Buckland, the federal administrative body; on the south, of the military, and the headquarters of the University of Coventry at Brandy Hall. Between them was the wide lawn known as Union Square. The buildings were among the oldest in Coventry, having been the homes of the Masters of Buckland before the Stanberian States were ever established.

But the most impressive sight within the walls was the hill, known by many as Monk's Hill, or the Red Hill, which rose over a hundred feet above the outer walls. On its crest stood the stately buildings of Brandy Hall itself; on the north, the modern structures, dedicated in 2125, of the New American Commonwealth industrial combine, and on the south the administrative center of the New American Empire. The hill was capped by the central building with its conservative tower, a massive structure built by Harkness when he established the capitol of the United Republics of Stanberia at Brandy Hall in 1530. Behind the hill was a sheer drop to a small hilly area which gave way to a narrow beach on the Baraduin. An arm of the sea flowed about the entire hill, serving as a moat.

As the last of the passengers crossed the gangplank, Tedron followed, stopping momentarily to speak to the Captain and bid him an easy voyage home. The Captain mumbled a farewell, and checked off the last name from his passenger manifest as the small man in the grey cloak stepped to the dock.

Tedron brushed off the few loungers who came hurrying forward to help with any luggage. "No, nothing. Sorry," he said, exhibiting his empty hands with a cheerful shrug. "But thanks for your concern," he added, and tossed his nearly empty purse of silver chips into the midst of the men.

The tallest one deftly caught it, and tossed it back to him. "Thank ye, sir," he said, "but we works for our wages." Tedron caught the bag again, restored it to his pocket, and set foot on the roadway that ran up the hill from the base of the pier, passing through the marketplace and ending at the Main Gate.

The moat around Brandy Hall was bridged only in two places -- directly before the Main Gate on the west, and on the north, where a smaller bridge ran directly from the Offices of the Commonwealth to the outer military reservation, which lay between the parade ground and race-track and the great marketplace, all watched over by the brooding grey walls of Fort Bellamy. All told, Brandy Hall and the immediate area around served as home to a garrison of 100,000 New American soldiers and 40,000 marines.

As he reached the top of the hill, Tedron paused to catch his breath, and stopped before the Great Gate which stood open before him, with its central spire towering above. He looked back down to the river, and watched the stern-wheeler he had left a few minutes before as it cast off from the pier and began moving on northward. He turned again and passed through the gates.

Inside there was a great oval court with a fountain playing in the center. The walks were filled with people, drifting around and waiting their turn to be

checked through the guardhouse which stood opposite the gate, pushed up against the inner wall. Along the top of this wall, which rose some ten feet above the oval square, was a grim fence of iron spikes. This fence was on the level of the ground above, and the only passage through was by way of the flight of stairs inside the guardhouse, where the main flow of people was bound. Tedron joined the crowd.

Trumpeters on the second floor balcony played occasional summonses -- this was a part of the intricate and hopelessly inefficient but aesthetically pleasing palace intercommunications system. Inside there were two guards at tables at the foot of the stairway, checking visitors through in pairs. Slowly the line moved ahead, and then Tedron found himself facing an impassive guard who asked, "Name and business here?"

Tedron seized the first name that sprang to mind. "Rental of Linn," he said. "I have a message for the Minister of Internal Affairs." The guard grunted, and Tedron took it as approval, pushed past the desk, and climbed the iron stairs.

Far down the concrete-edged grass of Union Square, almost half a mile away, rose Brandy Hall. The entire building complex rose a hundred feet above Monk's Hill and was almost a half-mile from north to south; truly, it was an impressive sight. But none of the people who walked briskly on their errands about the square seemed to notice it -- it was there, and they knew it was there. They could admire it some other time. For Tedron, however, every time was the first. He enjoyed admiring the massive structure, perhaps even more so knowing that so few people did.

He was nearly to the end of the square when he heard the trumpets sound again. But this was no summons -- this was the quick four notes in a rising scale that signalled the guards; there was a stranger, unauthorised, within the walls. And Tedron felt, somehow, that he knew who this was. He started up the broad stone steps and took the right-hand branch of the T. As he arrived at the top, he saw two uniformed guardsmen approaching at a trot. Tedron broke into a run, ducked through a door in the wall beside him and fled down a long echoing corridor. He took two turns to the left and the next one to the right, and as he heard the footsteps of the guards drawing closer, he found himself in front of a heavy wooden door, slightly ajar. He pushed it open enough to allow himself to slip through, then leaned heavily against it and felt it close beneath his weight.

Tedron drew a deep breath and looked about him, just beginning to realise what he had blundered into. He heard the sounds of an orchestra, and slowly he walked out into the large hall before him. The orchestra was seated with its forest of music stands and multiplicity of instruments on a floor that glistened like marble and was a deep blue in color. On both sides rose white marble columns, lining the walls distinguishedly. The orchestra was seated below the stage which was curtained with a rich blue material. The concert hall was large, but not too wide, and it was high. The ceiling, a cream color, was broken by heavy, ornately carved beams of dark wood, high above the absent audience and the orchestra. The concert hall was alive.

The orchestra was tuning up. Flutists were doing scales, violinists were running through their paces, brass players were limbering up their valves. Tedron made his way toward the orchestra pit, sliding between the red plush seats

on the marble-like floor, passing beneath the white-and-gold boxes. And Tedron realised where he was. This was the innermost 'Brandy Hall', the famous conference and concert hall. And this was the Brandy Hall Philharmonic Orchestra, Coventry's finest. With a wry smile, Tedron decided he could avoid being caught by the guards after all. He was going to become a concert guitarist.

He joined the players as they made ready, picking up a guitar that lay, apparently abandoned, in a corner of the orchestra pit. A middle-aged man with greying hair was testing his tympani with soft springs of his padded drum stick. A young man with close-cropped hair was running his fingers over his trumpet, limbering its valves for the rehearsal. A man with dark eyes was producing mellow, rich tones from a french horn and another, across the orchestra from him, slid his deep trombone from note to note. Tedron began picking at the guitar very seriously as he slipped into an inconspicuous chair between a balding man who was stiffly adjusting a string on his violin and a gentleman who was engrossed in gliding his bow across the strings of his 'cello. Tedron tried his best to look officious.

The balding violinist turned to him. "Old boy, do G-strings give you as much trouble as they give me?"

"Not as long as I'm careful with my fingering," Tedron said dryly, with a straight face, as he continued to tune the guitar.

Tedron looked around at the woman with the viola going over a delicate pizzicato as was a tall thin fellow with a bass viol near the percussion section -- the two stringed instruments, one high pitched, one low, speaking a dialogue with plucked voices; a woman in her late twenties caressing the strings of her harp, delicately; a mousy-looking man in horn-rimmed glasses adjusting the reed on his oboe; a pianist, seated before the podium at her grand piano, nervously checking a delicate part.

One of the percussion players bumped against a chime, and the entire orchestra came to attention as a vicious-looking man with handsome features entered, striding past the lady harpist, past the balding man with his violin, past Tedron who had his fingers stuck in the strings, feeling inside the guitar for the missing plectrum. The man made his way to the platform in front of the grand piano, at the center of the orchestra. He mounted it deliberately and faced the members, looking them over. "All right, gentlemen, we'll take the Previn, from the top. And let's make it springy. This is neither a funeral march nor the overture to the Flying Dutchman."

The "Previn", it turned out, was a ballet called 'Ring Around The Rosy', by the 20th Century terrestrial jazz pianist Andre Previn, originally written for a motion picture. The piece was a favorite of the Emperor's and was to be performed that Friday night on the Brandy Hall Society Concert, carried Coventry-wide by the CBS multi-casting network. Tedron opened the music on the stand and, though he could not read it well, began to play.

He had expected that the soft notes of the guitar would go unnoticed in the full orchestral passages, and was trusting to the fact that there are very few solo passages for guitar in commonly performed works. But he had not allowed for the microphonic ears of the conductor. The vibrant overture had not proceeded ten bars when he snapped his baton down, cutting off the flow of sound, and glared at the string section. "You, on the guitar. What were the last four notes you played?"

Tedron, as well as he could, repeated them. "What inspired you to that particular set of sounds?" barked the conductor. "Are you trying to improve on the score?" Before Tedron could produce an answer, he continued, "Who are you, anyway? Where's the regular guitarist? And where did you find that miserable excuse for a guitar?"

This question had an easy answer: "I found it in the corner," said Tedron honestly.

"Well, take that guitar and... and..." The conductor had a momentary struggle between his decency and his anger; his decency won -- "get out of here with it!" Tedron rose, bowed politely and headed for the small door under the stage as the conductor said, "Hart..." and the first violinist snapped to attention, "...five minute break. See if you can find our regular guitar-playing imbecile."

Under the stage, Tedron found himself in a maze of props, scenery and unidentifiable equipment. But a dim light bulb hung over another door which led to a flight of steps, which led up to yet another door. This opened onto the central courtyard, about which, along cloistered walks, were ranged the offices of the highest officials of the Empire, and Tedron was lost no longer. He walked the length of the side of the square he was on, turned the corner, and halfway down the second side found a black door with a four-pointed silver star on it. He opened the door a little way, looked in, and then stepped inside, closing the door softly behind him.

The pretty brown-haired secretary looked up at him with a smile that must have made short-hand a secondary consideration when she was hired. "Is there anything I can do for you, sir?"

Tedron could think of a number of things, but didn't seriously consider asking any of them. This was neither the time nor the place. Instead, he asked, "Is the Emperor in?"

"Do you have an appointment?"

"No," Tedron admitted.

"I'm sorry," she said, sounding as if she really was, "but you can't see the Emperor without an appointment."

"Can I make an appointment to see him?"

"Certainly. When?"

"Right now."

She laughed, a little surprised chuckle. "It's rather irregular, but... What is your name?"

Tedron saw no reason to change the story he'd given the guard. -- "Rontel of Linn," he said. But he immediately wished he had changed it; her reaction was one of surprise and slight alarm.

"You're..."

"Yes, I am!" said Tedron, thrusting forth his jaw and furrowing his brows in an attempt to look desperate and villainous. "I got past the guards and escaped the Major Damos to get in here, and they're looking for me right now. I have dared death or capture, fair lady, because I heard of your beauty far off in the wilderness and had to know whether the glorious tales of the Emperor's secretary were true! And they are," he added melodramatically. "You are even more beautiful than I was told."

"Nonsense," she said, trying to swallow a smile. "Gross exaggeration."

"All right," said Tedron reasonably. "I didn't come here to admire you." He raised his voice to a carrying tone, "I came to blackmail the Emperor! I know all his guilty secrets; how he steals the tax money, where he hides it, who his forty-seven mistresses are, how he plans to destroy his poor defenseless allies, like noble Methylonia; I know..."

"Tedron, you idiot," came a bellow from behind the black velvet curtain separating the inner office from the outer, "shut up and get in here. Toni, you get back to work and stop playing with my visitors."

Tedron quick-stepped past the desk and pulled aside the curtain. Paulus Edwardum Rex III, Emperor of New America and controlling power of a number of lesser things, was sitting behind a large black desk, the top cluttered with a mare's nest of papers, memos, reports, spools of film and tape, and a half-eaten sandwich lying like an offering before a picture of the Empress. He wore a gaudy white uniform, sporting a red cloak with a four-pointed silver star in the center. He was leaning back in a swivel chair, looking as if he was trying to be comfortable, but failing. The Emperor never looked comfortable. Tedron ignored the other chair and sat on the edge of the desk.

"Your scheme will never work," said the Emperor. "Everybody knows I steal the tax money; I don't hide it, I spend it all. The three mistresses I have are enough trouble without adding forty-four more; and I couldn't destroy my helpless allies if I wanted to. As for Methylonionia, it seems to be taking care of itself quite well, even though its Duke spends his time running around Coventry and causing no end of trouble."

"You seem to have been expecting me," said Tedron, unnecessarily.

"Of course. I've been expecting you for the last week, since you diddled one of my soldiers out of a reasonable bribe in Conqueror and ran off, leaving him to worry about that girl you picked up. And when I heard somebody answering your description was wandering around Brandy Hall without proper authorization, I knew you'd be here in a few minutes. What took you so long?"

"Well, coming here I stopped off in Xanadu for a couple of days -- that's quite a place. I'll tell you about it sometime -- and after I got past your guards I stopped in the concert hall for a while. Met Richard York, by the way; a nice chap, but awfully quick-tempered. He gave me this." Tedron held up the dirty, battered guitar. "I had to sell mine back in Cliff Beach."

"You have been travelling since you left Crimzoidia, haven't you?" said the Emperor, standing up. "Well, it's a good thing you got here today. There's a conference this afternoon you ought to sit in on. But we've got some time before then -- let's go down to the Embassy Club. There are some people I want you to meet first."

As they went out, Paulus stopped by his secretary. "Toni, I'd like you to meet Tedron, Duke of Methylonionia. Don't trust him any farther than you can see him. Tedron, this is Toni Teague. Don't give her too much trouble. Toni, I'll be going down to the Embassy Club. Probably won't be back till the conference this afternoon. See you there."

\* \* \* \* \*

The Embassy Club was a modern-looking building on the south-western slope of Mt. Robincroft, a hill overlooking the sea. Fort Robincroft, one of the coastal fortresses operated under the third defense command, squatted on the crest, commanding the hilltop. It was a circular building with wings shooting out in all directions, each wing fortified with heavy long-range artillery. Also on the hill, across a short lawn from the fortress, was a building constructed in the best Carolina plantation mansion style, with its back to the north -- the Westmarch Embassy.

Tedron and the Emperor clambered over the rolling meadows, travelling on a narrow asphalt road, until they reached the hilltop, with its impressive view of the sparkling Baraduin. As they walked slowly past the pillared Westmarch Embassy, a uniformed figure approached them.

"Good morning, Count," the Emperor said, shaking hands with the notable. "This, my dear Tedron, is the Westmarch ambassador, Count Hampton."

"Glad to meet you, sir," said Tedron.

"Oh, and this is the fabled Tedron of Methylonia, the playboy duke, or whatever it is..."

"Well, I don't know about that..." said Tedron awkwardly.

"Don't worry about him," the Emperor put in. "The Count is never so happy as when he's putting someone else in an uncomfortable position."

"Quite so, the Count continued. "I'm sorry, your Highness, but I don't have much time for formalities right now. Our embassy has just received word in answer to your queries about our neutrality."

"And they were..."

"...Not what you had hoped. Although the House of Councillors has always been, and always shall be, I think, in favor of positive neutrality in favor of New America, the House of Representatives has not only stated, but has declared that if there is to be war, it will be war waged in alliance with the Confederate Republics."

"And their reason?"

"Varied. I can't be sure, but I believe it hinges on what Alexander of Prussia believes to be our most pressing goal -- a seaport on the Baraduin."

"Oh yes; the Crimson Plan."

"Precisely. The House of Representatives is quite sure, and we have evidence to support their certainty, that the Confederate Republics cannot possibly win against your armies unless their generalship is superb, or they could swing Trantor over to their side. They're smaller than you, and I suppose they as well as you are aware of it. However, with us behind them, the Representatives are certain we could win the war."

"Tarpinia might support us in the action," muttered the Emperor.

"I don't know; I don't actually know, your Highness. Nobody can be sure what will come."

"The war will be hard and dangerous, Count, but I believe we could still hold even you off."

"Well, it hasn't passed through the House of Counsellors yet, you know, and even then it would have to bear Emperor Heinrich's signature. Surely you don't imagine that it would --"

"I never imagine anything, Count. I only prepare for eventualities."

"Eventualities?"

"The desire, perhaps the need, for a seaport in Crimson may very well supersede any whim of friendship that your fair Empire may feel. I have strong doubts of any friendship, however deep-seated; any sympathy between nations falls by the wayside when profit is at stake."

"I'm afraid you offend me, your Highness -- and my nation's honor."

"I mean not to offend. I mean merely to be realistic."

"You are no diplomat."

"If you want diplomacy, go and see Mr. Warde. I have no time for diplomacy, Count Hampton. I am a man of selfish feelings -- of ego, if you will; a very blunt man -- and a very poor diplomat. Others are here to do it for me. I am Emperor."

"It's been a pleasure, your Highness. At times I enjoy selfish men. A bit of ego often sparks things -- makes them more interesting, if not more pleasant. But bluntness can go too far -- especially if it has no sharp-edged sword to back it."

Both men laughed. "As I well know," the Emperor mused. "And now, I suppose, it's back to the atom pile for all of us."

"Indeed it is. I must take leave. My wife has business in Stock with a furniture maker. The embassy is buying a new set for the banquet hall. You must come and use it sometime, your Highness."

"I shall with pleasure."

"It's been very fine meeting you too, Duke Tedron, even if I've had no time to talk with you."

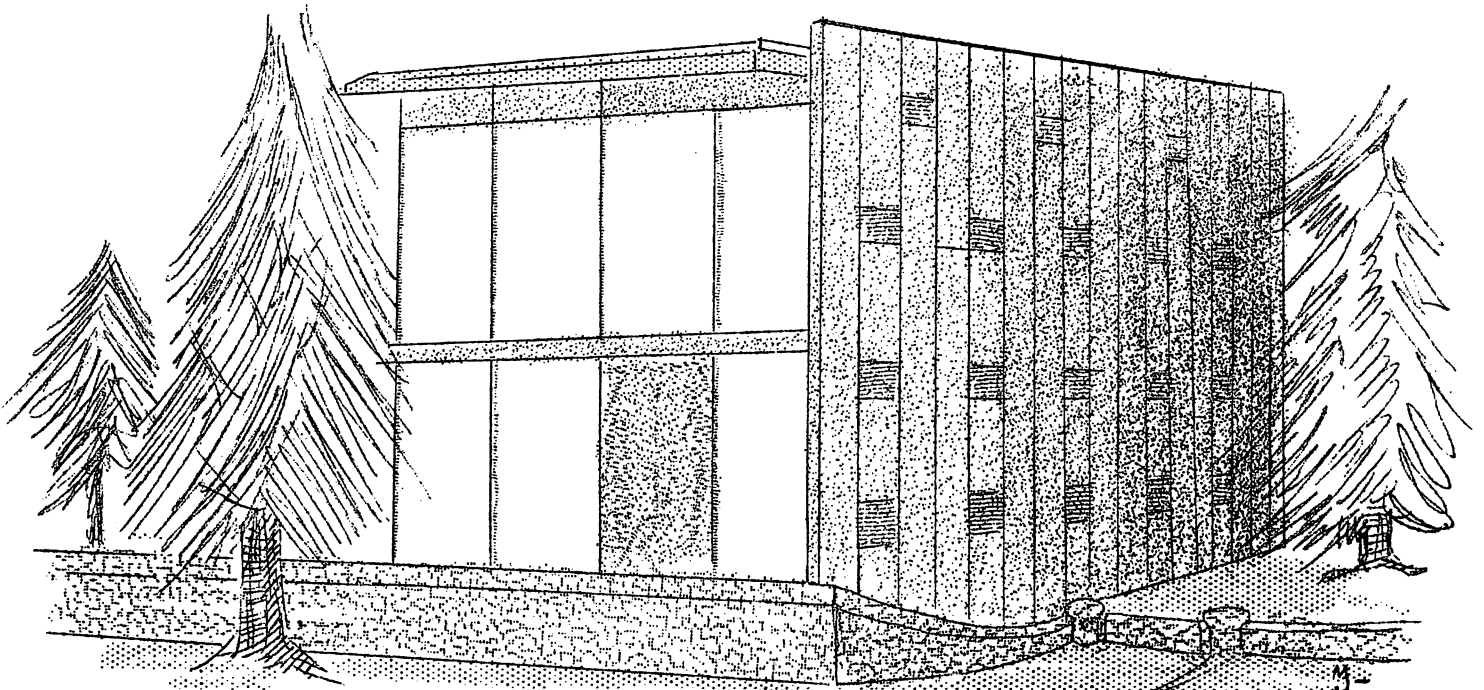
"Perhaps that made it the more pleasant," said the Duke politely. The men exchanged farewells and the Count went down the stone steps toward the gravel road that led down the hill. A carriage waited for him there.

"And now to the Embassy Club," said the Emperor.

\* \* \* \* \*







The Embassy Club, far less pretentious than the Embassy, or Fort Robincroft with its barracks and gardens, seemed to be built to fit the contours of the hill. Glass walls and concrete lined it, and pines surrounded it. It possessed a sunken public room, into which one came through an entrance section that ran upwards the full two stories of the building's height. A gentle stairway ran from the room to a private banquet hall above. To the right of the public room was the kitchen area, and a number of smaller dining booths. A terrace was located above the kitchen.

"I am afraid, my daer Duke," said the Emperor as they wound through the garden to the pine grove which surrounded the club, "that Hampton and I may have alarmed you. We really aren't such horrid diplomats, you know. We just argue ordinarily. Of course, what he was saying is no joke. But I have always hated Westmarchian efficiency and he has always hated my lack of tact, so we play one off against the other. He's really a very interesting fellow, that Hampton."

They slid through the glass doors of the Embassy Club and came down the plush-carpeted steps into the public room. They moved across the crowded floor the Emperor being patted on the shoulder and laughing with his friends. Tedron was fascinated to see so many notables in one room. At a lighted table near the door, the famed author-artist Martin Bason was playing chess with Grand Marshall Ryon from Arnor; at the bar, the strikingly disarming and intelligent Lady Tracy of Rowania, temporarily on leave from her Holy Vigil in Crimzoidia, was joking with a Trantorian baron, whom Tedron recognized, but did not know by name, with the T-Timer Crest on his coat-back; and many similar pairs and groups were scattered about the room -- the New American Broadcasting Corporation Executive Walter Eby, famed civil engineer Michael Cohn of the Marish... name upon name, soldiers and diplomats.

"Hello, Trace," said the Emperor to the slim woman at the bar, who smiled back at him. Finally, in a dark corner of the noisy room, the Emperor drew Tedron to a table where a brown-skinned fellow with dark eyes, flashing teeth, and a flowing robe sat, a sharp contrast to the curt military uniforms and flannel jerkins of the Buckland elite. The dark man rose, bowing graciously. The Emperor nodded and shook hands with him. "Glad to see you, Arkesian. How's life?"

"As usual, your Highness. Quite interesting when viewed from a far enough distance."

The Emperor drew up a chair and gestured at Tedron as they sat down. "Arkesian, I'd like you to meet a friend of mine. This is Tedron, Duke of Methy-lonia. Tedron, this is Aram Arkesian, Royal Tarpinian Ambassador to the Empire. Now let's all sit down and relax." They leaned back in their comfortable form-fitting Crimzoidian chairs in the dim corner and soon a servant appeared and filled crystal goblets for them with the clear and sparkling Champaign de Quenya. The unique wine of Miraleste was a mild stimulant, rather than a depressant; it lit their minds, warmed their hearts, and sharpened their wit. In a moment the conversation took wing.

"I don't think I shall play chess today, Aram, old man. I'm just not in the mood. Important Privy Council meeting this afternoon, and, well, you know," the Emperor said. "How's the string quartet?"

"Very well," the Tarpinian answered. "In fact, it's finished. I've given it to the Jazz Monitors at the Inn Of The Prancing Pony, just north of your little Rivendell. They're going to play it tonight, by the way. I was thinking that if you're in the neighborhood..."

"It sounds a fine enough idea. And you, Tedron?"

"I see no harm..."

"Aram, I've bad news to tell."

"Eh?"

"It seems that Westmarch has decided to ally with the Confederated Republics, if they join the war at all."

"We'll support you if we must, you know, Paulus."

"I was hoping you'd say that."

"You knew I would. I'm familiar with your friendship for Mikhail. And you know the House of Lords and the Senates support you. We could do nothing else. Our entire position hinges on an absolute balance of power."

A dark-haired figure with close-cropped hair and warm eyes strode in through the doorway, surrounded by three companions, clad as he was in jerkins, blue military breeches, and white boots.

"Warde has arrived," remarked Arkesian rather skeptically.

"How's life at Crickhollow?" called the Emperor, greeting the foursome.

"Respectable, I suppose," said Warde. "And who's this..."

"Tedron, Duke of Methy-lonia, a friend of mine. Very old friend."

"I didn't know you had any, Paul old boy."

"I've been working on it."

"Glad to meet you, Tedron. I don't think I've had the pleasure."

"Tedron," said the Emperor, "this is, of course, Robert Warde, of Rowania..."

"The Executive General, of course. Glad to meet you, sir. I wanted to ask--"

"And his compatriots, Marshall Sir Stephen Smith of New London..."  
The blue-eyed blond with close-cropped hair and a nasty sneer shook hands.  
"...Sir John Coltman of Wilhelmshire..."

"So happy," said the sarcastic, blue-eyed, brown-haired gentleman.

"...And Colonel Sir Richard Fairfield of South Isengrad."  
The tall, rather handsome gentleman laughed and shook hands.

"I'm very glad to meet all of you," said Tedron. "And Mr. Warde, I wanted to ask you about a bit of a loan that my government will be—"

"Trace!" exclaimed the Executive Generalm spotting that very interesting Lady Tracy at the bar. "Trace, how're tricks?" and headed across the room with his companions.

"Sorry to disappoint you, Tedron. But Warde and the Boys don't feel much like talking politics right now. I'm sorry, but you can ask Warde about the loan during business hours."

"Well, I had hoped..."

"I'm sorry, but Bob is like that. Besides, it's always a pleasure to talk to Trace. You really must be introduced to her sometime."

Just then Fairfield called out from across the room. "Oh, Paul, we spotted Liz heading this way in her carriage."

"Thanks, six-foot," the Emperor called back. And to Tedron, "You haven't met Liz, have you?"

"I think I did, once. A very long time ago in Buckland. About two hundred years ago."

"Well, that's much too long. You must see her again. Everyone must, I think."

"Elizabeth," the Emperor went on, "is a very strange case. I'm afraid there have been very few times when we've been very close. Of course, her position means a great deal to her. She has a title, you know -- New American Empress and Queen of Rowania, or something like that. You know what she told Warde, when he first won the Executive Generalship. They've been friends for years. She said, 'It's so nice to have a U.B.E. General from Rowania.' Things like that. She says she hates herself afterwards, but I doubt it. There's the carriage."

There was a stir outside and the doorway slid open, letting in the stamping of the horses' hooves and the slight creak of the carriage as she left it. The carriage rolled off and Tedron turned to look as she came into the Club. Warde nodded at her, and said in a low Carolina drawl, "'Lo, 'Lysbeth."

"Hello, Bob," she returned, and came towards Arkesian's table. She was dressed in a light grey travelling suit that did justice to the fashion-model lines of her figure, with just a little bit more thrown in in just the right places. Her face looked clean and fresh and her hair was a vibrant brown, the nose straight, the chin hard; long, delicate hands and limbs, eyes with a deep soulful look about them. She had a kind of goddess-like unattainability about her. She didn't walk over, she sort of slithered, but in a very housebroken manner. She was very housebroken. She may not have been the most beautiful thing in Coventry, but she certainly seemed queenly.

The Emperor stood. "Hello, Liz," he said in a soft voice.

She touched his cheek. "I'm glad to be back, Paul."

"Sit down, please. I'd like to have you meet some friends of mine..."

She extended a gloved hand.

"Mr. Arkesian of the Royal Tarpinian Embassy."

"We've met before, Mr. Arkesian, I think."

"Yes, yes. At the First Yule party at the palace last year, if I'm not mistaken."

"It was, wasn't it? You're enjoying your stay in Buckland, I hope."

"Very much indeed, milady."

"And this gentleman here?"

"This is -- uh -- Tedron, Duke of Methylonia."

"Oh, it's a pleasure to meet you, Duke Tedron."

"The pleasure is mine, milady. I've heard so much about you," he added with a curious smile.

"Has Paul been telling you all those nasty stories again? I guarantee whatever you heard about me -- it's not true." If anyone else had said it, it should have been a joke, but she seemed disarmingly sincere.

"Only that you were gracious, charming, polite and very beautiful, milady."

"And do you support my guarantee after having met me?"

"What I see before me speaks for itself."

She gave an odd little laugh and turned to the Emperor. "Your barbarian friend here seems to be picking up a bit of Buckland wit."

"His country is backward in condition but not in mental agility. And how did you find Admiral Rapp?"

"As well as can be expected. He thinks he has pneumonia."

"He should go to a cathedral and get a Miracle."

"I assure you he hasn't been near a church in the last several years."

"I suppose you kept him busy at home?"

"Not at all, but not for my lack of trying. He had a much more interesting bed-warmer."

"Liz, have you ever forgiven him for the Midsummer Eve Ball?"

"He certainly made a fool of me that time. First he would take me, then he wouldn't -- so General Frazer was to be my escort -- then finally he would, but I had to rent his sword, hose, and curiass..."

"My poor, persecuted Elzbietka. Have you promised him anything for his services?"

"Not yet."

"Not even the Order of Perseverance?"

"Not yet. I'm afraid I might catch the pneumonia."

"Do you think a transfer to Brandy Hall might help him recover?"

"The climate would be much too cold for him here."

"Not even the Order of Perseverance, Second Class?"

"The only thing Brian might need is some lessons in etiquette. Darling," she sighed, "I'm home, and we could talk of happier things..."

He took her hands in his. "We shall be having a reception tonight. Mr. Warde, of course, and the Westmarch ambassador..."

"That Count Hampton is so charming..."

"Don't play with him, you Buckland vamp, or I'll break your snowy white neck."

"Darling!" she winked at him.

"...and Duke Tedron, of course, as well as the Andersons, the Rivers, the Nivens couple, and Mr. York."

"The conductor?"

"Yes. I---"

"I suppose that Miss Teague person, your secretary, I suppose she planned it for you."

"Of course she did, Liz. You were away and somebody had to."

"I love you, Paul."

"And I love you, Liz."

"I've heard Mr. Tedron here plays the guitar."

"I do indeed," said Tedron, with a slight bow.

"I've heard so much about your songs. You must sing some of them for us."

"I shall with pleasure."

"Very good."

One of the waiters abruptly came up. "Your highness, I'm sorry to disturb you here, but..."

"What is it?"

"The telephone from Brandy Hall."

"Who's there?"

"Your secretary, sire. Should I tell her to wait?"

"No, no. I'll be right there. It's all right with you, isn't it, Liz?"

"Perfectly," she said.

"I'll be right back. I'm sure you can keep young Tedron busy, darling."

"One way or another." As the Emperor hurried off across the room, Elizabeth sat down and fondled one of the long-stemmed glasses, turning it between her delicate fingers.

"I've always wanted to meet you," Tedron said. "But somehow I just never got the chance."

"So I see. We're quite a pair, aren't we?" she asked suddenly.

"Milady?" Arkesian's eyes stared quietly at her.

"We're from two different worlds, Paul and I. He's a fine Emperor, politically, but an absolute social failure. He's charming, certainly brilliant, but often tactless, sometimes boring, and occasionally foolish. I don't know if I love him at all, sometimes. I doubt it. After all, we weren't supposed to be married, not really. But everybody knew he needed a wife and he kept staring at me. I love my job, really, the entertaining and all. He respected me, and, oddly enough, I respect him. Strange, really. It was the right thing, to marry him... But I must be boring you."

"Certainly not," said Arkesian.

"Oh, but I am. And here's Paul. Darling."

"I'm sorry, dear. But we must be leaving now, Tedron and I. They're about to start the meeting and I've some important information, and Tedron has an important job to do. You'll forgive me, I'm sure."

"Certainly. Until tonight, then." She gave him her hand.

"Until tonight. Cleah Uvani, Elzbiетка..." He kissed it with a deep glance into her eyes.

"Cleah Uvani, darling."

"Come along, Tedron. We can't start without you..."

Elizabeth rose, extending her hand to the Tarpinian. "I must be leaving now, Mr... Mr..."

"Arkesian."

"Yes."

He watched as she moved off into the crowded room, exchanging a mild flirtation with Marshall Smith, who was, Arkesian rightly supposed, a very old friend.

"Trace," she said, and sat down next to Lady Tracy, talking brilliantly, with that deep vibrant look. Their eyes met, Arkesian's dark brown, and her blue ones, then her glance moved on. Off into the crowded room...

\* \* \* \* \*

Tedron and the Emperor strode back to the Imperial Suite. "Beautiful area, isn't it," the Emperor muttered. "I love it. At night, you know, you can almost see Crimzoidia, to the far right, and the lights of Linn glow through the darkness. Lovely."

"Elizabeth is quite impressive." They strolled down the walkway above the patio and turned left by the little fountain into the dark doorway.

"Everyone thinks so. Heavens, I do. But she doesn't. Inferiority complex. A trifle, though the Empressship has helped her enormously." He led through the plush lounge past his secretary.

"Toni, has the Council arrived?"

"Most all of them, Paul. Except Warde, of course."

"Of course. He's still back at the Club. Thanks. Right this way, Tedron." He ushered Tedron in through a sliding door and they went down the stairway into the council chamber.

This room was the home of most of the major decisions of the Empire. Here the Emperor's council met, laws were debated and implemented, and treaties and declarations were drafted. It looked like a room worthy of its inhabitants -- beneath the great half-globe of Coventry on the wall opposite the door stood a great shining mahogany desk, its brown angles seeming out of place against the star-flecked wall about the globe. Curving away on either side of the desk, a few feet out from the wall, was a long desk where the council members sat, on a ledge about a foot above the floor level. The only break in this ring was directly before the entrance. The corners on either side of the star-map hold glowing panels of communication controls and added a feeling of power to the atmosphere. The ceiling, high above, was lost to the lights, which shone down into the circle of faces around the room.

"Salute, gentlemen," the Emperor murmured. "Are we ready to begin?"

"We're ready, sire," said a smiling young man with a slight lisp, rising. The man and the Emperor clasped wrists.

"Tedron, I should like you to meet Sir Richard Horgan, our Prime Minister. Sir Richard, this is Tedron of Methylonia."

"I think we've met... at the Erin Pact Conference, wasn't it? During the last Nationalist administration."

"Glad to meet you again," said Tedron, clasping wrists. "You were the Stan-berian League Provisional Secretary..."

"I think we're ready to have the roll." The Emperor took his place at his desk, and pressed the intercom, then looked up. "Oh, there you are, Toni. Sit down and read the roll, will you please?"

"Yes, sire. Here we are -- Cabinet members: Sir Richard Horgan?"

Curly light brown hair, honest blue eyes, sincere hominess. "Here."

"Minister of External Affairs, Norman Perry?"

"Robert Fiedler, acting bureau chief. Mr. Perry's on the mission to Gondor." Thin and dark with a satirical smile.

"Minister of Internal Affairs, Mr. Ralph Setian."

"Here." Dark, and dynamic with a middle-eastern face and a shrewd honesty.

"Minister of War, Sir Kendall Ellingwood."

A light voice, brown hair and green eyes, a smiling attitude. "Here."

"Minister of Finance, Mr. Tadashi Hiramoto."

A handsome asiatic countenance, quiet and defiant. "Here."

"Executive General, Sir Robert Warde." Silence. "Sir Robert Warde."

"He'll be here. I'll vouch for that," the Emperor chuckled. "We have to go through this," he muttered to Tedron, who had been given a seat behind him. Leaning back, the Emperor motioned to his Personal Secretary. "Go ahead, Toni."

She read on. "Commissioner of Agriculture, Sir John Jefferson."

A high-voiced handsome man with blonde hair. "Here."

"Commissioner of Industrial Production, Lord Richard Dinel."

Dinel, with a satiric expression and dark curly hair muttered, "I wish I knew where Warde was."

"An official answer," the Emperor chided, "for the rigamarole."

"Here."

"Commissioner of Revenue and Resources, Mr. Roger Anderman."

A deep-voiced round-headed little man with a charming manner. "Here."

"Commissioner of Welfare, Dr. Lord David Smith."

A mild-mannered precise man with blonde hair. "Here."

"Commissioner of Trade, Marshall Wayne Main."

An extremely handsome thin-faced man. "Here."

"Commissioner of Communications, Admiral-General Sir Dennis Jones."

A cultured, satirical gentleman. "Here, ma'am."

"Secretary of State for the Stanberian Federation, Sir Kenneth Chant."

A dark-haired, handsome gentleman with a smooth voice. "Here, Toni." A ripple of laughter wafted around the circle.

"Yes, sir," she returned caustically. "Next, Secretary of State for the Transorian Union, General Lawrence Shafer."

A hard thin blue-eyed blode with a sneer and a Carolina drawl. "Heah."

"Secretary of State for the Northern Confederacy, Lakos I of Sandcave."

A dark, curly-haired man with jagged features and a charming voice. "Saluté, as you say in Buckland," he remarked jokingly to the Emperor.

"Secretary of State for the Shire League, High Commodore Mose Henney."

A large bulk of a dark man with a light drawl. "Here."

"Secretary of State for the Colonies, Grand Marshal Sir R. Josiah Blakely."

A small man with blond hair and blue eyes and a serious manner. "Here."

"Governor-General for New Richmond, Sir Robert Truman."

A light negro with a pleasant voice. "Here."

"Governor-General for Cowpertown, Lord Steven Hammer."

A thin man with satiric handsomeness. "Here, Toni."

"Governor-General for New London, Prince Bruce of Buchanan."

A quiet homely man, full of confidence. Anderson replied dryly, "Here, ma'am."

"Governor-General for the Marish, Marshal Lester Pace."

A quiet sort with good looks, a strong physique and warm shyness. "Here."

"Representative for the New American Commonwealth, Sir James Danforth."

A light-haired, smallish man. "Here."

"And our honored guest, the Archbishop Clarence of Victoria."

There was a patter of applause as a mild-manner soul in red vestments raised his hand in the Pax Vobiscum.

"Finally," said the Emperor. "So this is our Privy Council."\* He rapped on the table with his gavel. "This meeting of Tuesday the Eighth of Lothron, or as it was known in Earth, May, of the Privy Council of the New American Empire and its Union, is hereby called to order. Will you please rise for the Citizens' Oath, and remain standing for the Moment of Silence."

They stood, and repeated the words taken from the oaths given before Harkness in 1532, before Edwardum II in 1580, before the Estates General of the United Republics in 1675, before the Stanberian Republic in 1873, and before the Empire of Buckland in 1903. A history of free people was tied up in the words:

"I do solemnly swear to uphold and defend the Consitution of the Empire of New America against all enemies, domestic and foreign, and to serve faithfully the state and land in which I live, its leagues and alliances, and the Empire and its Peoples; their symbols and authorities, being ever mindful of my duty to the Church and to its earthly servents. To these ends I pledge my life, my fortune, and the sacred tie of my honor before the name I hold most sacred and the witness of my fellow men."

"Let us pray," spoke the Archbishop of Victoria. Silence descended upon the room.

"And now," said the Emperor, "to the business of the day. I am going to ask for a motion to suspend the Orders of the Day when Mr. Warde and his colleagues arrive, for we have urgent business to discuss. Until that time, we will have a report from the Ministry of Labor and Industry on the Triumph Aviation of Isengrad quotas. Mr. Dinel."

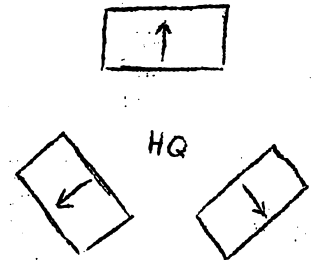
\* \* \* \* \*

\*NOTE: The Council is formed of the Ministers and League Secretaries from the Imperial Cabinet, and of the Commissioners, Governors-General, and the Executive General, from the Union Executive Board. Out of the entire company, only one member, Iakos I, who was also the Rascac of Collinsia and Caliph of the Elcortine, the aristocratic Socialist, was not a member of the Expansionist Party Coalition, rulers of the majority in the Estates General. The members represented were about evenly divided between the "dynamic conservative" branch, the Constitutionals, sponsored by the Emperor; and the Populists, the liberal branch, in which Hiramoto, the industrialist, was a major policy-maker. No members of the rival Grand National Party Coalition, which stood for extreme federalism and dictatorship, particularly powerful in the Trantorian States and Cowpertown, were present.



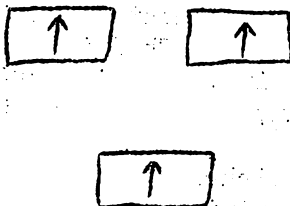
It was not long before Warde and his companions arrived, murmuring their apologies, and the real business of the day could be tackled. After Warde had seated himself and the meeting was again in order, the Emperor rose and introduced Ellingwood, Minister of War, who moved to the blackboard and drew three rectangles, in a triangular arrangement. Within each rectangle was an arrow, pointing outwards from the center of the triangle.

"This," said Sir Kendall Ellingwood, turning back to the group, "is the New American Phalanx, the basic strategic unit in our military operations. Three Ground Forces Legions, each 6000 strong, each facing outwards except when on the march. And here," he indicated the center of the triangle, "is the hoard of heavy calvary, 6500 men and horses, with the middle and high guard artillery numbering 90 guns, and a headquarters detachment staff of about 6000 with a scouting middle guard cavalry brigade. All this is the Phalanx. And all this, gentlemen, is out of date." Ellingwood turned to the board and drew a large X over his diagram. A disturbed murmur rose from the council.



"That is what I said, gentlemen; the Phalanx is obsolete. We are faced -- or will be faced in the near future -- by enemy divisions that outnumber our legions in strength and have mastered our detachments in offensive strategy. For example, the present war strength of the Tarpinian division is 8000 men, the strength of the Confederated Republics division 10,000 men, the Westmarch division 15,000 men and 48 guns integrated, and the New Scotland division 16,000, compared to our 6000 man Legion. We have, and can in the future, fight well, and, when we were attacked in multiple-phalanx formation, we could defeat large bodies of assailing troops -- for the New American phalanx was and still is a highly effective mixture of infantry, cavalry and artillery. We might even say that in fortified defensive positions it is unassailable. But in offensive actions we find that individual phalanxes are isolated and destroyed. Why? Because such a formation is essentially defensive, not offensive. It invites attack. My plan, which, I remind you, has been adopted in detail by the War Syndicate, entails not the destruction of the Phalanx as an organisation but the mere re-orientation of its combat strategy to fit the needs of modern warfare.

"Here is the plan -- the phalanx formation will never be used on marching maneuvers, but only a simple column formation with cavalry on the wings. The old formation will only be used in fortifications, entrenchments, and towns in defensive actions. In combat, a new formation will be adopted." Ellingwood



swopt the chalk off the board with a few swift strokes of a cloth, and drew a new triangle, apex pointing down. Again at each corner he placed a triangle, but now he made all the rectangles with arrows pointing up. "This is the new combat formation. Note that two-thirds of the units are in the front line. This, of course, does not take into account the artillery and cavalry units, which will be deployed where needed.

The third infantry legion is withheld in case reinforcements are needed on the line. Forces may be increased on the old multiple-phalanx plan.

"This, then, is the first phase of my plan."

Ellingwood walked to the side of the board, and Jones, Commissioner of Communications, unrolled a large wall-map of New America. Ellingwood's pointer moved over the map as he spoke. "At present, our marine corps, with our most powerful division constructions, each 12,000 strong, are stationed at various territorial locations: in the north, at Harristown and Esogarth; in the interior at Rivendell and in Stanberia at Kaiserville and New London; in the south at Minas Morgul and Minas Tirith; in the colonies at Ellingrad and Wilhelmshire; and in the Shire at Frogmorton. This leaves them divided so that any invader can pick them off one by one, simply as child's play. I recommend stationing them permanently in the government lands at Tower Hills just west of New Richmond in Eriador. The land should be used; the forces need to be concentrated. This would solve our problem.

"I next recommend the concentration of our field forces under a new field command system. At present we have no command post higher than the Defense Command HQ, usually consisting of one phalanx in peace and two, the consular phalanx, in war. All told, we have nine, stationed throughout the country; in Rowania, the Shire, Buckland, Gondor, Isengrad, Eriador-Cowperton, Stanberia, the Northern Confederacy, and Trantor, with our additional Reserve Command. I say, concentrate them.

"Here is how I propose to do it: two defense commands will compromise one corps, and two corps a field group; each field group consisting of roughly eight phalanxes in war; two field groups, one stationed at Fort John Muir in Marengo, and one at the Citadel in Stanberia, in national emergencies. A third group will be formed of the Imperial Guard Corps, the Buckland phalanx, a ranger division, and one marine corps. Every other field corps will have one ranger division added, and every corps a marine corps. Irregular or unassigned troops will be used to enlarge the one-phalanx defense commands into field command groups.

"I present, then, my three-phase plan:

1. New Phalanx Combat Orientation.
2. Relocation of the Marine Corps at the Tower Hills Reservation.
3. New Field Command organisation for the Army. (Which would also, by the way, assign one of our three navy task forces to each field command group.)

"I ask your approval and statement of my plan as a Privy Council resolution."

There was a vote, and the Emperor proclaimed, "You have Our assent."

"Thank you," said Ellingwood, and sat down.

"Now," said the Emperor, "I have a message which arrived within the last few minutes from Condor, in the Reach of Duel. My secretary just brought it in. The message reads:

'Most Noble and Exalted Emperor:

The governments of Duel and of the Geminii Republic<sup>1</sup> wish to inform your Imperial Majesty that your government shall in the future treat us as one government as concerns the Sheffield Canal and any other dealing with the Empire of Linn. Let it suffice to say we have allied and prepare now to meet any challenge put to us.

Signed, Prinz Jerome, Der Führer des Reiches Duel

Fuhrmann, Vice-Consul of the Gemini Republics and Acting Head of State.'

"Gentlemen, this is an alliance I have been expecting for some time. But now I can announce to you the most important business for our meeting today. You may have guessed from the reference in this communique to the Sheffield Canal --

1. Also called the Antares Republic.

the Reach of Duel intends to extend a commercial waterway across the country of Linn, giving them, in effect, a seaport on the Baraduin. But to give you the best study of this, I would like to introduce a most welcome and honored guest, who has but recently arrived by means of a Kroll 'Miracle'<sup>1</sup>, the Lord Adviser of Linn, acting in the absence of the Lord Leader Jommor Lynn -- Mathias Johns."

One of the wall panels slid smoothly aside, and Mathias Johns, a wiry man with sharp features and a nervous energy in every movement, stepped forth. "May the stars shine bright," the Emperor greeted him.

"And may the night wind be cool," answered Johns. "I've come at your summons, Paulus, to put my plight before your council."

"Proceed," said the Emperor, and Mathias strode to the center of the floor and began.

"Since the Reach of Duel has recently had its leader, Prinz Jerome, elected Supreme Minister of the Confederated Republics, they are in a position to direct the C.R.P. into building a railroad and canal system across Linn from the Bay of Charleston to the Inner Sea, connecting the Kingdom of Carpathia and the Republic of Conyon<sup>2</sup> to the great colony of Assyria by a direct trade route. But the construction of such a railway would enable the Confederated Republics Army to subjugate Linn, inevitably making her join the organisation, perhaps as a protectorate of Duel. However, gentlemen, it is still possible that war might be averted -- and I feel sure, that as my sworn allies, you would be as eager as I to do so -- if New Scotland were to ally with Linn.

"However, one of my intelligence agents, working secretly under the direct commission of the Leaders of the Patronate, my Cabinet; and on the orders of the heads of the Grey Fansmen, discovered a body of surveyors from the Confederated Republics working along the banks of the River Tilth. This agent, Rontel of Linn..."

"You look as if something just bit you, Tedron," the Emperor whispered. "Do you know this Rontel?"

"Er... I've met him a couple of times. Never knew he was anybody's agent, though."

"...stopped to talk with them," continued Mathias, unhearing, "and found that their home office was located in Conqueror. I fear my agent is a trifle over-aggressive at times -- he killed the surveyors -- but his results have been consistently excellent.

"He then rode to Conqueror in record time, found the office, and ransacked it in the night, finding a copy of a secret treaty between New Scotland and the Confederated Republics of Phobias, promising aid in subduing Linn. This treaty was signed, gentlemen, by the King of New Scotland himself, Bruce the Conqueror; and by the C.R.P. Minister of State, Hallman Parks. He also found documentary proof of previous reports that the Sheffield Canal Corporation is only nominally a Trensianian firm; its other offices in New Ilium and Venusberg are there, licensed by the Congress of the C.R.P., for only one reason -- to build the trans-Linnan canal and railroad.

"Now I have come to ask you for a vote of confidence, so that I may assure the people of Linn that New America will stand by our alliance."

The Emperor rose as Johns assumed his seat. "Gentlemen, it is no longer theoretical that New Scotland will ally with the Confederated Republics. It is also obvious that the government, through the Sheffield Canal Company, intends

1. In other words, he has travelled to Brandy Hall via the Kroll subways.
2. Lilliput and Belfuscus islands.

to continue their plans, even at the cost of war. And without the protection offered by New Scotland, war seems inevitable. I know many of you have considered Mathias Johns an interloper -- though he does not bear the family name of Linn he is nevertheless the official leader of the Empire of Linn in the absence of Jommor Linn. I ask you now to re-affirm our alliance with Linn -- now, in her hour of need." He paused. "Toni, call the roll."

One by one, the secretary called the names of the men seated about the council chamber, and every man answered, "Aye." Every man, that is, except for General Shafer. But it was to be expected that Trantor, which the Emperor had once referred to, in a whimsical moment, as the Empire's problem child, would abstain.

At last Toni stood, and announced the tally: "Aye, twenty-one votes. Nay, no votes. One abstention."

Mathias Johns rose to his feet again. "I and all the people of Linn thank you. And now, gentlemen, I have another problem which I hope you might discuss for our benefit -- my army has recently been suffering many losses in its upper ranks. In fact, in the last two years, I have appointed no less than ten Generals of the Realm, and each in succession has been poisoned. At this moment, Linn is almost devoid of top-quality original strategists. Now, recently I held a private conference with his Imperial Majesty on the subject, and I believe we have reached a conclusion.

"It is widely believed that an amateur is the best soldier, because professionals tend to be overly conservative. So I have acted on the Emperor's advice, and have tentatively appointed an amateur of amateurs to the post. Gentlemen, I introduce General-of-the-Realm Duke Tedron of Methylenia. I ask your approval."

It took a few seconds for the import of this message to reach Tedron. When it did, he began moving quietly back away from the Emperor's desk and casting his eyes about for an exit. But Paulus leaned back in his chair and beckoned him forward. "Come on, Tedron. We need your acceptance."

"Now, your Imperial Majesty, I... I scarcely feel qualified for the job, and I have serious doubts as to whether the military has any place in my life."

"Oh, but it does, Tedron. A serious endeavor like this will give purpose and direction to your life. After all, you have been rather a wastrel, and you should steady yourself. Besides, this can earn you fame and fortune -- well, fame, at any rate -- as well as raising your status in the eyes of the Empire."

"But I haven't any aptitude for anything like this..."

"Exactly. Gentlemen," the Emperor stood, his hand resting lightly on Tedron's arm, "Duke Tedron is a dilettante, a dabbler, a gifted amateur. He has, as you may know -- and if you don't, he will be quick to tell you -- come through a remarkable number of foolish escapades without harm, and often with a marked degree of success. Will you accept him?"

There was a definite, if unenthusiastic, "Aye" from the council.

"Is there any serious opposition?" asked the Emperor, and was answered by silence.

"Now, Tedron, will you accept the position?" asked the Emperor, adding under his breath, "Or do you want to back out in front of all these people?"

There was only a moment's silence. "Your Imperial Majesty," announced Tedron in what he hoped were suitably ringing tones, "How could I refuse the position? When duty calls, I must obey, and I do swear to serve as you see fit." he

concluded, adding in a murmur to the Emperor, "as long as I can't get out of it."

There was a round of applause from the Council, and Tedron saw Toni catch his eye and give him what looked like a very promising wink. Suddenly he felt better about his position, but just a little better.

Paulus called for adjournment, and half the Council came forward to shake Tedron's hand and congratulate him. But in a few short minutes, he and the Emperor were alone in the council chambers except for Toni, who kept her attentive position beside the mahogany desk.

"Oh, Toni," the Emperor said, as the last Councillor left, "you go on up and close the office. I'll see you at the reception this evening."

"Paul, why do you do things like this to me?" asked Tedron, once they were alone. "I have absolutely no desire to be poisoned by some C.R.P. agent or shot at by a Ranger."

The Emperor led him around the desks and across the floor as he answered, "Well, it was sort of a last resort. As I told the Council, you don't have much ambition or drive, you have no particular talents, and not really a shining intellect. So there's nothing left for you except religion, politics, or the military. Knowing you, the Church is out, and you've tried politics. So you are given another chance." They had come by now to a small door in the corner, where they stopped.

"Now, Elizabeth has prepared a surprise for you, Tedron, and she has it all properly wrapped and ready for you, to celebrate your appointment. Liz enjoys doing little things like this. When you're ready, bring it upstairs and I'll meet you and Mathias in the courtyard."

He walked swiftly away across the floor and up the stairs through the main entrance. As the echoing of his footsteps dies in the suddenly silent room, Tedron hesitantly opened the door.

As the door swung wide, he looked at the Empress's 'gift', reclining on the couch. She looked just as she had two weeks ago in Conqueror, when he had purchased her for two thousand silvers, except that now she was gowned in a magnificent silken gown that could only have come from the Empress herself. She looked up and smiled.

"Well," said Tedron. "Uh... Fancy running into you here!"

"I heard what was going on in there," she said. "Now I suppose you'll go off again before I've even gotten a chance to know you."

"That's sort of hard to tell," said Tedron, hedging. "But we didn't even have time for introductions before. My name is Tedron." He bowed.

She smiled very prettily. "My name is Kiterina," she said.

Tedron smiled back. "That's far too clumsy a name for a girl like you," he said. "Do you mind if I call you Kitton?"

"Not at all. That was what Captain Whiting called me."

"Captain Whiting?"

"The Captain of the ship that brought me from Conqueror. A very nice man."

"Indeed? You mustn't forget who owns you, my dear girl; if you are wise, you'll not notice any more 'nice men'. I'll see what I can do about taking you along when I go to Linn -- as General-of-the-Realm I ought to be able to get quar-

ters away from the fighting. But I'll take care of that. Right now there are a number of things we should talk over..."

\* \* \* \* \*

The last rays of the sun reflected off the inside of the Eastern wall of the courtyard and poured their golden light down upon the group that stood there. Tedron and his 'gift' had just come up from the ante-room where they had held a conference, the subject matter of which had no bearing on the problem at hand. Kitten had been introduced to Mathias Johns, and Tedron was muttering at the Emperor a safe distance away.

"Not that I don't appreciate it, Paul, but you could have given me a little warning. I suppose you know the background? How she got here, and so on?"

"I know enough. The fleet dropped her off here with the rest of your gear. Elizabeth thought of presenting her to you -- she said, 'What's a soldier without someone to say good-bye to?' -- I reminded her of the Lady Ruthien, but she said she was too far away in Tarpinia. Incidentally, Tedron, just what about Lady Ruthien? Have you forgotten that at least in the unofficial eyes of several governments you have spoken for her hand?"

"Now, Paul, have you ever known me to be able to analyse my own motives? I suppose Lady Ruthien would undoubtedly be a better match, but she's in Tarpinia, and she always seems far away even when she's sitting next to me."

"I know you have done some wild and foolish things, but this is possibly the worst of the lot. It would be far better to make a decision and stick to it."

"And you should know I hate to make decisions, especially when the outcome will probably be decided for me by circumstances."

The Emperor shrugged, and turned away. As he passed, he beckoned to the other three to follow him, and somehow Kitten was by his side as they entered the cloister and Tedron found Mathias beside him.

"My congratulations, Tedron," he said.

Tedron considered this carefully. "On my new rank, or my new friend?"

Mathias laughed. "Both. But perhaps my congratulations should be tempered with just a bit of sympathy... and perhaps some envy."

"Thank you. By the way -- this Rontel of Linn you mentioned. I ran into him in Conqueror, though I didn't know who he was at the time."

"He's probably our best agent; completely trustworthy, if he wants to be."

"As a part-time minstrel, I'd be interested in hearing what else happened to him on this particular trip. You just mentioned that he got copies of a treaty and some other documents."

"Oh, he said his trail had been picked up by a couple of agents of Parks -- he'd been Minister of Internal Security for the C.R.P. before becoming Minister of State -- and they tried to assassinate him. One of them used a 'magical' dagger, he said. It flew at him and wouldn't stop. We're going to have to tighten security on Crimzoidia -- we can't let their little gadgets slip out like that; though the Lord knows how that one ever got out of their labs. Anyway, Rontel made contact with Captain Whiting of the New American Marines..."

"I thought he commanded one of the ships," Tedron interjected.

Mathias laughed. "Don't let him hear you say that! He's a Marine from helm to boot-soles. But Rontel told him roughly what had happened, and was returned to Linn by a section of my underground system."

"It sounds like it might make an interesting song," Tedron commented. "I'll see what I can do with it."

As they came out onto the top of the great stone steps leading down before Brandy Hall, night was falling swiftly, the crickets were beginning to sound and the Emperor was waxing poetic.

"Come with me, gentlemen," he declaimed, "and we shall all join in the celebration of night in Buckland. We shall count the new stars that have risen, and name them and bid farewell to the old. We can see the beauty of the lights of the land upon the green by the river before the smoke of war billows over them, and hear the songs of joyous melancholy that we all love. It is a night of nights. Come along! And from there we shall ride like the night sea wind to my palace..." Kitten was walking beside him, looking worshipfully at him with her soft brown eyes as he made this speech.

The great door of the Imperial Theater rose behind Mathias and Tedron as they followed the Emperor down the cascading stairway that ran beside the lawn. "Well, I hope you're good at generalling, and won't run into that poison." "So do I," Tedron said, smiling.

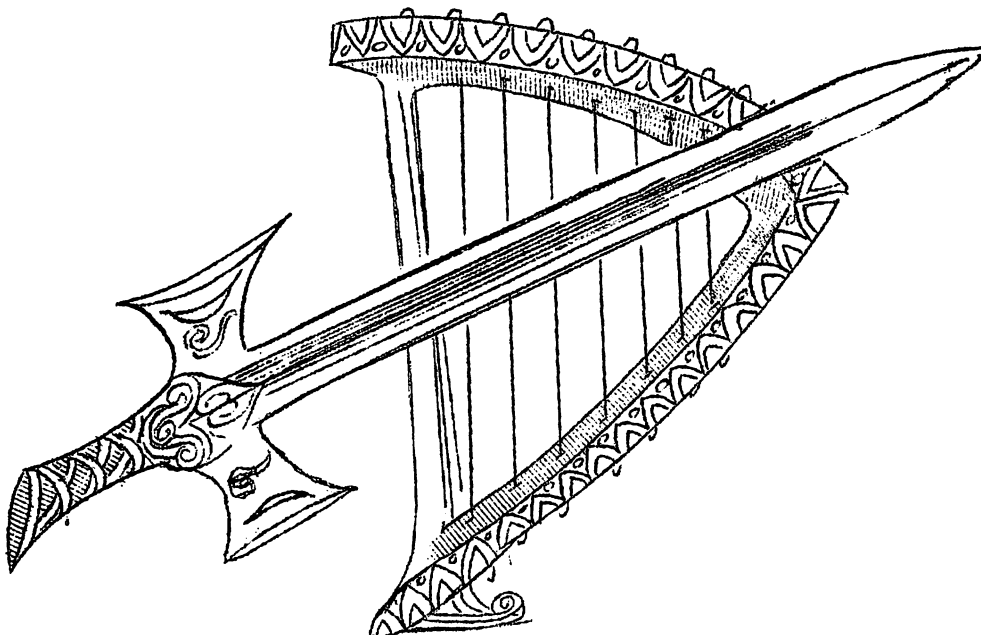
"But it's pretty sure, isn't it?" Johns continued, after a pause.

"What?"

"That the wave has finally broken. It may be hard and long and bloody, but it will be battle. One thing sure, whatever else may come, it's war for us!"

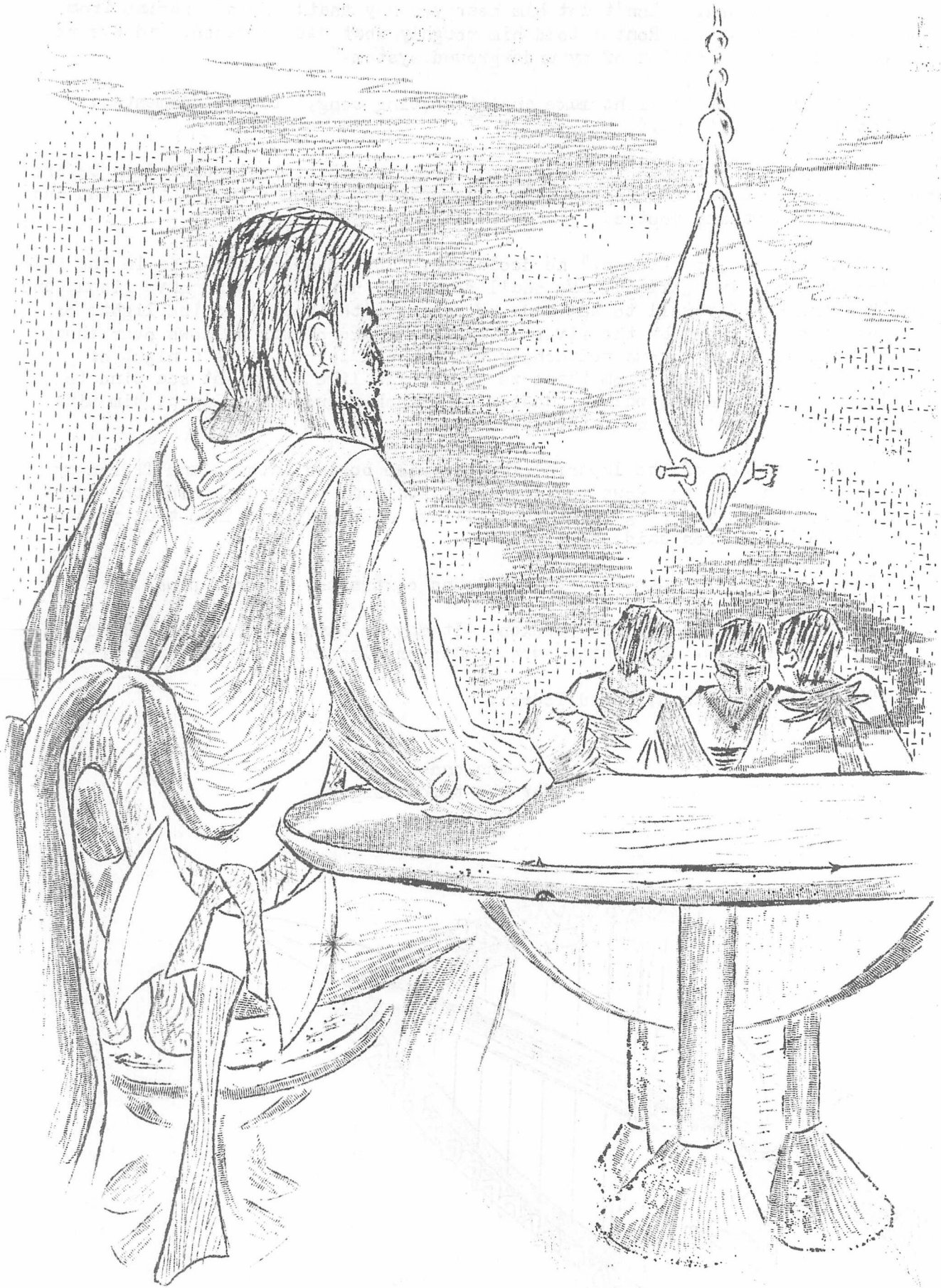
"I'll drink to that," said Tedron.

-the end-  
(for the time being)



M.







# PRELUDE IN LINN : SWERTHOLME, 2348

Bruce Pelz

A grey twilight swept quickly over the eastern forests and began, more slowly, to devour the city. Lanterns were lighted in the taverns, as the vanguard of the evening throng arrived to do some serious drinking and gambling. Shops were closed, and the honest merchants went home -- or joined the tavern-bound throng. The other merchants prepared for their business hours. And at the headquarters of VIII Corps, Army of Linn, the changing of the guard began, with the usual ceremony.

Robir Talan, Adjutant General of VIII Corps, stopped to watch the ceremony, standing quietly in front of the dozen or so townspeople who had also stopped to watch. Most of the citizens of Swertholme had become indifferent toward the ceremony in the two years since the Corps had been billeted there, but there were always a few on hand to watch -- even if only some children and a couple visitors from one of the other of the Eight Cities.

The Changing of the Guard ceremony served no useful purpose; it was nothing but a piece of colorful pagentry. But the Grand Marshall liked colorful pageantry -- so the guard was changed each day, with due ceremony, at dusk.

Talan watched until the new guard had started on their patrols, then continued his leisurely walk to the wooded Southern Sector of the Corp's post area. His hand touched the envelope in his pocket, assuring him it was still there, and he chuckled to himself. It was amusing to think how little the Lord Adviser really knew the leaders of his armies, if he thought that a message marked URGENT, TOP SECRET would actually push the Grand Marshall into immediate action. In all probability the Grand Marshall wouldn't even be in his quarters when Talan arrived. Depend on him to be undependable, thought the Adjutant cheerfully.

Jopel, the Grand Marshall's aide-de-camp, greeted Talan when he arrived at the low rambling building which served as quarters for the Corps commandant. "I'm sorry, Sir, but Grand Marshall Bruziver is not to be disturbed." He blocked the door to the inner quarters.

"I have an urgent message for him from the Lord Leader," announced Talan loudly, "and it can be delivered to no one else... And besides, rogue," he continued in a lower voice once Jopel had admitted him, "I know as well as you that Bruziver isn't even here right now. Correct?"

Jopel nodded. "I checked the wardrobe, and the woodsman outfit is gone. He's out snooping again -- but can't announce that to the whole city, can we?"

"No, of course not! it wouldn't do for the men to discover that their commander is some kind of a nut who likes to do his own spying. One of these days he's not going to get back, if he continues this stuff. But until then..." Talan drew a comfortable chair up to the table... "we will have to wait while he snoops. Get the cards, and we'll wait. What's the score so far?"

"You owe me 53 silvers, and since I dealt last time..."

The inn called The Tam was run by Deaf Barrat, who was actually only slightly hard of hearing -- though when someone was trying to complain about being overcharged, he became deaf as a stone. Barrat, who had been a tinker for many years (until it occurred to him that he would be better off selling the stuff that he usually spent most of his money for), ran The Tam with an iron hand, which he kept behind the bar for use in case of trouble. Anyone starting a fight would have to deal with Deaf Barrat as well as with his proposed adversary.

The inn itself was a joint venture: Barrat ran the tavern, and his wife ran the lodgings. The result was that anyone who could make his way through the smoke and noise of the boisterous tavern would be able to find well-kept and cheerful rooms (with formidable locks) on the top floor of the building. Solitude and revelry were separated by but one flight of stairs.

As Barrat surveyed the evening's collection of drinkers, gamblers, and other reisterers, he estimated that there would be four -- possibly five -- fights during the evening, which he would have to break up. The wild pair of soldiers at the side table would probably be first; they had probably been drinking all afternoon, as they were quite thoroughly drunk when they entered The Tam. They were even making passes at the serving girl -- and as Barrat had deliberately hired the ugliest serving girls he could find, they must be very drunk indeed.

As the door swung open, a large man ambled into the tavern, trying perhaps too hard to make himself unobtrusive. He was dressed in the green and brown attire of a forester, with a heavy green cape and a full beard. A few eyes of the other taverners swiveled to survey the newcomer, who had evidently given up trying to go unnoticed, for he strode to a vacant table in the middle of the room and called loudly for rum. Barrat watched for several minutes as the forester poured the rum over some sugar in the bottom of his glass and slowly drank the result. Then he turned back to watch the soldiers, trying to estimate how long it would be before the fight began. When he chanced to look again at the middle of the tavern, the forester had disappeared into the shadowy reaches of the room, and he could not pick the fellow out. "To the devil with him," declared Barrat to himself, and returned to identification of possible trouble spots in the room.

The forester sat quietly in the shadows and smoke, two tables behind the soldiers. Had he wanted to listen to them, he would have had no difficulty at all, since their arguments were becoming louder and more incessant as the time wore on. But instead he concentrated his attention on hearing the whispered voices of the three men at the table between him and the soldiers. Their conversation ceased when the soldiers halted their argument for a moment, and began again when it was once more in full cry. The forester listened intently from his shadowy vantage, as the two tall men, dressed in clothing obviously of Swertholm, held their intermittent conversation with the small man in the dark blue cloak. The soldiers' drunken dispute grew louder and more strident.

"...from New America," said the blue cloak. "And Trensina will pay well for the information. You should not have much trouble in obtaining it from the offices you serve."

"Very well," replied one of the tall villagers, "we can always use money, and if the risk proves too much, we can always abandon the task."

The blue cloak laughed softly. "Yes, I suppose you could. Now I must leave; remember, the information must be obtained within two days, else it is useless. Wait here for a while before you leave."

"Where do we meet you?" asked the other of the tall men.

"In the street of merchants, before the shop of the seller of pipeweed -- I mean tobacco. At an hour before midnight." The small man rose, wrapped the blue cloak around himself, and walked around the back of the room to the door.

The two soldiers were now arguing at full volume and without cease. As the serving-girl walked past them, one soldier grabbed her around the waist, shouting "She loves ME, I tell you!"

"She does not -- she loves ME!!" roared the other, leaning over the table and shouting in the face of the first. The serving-girl took advantage of the opportunity and hit both of them on the heads at once with her tray. The fuddled soldiers, each believing the other had struck him, leaped up and drew their swords. As the vigilant Barrat moved towards them with a quarterstaff and the iron fist, and the serving girl fled behind the bar, the soldiers clanged their weapons together, each drunkenly but skillfully trying to kill the other.

The two villagers rose from their table under cover of the fight, and started to the door. Suddenly the foremost found himself pushed roughly into the side of one of the soldiers, and the other quickly followed him, caroming off the second soldier. The soldiers turned from each other to battle the intruders, and the villagers drew their own swords hastily. The fight quickly engulfed the entire side of the tavern (and as many from the other side who wanted to join in). Staffs, daggers, and various kinds of swords clanged and crashed together. Barrat knew the fight was far out of his ability to control, though a blow of his quarterstaff had put one of the soldiers out of it as soon as the inkkeeper had reached the fray. He backed off and stood against the bar to protect his property against any brawlers who should come that way.

The forester, after his first well-directed shoves, had retired to a position flat against the wall, where he hoped he might remain out of the battle. A violent shove, however, thrust one of the participants against him, and the latter whirled on him, sword in hand. Resigned, the forester made a grab at his belt, and came up facing his opponent with a double-bladed axe. He stepped quickly inside the other's reach, swinging the axe at his sword-hand. The other pulled back quickly, and the axe hit the sword an inch in front of the guard, shaking the man's grip on it. The forester recovered and swung again before his opponent could regain an attacking position. This time the blow was aimed at the guard of the sword, and as the forester had anticipated, the man tried to step inside the blow this time. The axe bit deep into the man's hand just below the thumb, and he dropped the sword with a howl of pain. The forester kicked the sword under a table, and looked around to see how the battle was progressing.

The remaining soldier had killed one of the tall villagers who had been talking to the man in the blue cape, but the other was slowly winning his way to the outside of the fight. Ducking the battlers between him and the back wall, the forester hurried around the room to get between the door and the main body of the fight. As he slowly approached the fray from the doorway area, the tall villager broke through and, seeing only one man in front of him, made for the door. He attempted to bull his way past the forester, with his sword in guard position in front of him. But an axe flashed from under the forester's green cloak and struck the sword high in the air. Before he could recover, the axe flashed again, and the villager crumpled to the floor, his neck half severed. With prac-

tised fingers, the forester went through the man's pockets, took what he found and, turning, went quickly through the door.

"Well, now you owe me 68 silvers," laughed Jopel. "And if he doesn't get back soon, you'll wind up owing me more than 70!"

"You're always lucky," grumbled Talan. "But it's almost dawn -- about an hour to go -- he should have been back long ago."

"Probably ran into more than he could handle," said the aide.

"Not really," said a voice behind Talan. "It just took a little longer than I'd figured." And the Grand Marshall strode into the room from the bedchamber in the rear of the building. He had taken off the forester's cloak and hat, and left the axe behind. He walked to the table, from which the cards had been quickly cleared, and dumped a pile of papers on it. "I run into a spy who must be fairly new at the game," he remarked. "I thought taverns were rather poor for spies to meet agents nowadays, but this one seemed to think it was quite the place to be on such occasions. Well, he's now minus two agents, and the agents are minus their papers -- and their lives too, of course, but the papers may be important. I had to wait for the meat-wagon to show up before I could rifle one of them. They needed my 'help' loading the bodies." And he related the evening's activities to them.

"Won't the spy miss the agents?" asked Talan.

"I doubt it; they're supposed to report in two days, and that won't be time enough for an accurate account of the men killed in the brawl to get out."

"Why not just go out and collar the Transinian before he could get wind of their deaths?" inquired Jopel. "And you could merely have had the agents arrested instead of going to all that bother having them killed." Jopel's rather pacifistic nature was always aroused when he could consider a death as unnecessary.

"No, I want this spy to get away with his information -- wrong information of course -- so he can be followed back to his roost. There's something that doesn't seem right about him; Transinian spies aren't usually that stupid. Anyway, someone can impersonate one of the agents and deliver the 'information' at the appointed time. As soon as I can find out what information is wanted, that is. The Transinian said something about New America sending a message -- or something like that."

Talan reached into his pocket. "Speaking of messages -- I don't know about any from New America, but I have one for you from the Lord Advisor... marked URGENT, too." He passed the envelope to the Grand Marshall, who opened it and read it to himself.

"Well," he remarked when he'd finished reading, "this is what the Transinian was after all right. It seems that, with the Lord Leader away, the Army is being placed under the command of an outsider -- from Kothylonia, wherever the hell that is. He is being sent down here by New America! But the Lord Advisor has approved the appointment; I hope he knows what he's doing."

"It looks like the war is almost upon us, too. This includes orders to move the Corps to a bivouac area in preparation for an attack. This would probably be even more interesting than the change of command to our spy friend."

"Where are we going?" asked Talan.

"The orders say Heorot -- my old home. They'll probably mass several Corps there prior to attacking. But we'd better lead the Trensianian off in some other direction."

"Obviously the attack will be against New Scotland, then," said Jopel. "There is no other city in the area that we could be going to -- what can you tell the spy?"

"We'll march the Corps northeast, toward Lankmar, as if the orders were to help protect the Inner Sea against invasion, then break off for Heorot after a half-day's march. By that time, the spy should be almost out of the country, to tell his chief we intend to be defensive on the Eastern Coast. Before he can find out any different, we'll be well into New Scotland -- provided the Brass doesn't take too much time out to inspect the ranks and snarl everything up in red tape and delays." The Grand Marshall paced up and down a bit, scuffing his feet against the rug he'd had imported from Westmarch. "They'll probably bring in the II and III Corps for the invasion, and while Lord Frütz is an expert on cutting red tape, Ronell is not. You may have to push them, Robir, if things don't keep moving."

"Me?" asked the surprised Adjutant. "Why not you? You can push bureaucrats better than I can."

"You do quite well, and you know it. You just don't want the responsibility. Well, neither do I, and I have an excuse to get out of it -- who did you think was going to follow our Trensianian friend, one of those numbskulls from my staff whose idea of following a man is to stay fifty yards behind him every hour of the day and night? Not a chance! There's something strange about this spy, and I'm going to find out what it is. Trensiania doesn't hire stupid spies -- or if they did, the spies wouldn't stay alive very long. And there's something he said, too, if I could put a finger on it..."

"What will you tell him about the Methylonian General?" broke in Jopel.

"Hmm. Might as well tell him the truth on that, I guess. as the news is probably all over Buckland by now, and whoever is behind this spy could find out quite easily. Might as well color it some with an impressive list of battles this Tedron has won -- hunt up some little-known battles in one of my history books, Jo, and them up into important events. I'll leave it to you to make up the message for the spy, and I'll get one of the locals who work around HQ to deliver it tomorrow night. After which, of course, he'll be rapidly inducted into the army so he doesn't yip to anyone about the message. I can foist him off on Gerbor as a messenger; he wears them out as fast as we can replace them, my personnel officer says."

"Now let's get some sleep. Detailed marching orders will have to be drawn up this afternoon, and that will mean work instead of fun... even for me. Goodnight -- or is it good morning? No, goodnight. As Wheatley of Diaspar says, 'As long as it's dark...'"

"We know, we know!" chorused the other two, as they made a rapid exit. "Good night!" The door slammed behind them, and Bruziver chuckled. He'd have to get a new line someday. He walked into the bedroom, dropped his clothes in a heap in the middle of the floor, and flopped onto the sturdy bed to get some sleep. His working day was ended, and dawn, evident even through the hangings drawn over the windows, crept slowly into existence.

-oOo-

By the time the Grand Marshall awoke, the sun was almost overhead, and the shadows of Swertholm had given way to the busy clamor of noonday activities. He didn't bother to check what was happening in other parts of his quarters -- Jopel would have been up better than an hour ago and would have the rest of the staff under control -- but slipped into one of his customary working day uniforms of black and silver and strode hurriedly to headquarters. There was a lot to be done, and not much time to accomplish it.

The routine matters were dispensed with quickly -- messages read and turned over to a clerk for answer, political and military dispatches read and noted, a trio of visiting politicians from the Capitol kid-gloved out of the way in as short a time as possible. And by 1530 a staff meeting was under way in the sound-proofed and guarded Conference Hall.

Bruziver looked around the table from where he stood at its head. Gorber and Kinng the infantry division commanders, Kieny of the cavalry, Trapp of artillery, Shoarths of the engineer battalion, and Talan. One missing. But before he could comment on the fact, the door flew open and Colonel Anhaven, chief of Bruziver's commando company, walked quickly to his seat opposite Talan. "One of these days," thought Bruziver, "he's going to time things too close." But he hadn't yet, and that made him an excellent leader for a commando force.

"Gentlemen," began the Grand Marshall, "I presume you have all heard, via the grapevine, that we are moving out quickly. If you haven't, I shall consider dropping you a rank or two for maintaining inadequate communications with your men and with other units of the Corps. At any rate, we are moving -- tomorrow. At 1300 tomorrow we leave a skeleton garrison here in Swertholm and march for Lankmar until nightfall, at which time we should be skirting the edge of the Great Desert. The following day the line of march will be directly north, following the Desert, and the third day it will be west, to Heorot. We will arrive there by that night, to join the other units. The dispatches mention an inspection five days from now, so with any luck at all we can get the fighting under way in less than ten days.

"General Talan will be in nominal command, until we reach Heorot, as I may have to stay behind here to clean up some administrative matters. Col. Anhaven, you will place your command under that of General Kinng, but subject to my recall at any time. General Gerber will take charge of patrols during the march; the patrols will arrest for interrogation anyone who gets overly curious about our maneuvers -- I leave the disposition of such persons to your discretion." Gerber nodded, smiling broadly.

"The men will be told of the changes in the line of march as they are made, not before. They can be told that they will be in for sea duty, but we'll let them think it's the Inner Sea we have in mind, rather than the Bay of Londinium. Are there any questions?"

The meeting continued with discussions of probable tactics and strategy in the imminent war with New Scotland and the Confederated Republics of Phobias, until each man was satisfied that he knew his duties and courses of action. As he dismissed the meeting, Bruziver turned to Anhaven. "Win, I'd like to see you a moment." The others, including Talan, filed out of the Conference Hall.

"I have a hunch I'm going to need you and your company before very long," said the Grand Marshall to his commando chief. "And I don't want to have to go running around to all the jails and hospitals in the area getting your company out of them."

Anhaven looked pained. "But sir, you haven't had to get my men out of jails," he protested. "Hospitals, perhaps, when they couldn't fight any more, but not jails." A stickler for accuracy.

Bruziver matched the Colonel's pained expression with one of deep thought. "Well, what about the time your men decided that the Prelate's garden party would be a good opportunity for a demonstration of mass panic and scattered themselves through the thousands of guests carrying subsonic generators and wearing nullifiers? As I recall, the Prelate's guards hit them with stun beams through the generators so fast your men didn't know what happened until they woke up in jail -- stripped of damn near everything they had!"

"That was an unfortunate oversight," said the Colonel. "Those stun beams with the variable wave-lengths must have been brand-new inventions the Church came up with. Of course they couldn't use anything like that in the war."

"I'm not worried about that. I trust your men -- for everything except staying out of trouble. I got them out of that one, but it was a lot of time and bother. Just try to keep out of trouble for the next week or so; there'll be plenty of action after that, I'm sure. Kinnig will leave you alone pretty much, which is why I put you under him instead of Gerber. Try to cooperate a little. Now go get your bunch of scavenging roughnecks ready to march!"

Anhaven snapped to attention. "Yes, sir!" and he wheeled and walked out of the hall. Bruziver followed him out and watched as the brown-uniformed figure changed from a march to a saunter and disappeared around a bend in the corridor. The Grand Marshall shook his head and went off to finish his business for the day.

-oOo-

The next day, Swertholm resembled nothing less than a beehive gone mad. The merchants of the town did a rushing business in the morning, with the soldiers of the VIII Corps hurrying to buy the many last-minute items they thought they would need, but by mid-day there was no business at all, and many shops closed down so that the owner might watch the troops march out.

At the military post, messengers scurried back and forth, the heavy weapons were maneuvered slowly into position, and orders were shouted as a deafening din -- one order after another, one order on top of another, one order countermanding another. But by 1300 most everything was in place, and the Corps began its march. Led by the two infantry divisions and the cavalry horde, the slower artillery set the pace with its ponderous movements. The engineer battalion and miscellaneous units followed the artillery, and the long line wound slowly north through the

main section of town and out onto the desolate road. The townspeople lined the streets to watch them leave. The usual apathy was replaced in general with a vague kind of concern; an army marching to war is not the same bunch of villifiable vermin who plague townspeople in peacetime. An army marching to war is somewhat awesome, even when the war is in some far-off place; the town watched in silence, broken only by the occasional cheers of young boys wishing they too might go.

In back of the crowd was a small man in a blue cloak, and he too watched the marching VIII Corps. When the last of the soldiers has passed the limits of the town, he followed the crowd that pressed after them for a way -- far enough to see that the road they took was to the northeast. Then he returned to his room in town to wait for evening.

After putting away his telescope and climbing down from the roof of The Tam, Bruziver too returned to his room.

-oOo-

Shortly after midnight a grey horse trotted out of Swertholme, bearing its rider north. The spy had his information, confirming his surmise of that afternoon, that the VIII Corps was indeed headed for Lankmar to defend the Inner Sea. Other information, concerning a Methylonian General being placed in charge of the Linn Army, was good to have, but definitely secondary. His superiors would be glad to pay well for what he could tell them.

At daybreak Jopel stuck his head into Bruziver's bedroom to find that the Grand Marshall had gone, his bed unslept in at all. The wardrobe indicated several disguises were taken, as well as one of the Grand Marshall's regular black travelling outfits. Jopel shrugged and went back to his tasks of keeping the skeleton garrison of Swertholm running.

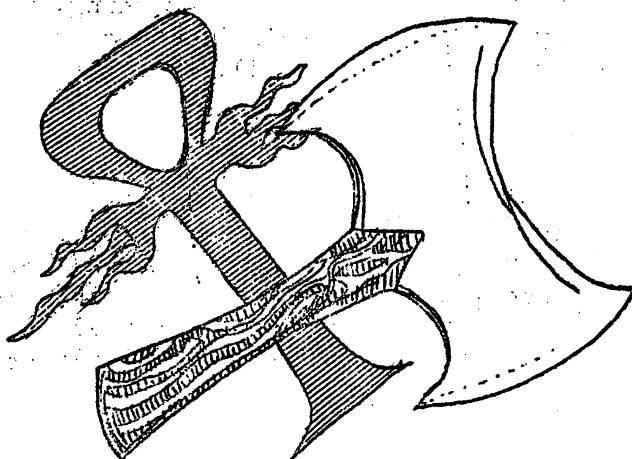
And several miles to the north of the spy a deceptively old and decrepit horse made his way slowly along the road. On his back was a large man dressed in leather and old cloth, and in packs at his side were pots and pans and sets of tools. As the sun rose higher a slightly raucous voice could be heard singing: "Oh, there was a jolly tinker, and he hailed from France..."

Bruziver of Heoret was following a spy -- by staying ahead of him.

- - - 29 $\frac{1}{2}$  - - -

the end -- for right now

Bruce Pelz -- Sept '61



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# THE MAINTENANCE OF COVENTRANIAN CIVILIZATION

by  
PAUL STANBERY

## THE PLAN

he launching of Coventry in June, 2125, brought with it a series of doubts and theories which immediately conflicted with the founding theories of the Coventranian state, the "Cope Preceptis dan Ideal Coventrani Zyskyiana"<sup>1</sup> written by the Ten Founders<sup>2</sup> when they met in Zyskyn's Harrison City penthouse to plan the voyage.

The plan itself may be summarised:

### PART ONE: THE NECESSITY

I. Dar Conceptum Coventrani (The Concept of Coventry) -- a proample and justification of the theory, which might be described as a need to preserve human accomplishment.

II. Dar Victorim Humana in Conservitus Conflictum (The Maintenance of Conflict for Human Accomplishment) -- which set forth that the most important factor in creativity<sup>3</sup> (in this case the establishment of a Golden Age) was constant conflict, or insecurity.

### PART TWO: THE TOOLS

III. Dar Conceptum Nationali Historica (The Concept of Historical Nationalities) -- Set forth here was the theory that a state of conflict could be maintained by a set of primitive nations at war. This constant competition and ever changing circumstances would give literature a chance to develop much more freely and richly than under a secure state.

IV. Dar Conceptum Paradisium Scientifica (The Concept of Scientifically Controlled Environment) -- Here it was said that the Golden Age could also be maintained by the use of scientific supplying of food and other environmental needs. That by this perfection a highly imperfect state could be maintained; in short, that a richly creative human civilization could be nourished in the inhuman vacuum of Antarctic civilization.

### PART THREE -- THE PLAN

V. Dar Conceptum Oddyssium Interstellia (The Concept of Interstellar Voyage) -- Here was set forth the basic plan for the entire program. The ship would travel between stars, recording facts about each star and its planets and attempting to help any life forms in the stellar system to survive according to natural laws. Between stars the small nations would fight.

VI. Dar Conceptum Existicum Immortala (The Concept of Immortality) -- To preserve their lives between stars, the most valuable members of the expedition would

1. Nine Precepts of the Coventranian Concept of Zyskyn -- copy furnished e auth- or by the Ministry of the People from the City Fathers of the State of Coventry.
2. Zyskyn Magnificat, William Bismark, Moses Blake, Ralph Ford, Gautama Mithrail, Mephistopheles Mannson, Guy Petronius, Alexander Warren, Astarte Roma, and Tyrell Windsor-Kartr of Westmarch.
3. Such cases as the Golden Age of Athens and the Italian Renaissance were cited.

be given anti-agathic drugs to maintain their lives as long as they wished. These drugs would be kept secret within a society of the immortals.

VII. Dar Prostandum Spawncitida (The Establishment of Daughter Cities) -- With even a slight immortal rate the time would come when the first city (Coventry) was over-populated. This provision was made for the establishment of smaller uni-national cities which would spring off from the larger mother city.

VIII. Dar Conservitum Communicadum Interstolli (The Maintenance of Interstellar Communication) -- As the ships travelled farther from one another a method would be needed to keep them in touch. A method of instantaneous re-creation of messages, possibly by use of the Relative Relativity hyper-space technique, was needed to keep the cities in touch.

IX. Dar Covenantum (The Covenant) -- This was the fundamental rule of all Coventranian life, quoted here in the official Radcliffe english translation:

"To Serve Life,  
"To Cause No Damage to Any Living Thing,  
"And to Guard the Works of Man From Harm."

The Complete Covenant contained the above quotation, the Prime Directive, and a series of definitions of the clause. For instance, service to life was defined as nourishing and preserving life as long as attempts did not interfere with what Mephistopheles defined as "cosmic balance". In basic Coventranian law the second clause was taken as meaning that any act not leading to physical or economic damage to any individual was legal. The preserving of the works of man, however, was considered by the Antarticans as the most important provision, as they believed a man's existence was relative, and therefore the only way anything could survive was in the memory of other men.

The major objections to the policy were those of Jommor Lynn, Lord Leader of Linn, and Mikhail II, King of Tarpinia, and their governmental ministries, the Star Chamber of Linn and the Royal Tarpinian Senate.

The Linnan objection was an administration which asked fundamentally if the third and ninth precepts did not conflict. The Linnan theory was that the individual had the prerogative as to what act might damage another and that extenuating circumstances, such as the wars suggested in the third precept, might occur. They believed they had the right to act as they saw fit.

The Tarpinian objection was much more fundamental. First of all, the artificial re-building of the area was resented and it was felt that the purposes of the Antartican civilization were precisely opposite to those of the Coventranian way of life. The idea of precept four, scientifically controlled environment, was particularly repulsive to the Tarpinians, who had apparently gotten the idea that a new planetary mass would be formed, and disliked the idea of scientific interference to extreme revulsion. Reconstructism, regardless of the fact that Mikhail II himself was a reconstructee, sincerely sickened them and they took it to be distasteful, if not sacrilegious.

Attempts were made to solve these problems by the establishment of the Coventranian Board of Regents, founded by Paulus Edwardum Rox III of Buckland, who had taken, upon his awakening in Coventry, residence at the King's Rivendell just north of Newbury in Buckland.

The some 600 Awakees<sup>1</sup> at that time appointed him for the position upon suggestion of Tyrell, who gave the thought in the form of a letter<sup>2</sup> delivered by the Quenya to the representatives of the Northwest Phobias Confederation<sup>3</sup> at the Three Farthing Stone in January of 2177.

The Board of Regents was elected by the Confederation and consisted of twelve members, as suggested by Carue<sup>4</sup>. The Board was made up of Paulus Rex; Jommor Lynn; Mikhail II; Heinrich IV, Emperor of Westmarch, heir to the Fredlov estate in Columbia; Bradford Trenser, Trenser Organisation head from New Ilium, and Supreme Minister of the Confederated Republics of Phobias; The Mizbah Bizri, well-known eccentric governor of Cliff Beach in Linn; Lady Tracy, one of the members of the aristocratic class of the La Canada Island Group; Lakos I of Sandcave, Rasacc of Collinsia and Caliph of the El Cortine; Janet Bean, General Manageress of Lapex Productions of New America; Bruce the Conqueror, King of New Scotland; Lord Richard, Liege of Rimland; and Tedron, Duke of Methylonia.

### THE BOARD

The Board of Regents met in the City of Crimzoidia and set up a series of rules, establishing the principles under which Coventry was to be governed in the future.

According to the Antarctic suggestions, represented by Tyrell's proxy, Paulus Edwardum Rex was to serve as President, chief responsible party for Coventry, according to precedence, and Jommor Lynn as his chief of government. The Ship, however, was to be under the principle rulings of the Board of Regents, which was then set up as a permanent body.

The Board of Regents would meet at least once every year. Between meetings all business of President, Chief of Government, and Board, would be handled by an Executive Secretary, which position would be held by one of the twelve regents after another in succession. Each would withdraw from Coventrian residence to live in Crimzoidia for the 25-year term. The President was Number One, the Chief of Government was Number Two, etc. Every time the sixth chair member had served the term of Executive Secretary and had left the position, a new member for the sixth chair would be chosen unanimously by the board.

The Board of Regents under the Executive Secretary was to act as a primarily advisory body until the ship came in contact with a planet, in which case the President and entire Board convened to supervise trade relations.

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1. Each member of the 144,000 Coventrian guardians awakened (after being placed by the Quenya in a proper location after removal under Tyrell's supervision from the House of Varrda in Crimzoidia) after a period proportional to that of the period of his death in Earth-life to the member who had died previously.
  2. Tyrell was not seen by the Guardians for some time after launching, remaining in a secret lodge of the Quenya, possibly dwelling in the Krell City.
  3. The Northwest Phobias Confederation was an alliance formed by the Stanberian Empire about 1880 against the Republic of Glorietta. It was a defensive treaty organization revived in the early twenty-second century against Westmarch. It was used by the Antarcticans as a method of government when they took over the Coventrian islands in 2109.
  4. A member of the Secret Six of the Quenya.

To serve the purposes of administration, etc, four ministries, to be situated in Crimzoidia, were formed:

1. THE MINISTRY OF THE SHIP -- was governed by a board of Supervisors which included the Captain of the Ship, William Albert Williams; the City Manager of Crimzoidia, Danial Brommage; the High Warden of Coventry, Lord Richard of Rimland; the Director of Luna City (the "eye-in-the-sky" space city that travels over the dome of Coventry by night) -- the same officer is known as Director of Coventry Port Facilities; and the Supervisor of Lower Deck Operations and Krell City Maintenance. The rest of the Ministry is composed of the Ship's crew and officers as well as various necessary department heads. It was responsible for keeping Coventry headed on the proper course and maintaining her physical condition.

2. THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS -- was composed of the Interstellar Director and his staff. It was established to conduct affairs with other stellar races, establishing contact, recording relations, and generally supervising Coventry's planetary relations.

3. THE MINISTRY OF THE PEOPLE -- was the legislative body of Coventry, composed of representatives from the normal population, the immortal population, and the daughter cities, as they were established. All major decisions were made by this body, subject either to a veto by the Board of Regents, or a veto by the President.

4. THE MINISTRY OF RECORDS -- remained officially outside of all political work and took no part in any actions of Coventry, but served to record all that passed on the Ship and to preserve all artistic creations of the Coventranians.

Accompanying the Ministries, a computer, known as the City Fathers, was installed with knowledge of the Covenant as its ruling factor, and certain circuits, based of the Instantaneous Interstellar Communications principle (which sent brain waves through another continuum (thanks to Zyskyn's Relative Relativity)), which could receive human thoughts, though it could only register and track down those which were pertaining to violence against the Ship. Under the City Fathers, in the portion of the Krell City known as Wing IV, a group of humanoid robots were established to serve the Covenant, but only to act in un-nationalized areas of the Ship and never to interfere with humans without the permission of a majority of the Board of Regents.

The Board of Regents was also assisted by a group of eight commissioners, associate members:

COMMISSIONER OF PRODUCTION	COMMISSIONER OF ECONOMICS
COMMISSIONER OF POWER	COMMISSIONER OF SCIENCE
COMMISSIONER OF SOCIAL ENGINEERING	COMMISSIONER OF SPORT
COMMISSIONER OF ART	COMMISSIONER OF PHILOSOPHY

It was decided by the Board, that the Guardians should be masked off from the other inhabitants, to preserve the appearance of free will according to Principle III. This was done by the admission of all Guardians to a group known as the Emyreate, each member having immortality if he wished. A secret brotherhood would be set up by certain members of the Emyreate, chosen by the Board of Regents, known as the Grand-Union Institute, which would be composed of those people who were intelligent enough to guess or discover the true nature of the Ship. They would be contacted through the Institute's recruiting organization, the Church of Coventry.

## THE CHURCH

The Church would establish cathedrals throughout Coventry, with one priest per thousand population, one Bishop per 50,000, one Archbishop per half-million, one Metropolitan per 5 million, and a Supreme Pontiff elected from the body, all organized under the Commissioners. The Church would have no fixed belief but would encourage and support all philosophies, serving as a universal seminar with the motto, "Prove all things, and hold fast to that which is good." It would administer the codes of the Ship in the nationalized surface deck, under cover of its masquerade. The bishops, archbishops, and metropolitans would serve as population representatives in the Ministry of the People.

All those contacted from the body of the uninitiated (known as Glarks) could enroll in the Grand-Union Institute Plan for life extension. Based on their achievement in society per fifty years, they would be given life extension treatments: no treatment upon enrollment as Base, or Brood; one treatment, upon achievement, fifty years after enrollment, with advancement to Second, or Wedge, status; second treatment fifty years after attainment of Wedge, with advancement to Third (sometimes known as Arrant); third treatment again fifty years later with advancement to Fourth or Verge status; and finally, the attainment of indefinite life extension with the Fifth level, or Amaranth.

The Amaranth Society, formed of all Emperate members admitted and all who worked their way up from Glark, formed the second chamber of the Ministry of the People (not counting Bishops and above in the Church), with their Chairman. All members of the Institute could advance a status if they Achieved after the fifty years had elapsed but before they died. A group of the Guardians were appointed by the City Fathers as the Upper Twelve, or the first 12 members of the Amaranth Society.

The Church, through its various departments, administered the lands as representatives of the high government. Some of their regulations included the control of War:

War, as conducted in Coventry, involved no killing and was placed under the control of the Commissioner of Sport. Weapons "consecrated" by the Church were distributed for use, and involved paralysis, both as guns which shot paralysis rays and vibro-blades which paralyzed within the field of their "blades". Any weapon made had to be "consecrated", in addition. Carnal killing, or murder without consecrated weapons, and all other crimes for which there was capital punishment in the nation-states, was punished by paralysis, after which the bodies were delivered up to the Church, as occurred with any dead by paralysis. The Clinic Squad of the Church delivered the bodies to "Valhalla", Crimzoidia, where their names were engraved on the Roster of Honor in Central Control, and they were awakened from paralysis as Reconstructees, able to enlist in the Church if they wished, able to serve in the crew of the Ship, or dwell in Crimzoidia, accepting or not accepting the Covenant. Any members of the Grand-Union had to accept the Covenant.

Violators of the Covenant were given a choice of psychological re-adjustment, exile from the Ship, or re-location to Belly Rave, the lawless district of the Krell City under Crimzoidia. Operations dealing with Reconstructees were known as Re-Classification.

Bombs using paralysis were also developed, and all bombs and vibro-blades, though chopping through inanimate material, plants and reptiles, caused paralysis when they struck warmblooded living matter. The paralysis spread with the circulation of the blood, simulating bleeding, and could be arrested by adequate bandaging and administration of proper remedies.

## FREE TRADERS

Many people who did not wish to live in Coventry, although they abided by the Covenant, were permitted to own their own spacecraft, becoming free traders travelling between star systems and trading among the space cities.

—Paul Stanbery, 1960

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## EDITORIAL COMMENT

Although it has been a year and a half since the last issue of GIMBLE, interest in Coventry has risen to heights which I frankly find amazing. People keep writing to me -- people I've never heard of -- asking when the next issue will be out; people who were given characters in Coventry have suddenly started taking themselves seriously and working at running their kingdoms; people have started clamoring to get in on this.

So a society is being formed by the Incredible Paul Stanbery to tap some of this interest. This is the "Coventry Is A Waste Of Time" Society, founded on and continuing the worthy work of W.T.Dauringa, alias "We, The Guardian", alias Mitch Evans (see p.20 of Who's Who In Science Fiction Fandom). The CIAWOT Society is open to anyone interested in more detailed information on this best of all possible (fantasy) worlds. Now Stanbery Himself Speaks:

"ALL THOSE INTERESTED in joining the Coventranian mailing lists as permanent supporters and enrolling in the CIAWOT Society to support the spread of Coventranian activity will sign the pledge below and mail the letters to:

Paul Stanbery

#220

1101 NE Campus Parkway

Seattle 5, Washington

"I pledge to support Coventry by observing its establishments of persons, land, history, technology, and institutions according to the approval of The City Fathers, and to perform no action on the behalf of Coventry as a member which shall be deemed official and binding without the written approval of The City Fathers acting through the Office of The President."

Signed \_\_\_\_\_

"Having signed this document, you are now registered as Free Agent level members of the CIAWOT Society, entitled to be registered on all rolls of the Society and eligible to receive all communications of the Society, having your name furnished by the Society for possible entrance on the mailing list of all officially approved publications, and, upon agreement to the Covenant as interpreted through The City Fathers and their agency, the CIAWOT Society, you shall be eligible, when you receive the proper materials, to register as a Base Level member of CIAWOT."

The editor and publisher of GIMBLE would like to disclaim all responsibility for the writings, ideas and actions of Paul Stanbery; we do not necessarily agree with him on anything. Therefore, please address all complaints, accusations of insanity, etc, to Stanbery (address above). Egoboo for the stories, you can send to the editor and/or publisher. Please send egoboo; it's all the pay we get.

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