

Most honored one:

Attached you will find a small packet of information, much of which you requested. I have included my own notes, where appropriate.

Of course, I have also included the latest HTE board meeting minutes; I'm sure you'll find much of it boring, as usual. But you wanted to remain up to speed on doings at home, so I am obliging you. I know you already have most of that information, but I like being complete.

Can I be honest with you?

I am not much liking this current venture of yours. Yes, I understand you're continuing your mother's research, but I also know it goes beyond that for you. Out of honest curiosity, are you simply pursuing your own vendetta, or is this truly in the interest of the Combine? I dislike questioning your motives, my lord, but with the fires of a thousand battles raging around us, and with civilization itself seemingly ready to fall, I need reassurance that what you are doing is indeed the right and honorable path.

Not that I blame you if this is personal. I am a pragmatist, as you well know. The chance clues we have stumbled upon regarding such an invisible prize point to two inevitable outcomes—either a most ingenious and nefarious trap, or once again the Laughing Buddha has smiled upon you. I fervently wish the latter, but fear it is the former. The fanatics can be insidiously deceptive, as we've seen on Luthien, and I would not discount such a convoluted plan from them simply to take you down.

To that end, I have also sent with this message a particularly deadly band of associates, whom I'm sure you'll remember well. They honor their fealty to House Kurita, regardless of where they serve. Please, my lord, let them protect you further—if you died, I would make sure my prayers sent you to the Five Hells simply for failing to follow my security suggestions.

I have included a rundown of the mercenary commands you wanted to investigate. I got hold of most of their files in the MRBC—provided they had any. Some did not, so I gathered what I could. And the fact that you've managed to secure some independent House commands (though I must say, Benton and the Sabres were a foregone conclusion once we got them off Luthien), I think the direction from here should be to look at smaller, relatively unknown or new commands. It will make for an odd conglomeration—but these are desperate times. Which call for desperately extraordinary measures. I fervently hope you have indeed found the prize that we have so long sought.

Madame Isesaki-Sorenson has assured me that the supplies you requested are on their way, via one of ISC's most secret routes. I know she is mostly concerned regarding her daughter; if you can in some way reassure her, it would be most kind.

As always, your needs are my pleasure to fill. Until then, consider HTE unassailable. We shall await your return.

In your humble service,

(signed) Peter Abdulsattah

To: All CEO/COOs on HTE holdings sublist

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Consortium Emergency Board Meeting 12.03.71

Present:

Mirza Peter Abdulsattab, Tanadai, CEO (presiding)
Marissa Ilishovic, HTE, CFO
Julie Isesaki-Sorenson, Isesaki Shipping, COO (HPG)
Ignatius Brown, Turanian Transport Company, CEO
Takinama Rendelli, ISF, liaison
Erin Yakima-Shotomi, HTE, secretary

Absent:

Chandrasekhar Kurita, HTE, CEO
Marquis Unno Kitabake, Metals of the Earth, CEO
Elizabeth Roshenco, Joyous Springs Wines, CEO
Jorges Philippe, Hosi Textile Partnerships, COO
Wie Copperhouse, Copperhouse Manufacturing, CFO

Incidentals

- Birthday wishes to Ignatius Brown, gift presented by PA (in absentia for CK)
- Madame Elizabeth Roshenco still unaccounted for; complete loss of contact with Palos HPG (status being confirmed via hard sources —TR)

Meeting Recap of 110971

- Company briefing on Iveco, Donovan-Miter, Champion Hoversports, SphereBAC, Adelante and the Hamilton Consortium for possible additions (PA)
- Addition of Contard Mining, Capriole Dynamics, Iroquois Machinery Ltd and Tatyana Trans-Oceanic Shipyards to list (MI, CK, IB, UK)
- Briefings to be compiled and presented in full for final consideration at next meeting (EYS)
- Acceptance of proposal to add ISF to Board, per CK's suggestion (MI)

Old Business

- Selection of additional business candidates tabled until full briefings for all companies submitted (JI)
- Renegotiation of 21st Centauri Lancer contract due to relocation of garrison (IB, UK)
 1. Additional 20 percent increase in size warrants renegotiation clause, #499.22-r5 (JP)
 2. Stipulation added to relocation—defense now all of Hachiman, with Masamori complex priority (JP, UK)
- Approval of Isesaki Shipping's proposal to open negotiations with FRR/GBD under limited agreement (WC, PA)
- Approval of limited investment agreement with Sapphire Sunset Metals; 10-year maximum cap (UK, IB)

New Business

- Approval of final candidate briefings (enclosed) for conglomerate additions (TR, PA)
- Approval of additional 20 percent increase in supply request to interests on Arcturus (PA, MI)
- Presentation on IrTech stealth acquisition of LAW options and rights, incl. patents, schematics and technological copyrights (TR)
 1. Ideas on deflection of IrTech aggression in Combine business (all)
 2. Pros/cons list of escalation tactics (TR, PA)
 3. Financial assistance to LAW through intermediaries
 - Sapphire Sunset Metals
 - Yan Manufacturing
 - Wakazashi Aerospace
 - StarCorps
- Report on decreasing merchant traffic along OA border (JI)
- Special request by *Kanrei* (delivered and presented by TR) for assistance in Azami disaster and relief efforts through local intermediaries

Concluding remarks

- Best wishes for holidays (CK – *in absentia*)

Meeting adjourned (PA, MI)

Lord Kurita:

Attached is a rundown of the various items produced by the candidate companies suggested by the Board. We desire your input and suggestions before moving forward. The Board has recommended that at this time we focus on acquiring controlling interests in two or three of the following candidates; conflict with IrTech looms on the horizon, and the more assets we have to counter their marketplace percentages, the better. We believe these companies—and these products in particular—may be the deep resources we need to help us push Sigmund and his fanatic allies out of the Dragon's space.

The candidate companies are:

- Iveco
- Contard Mining
- Donovan-Miter
- Champion Hoversports
- Capriole Dynamics
- SphereBAC
- Adelante
- Hamilton Consortium
- Tatyana Trans-Oceanic Shipyards
- Iroquois Machinery, Ltd.

In a wonderful turn of irony, the reports attached were the exact ones delivered to the CEO of IrTech. When we have time, I would love to share with you how we scored that particular coup. You'll love the tale, I'm sure.

Your humble servant,
(signed) Marissa Ilishovic

So it has begun.

As I look out across the shattered remains of our makeshift DropPort, the smoke still curling into the air like a Capellan incense house, I can only smile.

Oh, no, dear me—not because of the lives lost today. While they may be “only” mercenaries (as some diehard old fools in the royal court would say...I wonder, is there even a royal court on Luthien anymore?), I learned long ago after my gifted crossing of paths with the Caballeros that these mercenaries, by and large, are still people.

I must make sure to compensate these men and women for their losses. I daresay Peter will object—as he should—but he knows as well as I that this is no time to pinch a Lyran kroner. I will need to make sure I inform them of this today, before I let them know our true purpose for being here. And why their losses are not in vain. It saddens me that some of them have died for a cause, a purpose that even I have not divulged to them.

Actually, in about five minutes. Captain Webb should be signaling me shortly, letting me know that the commanders—whoever’s left—are ready in the dining room. Let me finish my thoughts here first.

It became painfully obvious as that monstrosity Sariel was pounding on our proverbial door that I’m on the right track. I know it. In my gut, vast as it is, I can feel it.

Odessa was only a supposition, a guess.

After today, after pushing back such a determined, destructive foe—I’ve never seen such bloodlust, not even from the Dragoons—it only confirms that I was right.

The Ruins of Gabriel....

....are at Odessa.

And very shortly now, so will I be.

So. Will. I.

—CK

