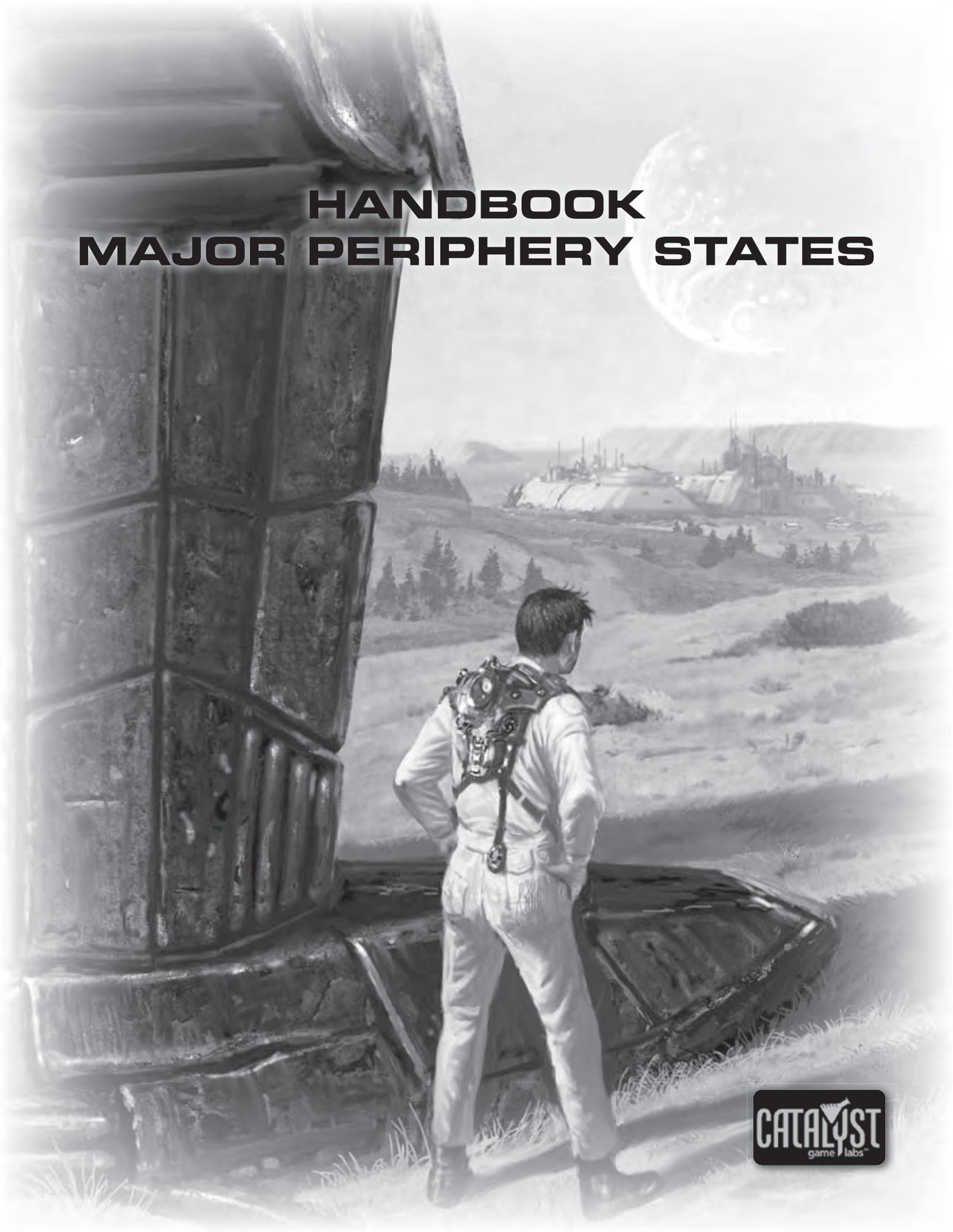


# HANDBOOK MAJOR PERIPHERY STATES





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—Excerpt from *Scoop! VidZine* broadcast,  
Luxen, Magistracy of Canopus, 12 September 3067

# SCOOP!

VIDZINE

**[DENISE DEVALERA]:** I'm Denise DeValera for *Scoop! VidZine*. We have a special guest in our studio today—the Periphery's very own oldest living Errant, a MechWarrior whose career gives the words "bold and daring" a style all her own. Now retired on Luxen, she recently celebrated her 120th birthday—and she earlier told this reporter that she plans on "seeing a hundred and twenty more, God willing and the whiskey holds out." Temper MacCaulay, welcome to *Scoop! VidZine*. Thank you so much for being with us.

**[MACCAULAY]:** My pleasure, Ms. DeValera. [grins] Not often an old girl like me gets an all-expenses-paid invite to tell war stories.

**[DEVALERA]:** You're a living legend in these parts. How do you feel about that?

**[MACCAULAY]:** [shrugs] You do what you do. People make what they make of it.

**[DEVALERA]:** So how did you come by your unusual first name?

**[MACCAULAY]:** It's Temperance, really. You know—moderation? My folks had a bad case of wishful thinking... I never did live up to it. Daddy used to say I came into the world raging and never got over it. My name got shortened to "Temper" real quick. Mind you, a name like that gives you a rep to match right off.

**[DEVALERA]:** You grew up on a mining outpost, right? An indy world, not an official colony? How does—and I'll quote from your memoir here—"a rough-edged miner's kid from the back of way beyond,

with no more notion of soldiering than a tunnel rat has of daylight," get to be a MechWarrior in the first place?

**[MACCAULAY]:** [grins] I blame my daddy. He loved those old flat-screen Westerns—used to watch 'em with me all the time during the light-storms we'd get, when no one dared set foot outside the enviro-domes. This was back on Tumbleweed, where I grew up. My parents followed their old friend Wilkie Jones out there, looking to set up the ideal colony based on the ancient North American frontier... or at least, what they all *thought* was the ancient North American frontier. They'd meant to make landfall somewheres a little gentler, but with food and fuel running low, they settled for Tumbleweed. It had useful ores, and they figured we'd get by inside envirodomes until we could terraform a decent chunk of it for farmland. Population was meant to stay small anyways, so old Wilkie figured, why not? And anyway, weren't we all gonna be hardy pioneer spirits toughing it out on the Great Plains of the Universe? Tumbleweed fit that bill, all right.

Well, things didn't quite work out as planned—which tends to happen on the edges of known space—but we did get by. Nobody much bothered us; even the pirate bands didn't have us on their star charts at first. We all had to work, mind, even us kids. Soon's I got old enough, they let me help fix the IndustrialMechs. Got tall enough, and they let me work 'em. Cut my teeth on those lumbering towers of bolts, held together by then with spit and duct tape and a lot of profane prayer. And I'll tell you something that's likely news to your fancy 'Mech jocks from the Nagelring and such—when your daily bread depends on knowing the quirks of a cranky pile of parts that might collapse out from under you the second you put a foot wrong, you get damned good at tricky maneuvering. And troubleshooting.



# LOCAL COLOR



## LOCAL COLOR



**[DEVALERA]:** So what turned you into a fighter?

**[MACCAULAY]:** Tortuga pirates. One of their “Jolly Rogers” happened across Tumbleweed in 2960. Hell of it is, they didn’t even need our ores—not with all the stuff they were sitting on. They were just looking for someone to play with. They did a flyby, blew pure hell out of half our envirodomes, stole everything we’d brought to the surface and wrecked pretty much everything else. Then they took off into the wild black yonder, and left us survivors to clean up the mess. [grim laugh] First old Western me and Daddy watched after that—months later, when we’d finally got some breathing space after burying our dead and jury-rigging vital repairs—was *High Noon*. I wanted to be that Gary Cooper guy—the lone lawman who rides into a scared-as-hell town and sets everything to rights. Most of all, I wanted to get those Tortuga bastards. And any other predators like ‘em out there.

**[DEVALERA]:** So you got your first ‘Mech...?

**[MACCAULAY]:** On Illyria, in the Palatinate. [snorts] ‘Scuse me, nowadays it’s the newest toy in the Marian Hegemony. Anyways, they used to hold fight-to-the-death ‘Mech games there. Still do, I guess. Whoever won got the salvaged ‘Mech or spare parts...whatever the combatants put up. Killer poker in a giant walking death machine. Fellow I’d been mechanic for—Ty Falco—got the yellow-bellies, couldn’t make himself go through with the death match. Not even to hold onto his family ‘Mech. He’d been going downhill awhile, hitting the jet fuel real hard just to get up in the morning. Comes to me on game day, drunker than a House Lord, says he wants me to have his ‘Mech. If I can win it in what was supposed to be his fight, that’ll prove I’m worthy of the Gray Lady. That’s what he called her. This was 2970, now, and his family’d had that bucket of bolts for longer than old Ty could recall. She was towering and gray and full of dings and quirks, but she was a sound piece of work for all that. I’d got to know her pretty well by then, and I figured Ty’s offer was my best shot at getting my own ‘Mech. So I fought and I won—blind luck, that last engine shot, doesn’t matter who knows it now—and I figured I was ready to take on the universe.

**[DEVALERA]:** Tell us about your first campaign.

**[MACCAULAY]:** If you can call it that. I spent a few years with the Illyrian Militia, knocking out raiders. They kept hitting Illyria, chasing stories about Star League ‘Mech caches on the northern continent. They’d land and we’d bloody their noses, and they’d go away again after doing enough damage to save some face. They mostly couldn’t fight worth a plugged C-bill. Got boring after a time. I got restless. Wanted to face down some real bad guys for a change. So when my rotation came up, I got myself an honorable discharge and went looking for work. Found it for a time on the Lyran border, fighting off raiders from the Oberon Confederation. Then I got itchy feet and joined up with some mercs who were working for Interstellar Expeditions, going out into the Deep Periphery looking for lost colonies. Spent a chunk of the 2980s doing that. Mostly, we found remnants of colonies that didn’t

make it—which gave me a whole new appreciation for how lucky we were to make a go of things on Tumbleweed.

**[DEVALERA]:** And then you came back to the Near Periphery, in...?

**[MACCAULAY]:** Let’s see now... 2995, maybe ‘96. Found work on Cadiz, settled by that Far Looker bunch out of the Taurian Concordat. The Taurians were real big on colonial expansion back then, a lot of it pushed by the Far Lookers. Them people’ve always wanted to go way out there, put humans on as many planets as they can. So they settled this pretty little breadbasket world, with a couple-three major mountain ranges on each of its continents. One of the ranges had radioactives in its stone guts, and eventually that made it a target. Pirate band calling themselves the Horsemen of the Apocalypse, of all the fool things, hit Cadiz in the spring about a year after I took up station there. Woman was leading ‘em, went by the moniker Black Maria. As in a hearse, which I guess would’ve made her Death. Never did figure out who was supposed to be War, Pestilence and Famine. There was ten of ‘em all together, which would’ve made a tough fight for me on sheer numbers. Luckily, I was dealing with amateurs.

Me and the local constable, plus about half a dozen colonists in dressed-up hovertrucks, used comm transmissions and misdirection to fake up a couple tank and ‘Mech companies. Amazing, how useful a ‘Mech sensor ghost can be...The set-up convinced Black Maria to duel me for the rights to the uranium mines in the Blue Mountains. She gave me a good fight before I nailed her with a lucky hit that breached her cockpit. With her gone, the rest of ‘em fell to battling each other over who was the new boss. We let ‘em duke it out, and then I knee-capped the last two pirate ‘Mechs standing. The pirates still alive were told they could join the colony or hole up in the brig until Concordat law enforcement took ‘em back to Taurus for trial. Couple of ‘em took the join-up deal, and did okay. I stayed on Cadiz for awhile after, but nothing much happened. I found out why after I’d moved on. God alone knows how, but somehow my rep had preceded me. According to the scuttlebutt, I took out all ten of those pirates by my lonesome—and they weren’t some itty-bitty bandit wannabes, either. One version I heard had me knocking out the entire ‘Mech force of a Marian Hegemony privateer—this was back in the days before the Hegemony got respectable.

**[DEVALERA]:** And you moved on to where?

**[MACCAULAY]:** I stayed in the Concordat awhile, as part of the merc unit Thor’s Arms. I liked the pay, liked the people, mostly liked the work. After ‘bout ten years, though, my feet got to itching again. So I left Thor’s Arms, no hard feelings, and went looking for a solo contract. The Lothian League was having some trouble with Caesar Marius O’Reilly around that time, not too long after the turn of this century. Made me chuckle to think I’d be fighting the Hegemony for real.

Anyways, the Lothians hired me to train up a planetary militia on Logan Prime, which was close to the Hegemony border and had some rich ore deposits. Marius O’Reilly had just taken power, and he wasn’t satisfied with plain old piracy. He wanted to play conqueror, and the



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League planets were at the top of his list. I remembered a bunch of stuff from my days with Thor's Arms, and the Logan Prime militia gave a good account of itself when the Marian troops finally hit. We took some casualties, but we sent 'em away good and bloodied. Not that it mattered much in the long run. [grins] But you didn't ask me on this show to talk politics.

**[DEVALERA]:** Weren't you part of the expedition that forced Marius O'Reilly off Astrokaszy in 3035?

**[MACCAULAY]:** I wish. I gather that was some ruckus. No, by then I was in Canopian space. Militia training, mostly, on backwater worlds the MAF couldn't reach. The MAF had its hands full at the time with the Andurien situation, and didn't have many personnel to spare for the real podunk planets. So they hired folks like me to fill that gap. Decent money, too. Which was getting to matter to me, being the age I was. Even with Canopian medical tech, a girl can't help slowing down some after she passes seventy.

**[DEVALERA]:** But you pulled off some pretty impressive feats before then. Like the incident with the Forty-Niners—the germanium prospectors who ran into “dragons” on Far Edge. They weren't really dragons, were they?

**[MACCAULAY]:** Close enough. Big as tanks, with steel-hard scales and spitting fire... nastiest local beastie I ever tangled with, including the flying spiders on Tango. At least the spiders, you could fry with a good solid laser shot. But the dragons...Lord God, they were tough to kill. Only thing that'd punch through those scales was a big-bore autocannon, and even then you had to be in too close for comfort to get maximum impact. Me and three other Errants took that contract. Only two of us came back. Liz Bennett bought it, along with Li Jun Park. Dragon tore Li Jun right out of his cockpit, like peeling a shrimp. Horrible. Me and Liz and Marti, we went to town on the beastie that did that. And its friend, who damned near got me, 'cept Lizzy got in its way. Killed it with a shot through the eyeball. [pause] It crushed her when it fell. That particular dragon was a lot bigger than the others. We figured out later it was the queen dragon. Its nestlings or whatever scattered after that. Only Marti Winter Moon and I made it back to civilization. But we didn't lose a single miner. I still miss Lizzy and Li Jun like hell, but I'm damned proud of what we all did there.

**[DEVALERA]:** And what about you taking out Helmar Valasek in the 3030s? That story still makes the rounds in a lot of bars, but you don't mention it in your memoir.

**[MACCAULAY]:** [laughs] That's because it didn't happen. I had one fight with Valasek's band back in the thirty-teens, when the Outworlds Alliance put together a bandit-hunting force. Got help paying for the deal from some Davion mining companies that wanted to protect their investments. We did OK against Valasek—cost him a few pirates and some materiel—but it was a far cry from “taking him out.” Credit for

that goes to the Clanners, a lot later—3049. They rolled over Santander's World when they invaded Spheroid space—and though I'm no huge fan of 'em, I don't know anyone who's crying about old Helmar. [chuckles] Funny—almost twenty years on, folks are getting the Clan invasion mixed up with ancient history.

**[DEVALERA]:** What's the most memorable job you ever had?

**[MACCAULAY]:** Working for Lyle Steadman. Yeah, that Steadman. The guy who made a fortune on Canopus IV in the 3040s—patented some kinda micro-bug that eats poisons out of the soil and rode it all the way to the bank. He'd made and lost a couple fortunes before that, one on a soft drink and another on some gadget I couldn't understand when he tried to describe it. He came from money—Lyle was the eccentric of the Steadman clan, who'd made a pretty C-bill in the gemstone trade here on Luxen. Lyle was supposed to follow his mother into the business, but he preferred tinkering and finding lost treasure. He hired me to help him with that last one. He'd heard all kinds of stories about lostech caches just waiting to be discovered farther out in the Periphery, and he aimed to find one. Hired me as his bodyguard and fix-it person. This was in 3026. Youngster then, Lyle was, ready to take on the universe. [laughs] Especially with a few drinks in him. We met in a bar on Astrokaszy... real dive, but known as a place where a soldier could get decent liquor cheap with no water in it. I'd gone there following up a contract, but the fella never showed. I stuck around for a last drink and happened to catch a couple regulars harassing some new guy. Never could stand for that sort of thing, so I busted up the ruckus that was forming and got the poor sucker out of there. Turned out it was Lyle. After I got him sobered up with plenty of strong coffee down the street at Sal's Diner, he offered me a job.

**[DEVALERA]:** Treasure-hunting.

**[MACCAULAY]:** [nods] I'd thought about doing it myself, but never quite worked up the gumption. Or the financing. Lyle had the cash, no problem. I thought, what the hell? Turned out to be a bit more than either of us bargained for, but we did all right. First place we went was a water-world called Tethys—s'posed to have a lost Star League base on its major island. We didn't find one, though we did have trouble with some big cats in those jungles. There were also these flying lizard-snake critters...they'd come at you in swarms. Had a nasty bite. Left the pair of us shivering and sick for a week. Lucky for us, if the first bite or two don't kill you, the rest don't hardly slow you down. Acquired immunity, I guess. Anyways, we went on to a little planet so obscure it didn't even have a proper name. Ten-A-Two, it was marked down as. Supposed to be uninhabited. Wasn't. We stumbled on what must have been the last remnants from a crashed colony ship, barely surviving in the foothills where their ship'd gone down. Slow radiation leak was killing 'em. I don't know how many decades or even centuries it'd been since they saw civilized people, but it must've been awhile. They took us for gods, if you can imagine. None of 'em could remember ever seeing a ship actually fly, and they acted like every piece of tech we had with us was

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some kind of marvel. We didn't find any lostech there, either, but we did some good. Lyle scooped the survivors up and ferried 'em to the temperate southern continent, and we left them what we could to get on with. I was all for takin' 'em to the Outworlds Alliance, which was the closest region in the Periphery where they might get help. Plus, a lot of Alliance planets were still pretty low-tech back then, which I figured would cut down on the culture shock. But they didn't want to leave. Kept calling Ten-A-Two their Promised Land and flat refused to budge.

**[DEVALERA]:** And you took "No" for an answer?

**[MACCAULAY]:** That's how we do out here. Folks choose their own way, and unless it involves harming them as can't fight back, we mostly let 'em. Because who's to say what's right for someone else? Wasn't our place to tell 'em, "No, you can't stay here, you've got to come with us for your own good." That kind of stuff you can leave to your Successor States.

**[DEVALERA]:** So did you ever find that lostech cache?

**[MACCAULAY]:** [nods] On a godforsaken iceball of a planet way out toward the rim. I don't recall its real name anymore; Lyle named it Brass Monkey, as in "Cold enough to freeze the nose off a...". Even the arctic-weather gear we'd picked up on Thraxa almost didn't see us through those months. Lyle lost two toes to frostbite. But we found the cache, and he still says it was worth the swap. Not a big cache, mind—hardly enough to make the major vid networks back in the Magistracy—but enough to make Lyle happy, and to buy me a brand-new 'Mech with my cut. Lyle insisted I take half, in addition to my pay. Always was generous.

**[DEVALERA]:** So you traded in the Gray Lady?

**[MACCAULAY]:** Yep. I felt kind of sad letting her go, but she was an old rattling heap by then, and I seriously needed a new ride. By the time we got back to civilization, the Fourth Succession War had come

and gone in the Inner Sphere, and as usual, all the brawling—plus the Helm Memory Core—had sparked some mighty sweet military tech. So I got myself a new machine, called her Lady Day after a famous blues singer on ancient Terra. And went looking for a chance to christen her in the field. The 'Mech games on Hardcore seemed worth a try... especially with the prospect of resting my old bones in a hot tub afterward, at one of the better hotels. [grins] Was that ever a time. Quite a place, Hardcore.

**[DEVALERA]:** The site of your last exploit, according to your memoir.

**[MACCAULAY]:** Getting young Emma Centrella out of her crazy mother's way. [nods] We'd crossed paths before; I did a stint as a guest instructor at the military academy where Emma did her training. Good eye and a steady hand, I thought then. Plus a crafty head on her shoulders. Anyways, I was one of the locals who helped the Magistracy Royal Guards smuggle Emma off Hardcore after Magestrix Kyalla tried to have her killed. The Guards were supposed to arrest her, but Kyalla didn't know how thin her own support had gotten among them. The ones who fetched up on Hardcore were Emma's partisans, and we all knew she was safe with them.

**[DEVALERA]:** Has Magestrix Emma ever acknowledged your role in that incident?

**[MACCAULAY]:** Sends me a bottle of aged Canopian apple brandy every WinterFest, if that's what you mean. [grins] She wanted to give me a medal, but I told her I'd rather have the brandy. Woman in her nineties, which I was then, has to think of her comforts.

**[DEVALERA]:** This has been fascinating. I wish we could keep going, but unfortunately that's all the time we have... so once again, thank you for coming on our show. It's been a pleasure, Ms. MacCaulay.

**[MACCAULAY]:** Likewise.



## INTRODUCTION

The following compilation began more than a year ago, when Doug McCrory—my editor at InterStellar Associated Press—suggested an in-depth series on the Periphery. As ISAP’s unofficial “resident expert,” he tapped me for the job. “You’re the outlander, Ev,” he said. “Here’s your chance to give our readers a taste of home.”

“Home”—meaning Early Dawn, something of a Canopian backwater—was a place I hadn’t been to for some time. Ten years, to be exact. At seventeen, I’d dreamed of getting shut of the place. At twenty, a scholarship to the Royko School of Journalism on Piriapolis gave me that chance. I moved across the border to the Free Worlds League and figured I’d never look back.

Funny thing, though. Getting away from someplace can really make you appreciate all the things about it that you didn’t know you’d miss. I missed my morning cup of *tzim*—a strong tea made from dried grass roots that gives you a kick like a BattleMech while it takes the edge off your appetite. Tastes like old socks smell. The first colonists on Early Dawn used it to get through the Winter of Hunger in 2570, when the gengineered crops failed. The next generation drank it on a dare, then it became a fad during the First Star League era, and finally it got to be a habit. And damn it, living in the League with ready access to fresh-ground Blue Mountain coffee, I found myself hankering for *tzim*.

I missed bigger things, too. Like the feeling that every day is a gift because you never know what might happen in it. The dirt-poor prospector who finally stumbles across that lostech cache and makes his fortune overnight, the prospering farm colony wiped out by bandits,

the explorers who narrowly survive a run-in with some nasty local beastie and then find out its sweat glands contain the cure for a horrible disease... such triumphs and tragedies can happen any time. You don’t get that feeling in the Inner Sphere. The Successor States are too big, too well established, too used to seeing themselves as eternal despite the history books that tell us otherwise. People here have a structure to their lives that’s missing for those on the edges of space. They take for granted that the sun (or suns) will rise and set every day, and that they’ll be here to watch. And so will their families and their bosses and their co-workers, and their houses and their towns and their cities. Oh, sure, Spheroids have seen their share of warfare that blew all their certainties sky-high... but only until someone—new lord or old—rebuilt whatever they’d knocked down. In the end, loss and destruction are temporary here. Everyone knows that.

The Periphery’s different. Back in the day, if bandits hit at the wrong time, your entire settlement could die. Assuming you survived the assault, there might be nothing to survive for—or rebuild with. So many Periphery worlds had no national resources to call on, no Big Government behind them with a stake in whether this or that colony lived and grew. They just had whatever the first settlers brought with them, plus whatever later generations cobbled together. That, and plenty of crazy determination.

We’ve still got our stubbornness. It’s allowed the major states, like the Magistracy and the Taurian Concordat and even the poor-relation Outworlds Alliance, to go from ad-hoc collections of rough colonies to stable nations. But that anything-can-happen sense remains. It’s bred too deep ever to fade away. Because we know we still live on

### MINOR POWERS

One can’t discuss the Periphery without mentioning the real “Wild West” portion: the minor powers, including various independent worlds, micro-states and pirate bands of the Near and Deep Periphery. After considerable thought, Doug and I decided that only a second, separate series could do justice to those. The following paragraphs therefore touch on what’s currently happening with some of the Periphery’s better-known minor players. Readers interested in fuller coverage can expect it in the near future.

#### Mica Majority

This three-world collective has dragged itself a bare notch higher than its historic subsistence-level economy through trade links—licit and otherwise—made possible by its zenith-point jump station, a relic from the Majority’s days as a Combine prison complex. The station has evolved into a major crossroads for small-scale traders, lostech prospectors and other drifters. Merchants from Clan Diamond Shark have come sniffing around lately, possibly interested in adding the jump station to their Periphery trade network. The Sharks may also want a piece of recent mineral finds in a nearby system, which have quintupled the Majority’s trading profits since 3064. So far, both sides are still talking. One wild card in all this: a recent assault on a Shark trade flotilla, attributed variously to the Hansa, Word of Blake operatives or the renegade Smoke Jaguar remnants who call themselves Dark.

#### Hanseatic League

The Hansa planets are making a packet off the lucrative regional weapons market. From Near Periphery states to local customers like Nueva Castile to the Hanseatic League’s own beefed-up security for its far-flung mercantile fleet, things are booming. Rivalry continues between the League and the Diamond Sharks, though the Hansa remain cautious about provoking another assault like the one that cost them two JumpShips and several DropShips near the Chainelane Isles in 3055. No major rumbles yet, but most local observers believe the Hansa will make a move once they’ve finished muscling up their ships. Should the Hansa and the Sharks then cross paths, the outcome won’t necessarily be another easy Shark victory.

#### Niops Association

A few years back, the tiny Niops Association sold several centuries’ worth of scientific research to private Inner Sphere corporations in order to raise money for serious military hardware (comparatively speaking). Royalty agreements on the sold data have since permitted the Association to buy a third ‘Mech battalion, even though the reason for the buying spree—Marian Hegemony belligerence—has ebbed considerably in the wake of Julius O’Reilly’s most recent military adventures. Niops VII has also become a favored destination for science wonks, especially astronomers, throughout the rest of the Periphery and even the Inner Sphere.

#### JärnFolk Worlds

Descended from 26th-century Rasalhagian refugees, the JärnFolk keep to themselves, though stories periodically crop up of JärnFolk assassins in the Hanseatic League and elsewhere. For the conspiracy-minded who follow the alleged doings of various Periphery and Inner Sphere intelligence agencies, a few recent unexplained deaths among supposed intel operatives may or may not be the JärnFolk at work.

#### Astrokaszy

This rough-and-ready planet is the arms-deal capital of the Periphery. Everybody who’s anybody has some operation here: Near Periphery states and corporations, the Blakists, Clanners, even some folks from “respectable” Inner Sphere states. Current hot rumor says the Blakies run the joint and are selling off stuff from stockpiles or skimming everybody else’s deals to finance merc contracts (for an unknown sinister purpose). All we know for sure about them is, they’re around and they may have some link with a new pirate band on Astrokaszy, dubbed the “Order of the Faithful” and recruited from the planet’s ubiquitous desert warrior tribes. Astrokaszy also appears to be the base for recent raids into the Marian Hegemony and the Magistracy of Canopus—nothing serious, but enough to keep both realms off-balance. Guessing the raiders’ identity—Blakists? Bandits? Secret Marian and Canopian assault teams hitting each other under “plausible deniability”?—is a favorite local parlor game.

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the edge of existence, even if Canopian or Taurian planets now have a national government to lean on when things get tough. And we know how fragile our nations really are, against the dangers that lurk among the stars—those we've learned about the hard way and those beyond our imagination.

The past couple of decades have seen new hazards appear and others diminish. The Clan Invasion cut a swath through the coreward Periphery, while refugees from their assault on the Inner Sphere swamped us with desperate immigrants—some of whom forged pirate bands to replace the ones the Clanners took out. On the other hand, the new Star League—despite being shaky on its feet—stands as a symbol of unprecedented alliances between Periphery and Inner Sphere powers. For once in our sorry mutual history, the Inner Sphere isn't imposing itself on the Periphery at the point of a PPC. Instead, some of us are working together by choice.

Yet things rarely stay quiet in human-occupied space, and plenty of misunderstanding still exists. So it seemed like a good idea to use this breathing space to show everyone what the Periphery is all about. We're different from you Spheroids, and different from each other... and yet, not so different when it counts. The sooner we all understand that, the more likely our next "breathing space" will last awhile.

So off home I went, to the Magistracy of Canopus. A small team of my colleagues—Tai Eleazar, Leandra Malnati, Felipe Montoya and Osei Li—traveled to the Taurian Concordat, the Outworlds Alliance and the almost-ready-for-prime-time powers—the Marian Hegemony, the Circinus Federation and the Rim Collection. Most of this volume is our own work, based on interviews and extensive research, along

with personal knowledge and insights. I've tried to make this material objective, screening out reporter biases and personal assumptions in order to bring readers the real story. On occasion, when that effort proved impossible, my associates and I went to other sources that do a better job of conveying the full reality of Periphery life. Read all of this with a grain of salt; some sources have their own agendas, and we've all got our bedrock viewpoints to contend with. I will say this: having read previous ComStar compilations on the Periphery, you're better off trusting what's between these covers. Not that the earlier works are completely wrong—but they've got some real howlers, and the authors didn't always do their homework terribly well. Which isn't surprising; records in the Periphery are notoriously spotty, and memories tend to go for color over truth.

For the record, never once was I run off at the business end of a laser rifle. Okay, there was that one time... but they welcomed me in after I told them I just wanted "a set-down for a good jawbone over whatever you've got cooking and a case of Timbiqui Dark." (Yes, even out here, they've heard of it.)

The Periphery often gets stereotyped as "the Wild West"—where the men are tough, the women are tougher, and nobody goes anywhere without a trusty sidearm. The Periphery is all those things. It's also much more. Fascinating, complicated and vividly alive, the Periphery embodies life on the edge. It may draw you, puzzle you or make you crazy, but it's never dull. And I'm proud to call it home.

—Evann Kaplan Soong, *InterStellar Associated Press*  
17 November, 3067

## Franklin Fiefs

The newly tech-hungry Outworlds Alliance is sending diplomatic missions to resource-rich Novo Franklin, hoping for a mutually beneficial trade deal. Allegedly, the diplomatic vessels carry passengers from Clan Snow Raven. Some think the Ravens want to conquer Novo Franklin, but quietly enough that the other Clans won't come after their new prize until the Birds can defend it. No word on how the Alliance might regard any such plan.

## Nueva Castile

The two major political powers in this perennially squabbling collection of planets are finally uniting—sort of—against the Lyran Alliance, which the natives blame for fomenting centuries of warfare that have kept both sides down. An influx of new military recruits and the Lyrans' post-FedCom Civil War disarray have enabled this new belligerency—but the Castilians and the Umayyads still don't trust each other, making coordinated military action unlikely.

## Elysian Fields

This place has pretty much belonged to Clan Wolf since 3052, though the Wolves keep a light hand on Elissa, stronghold of the One Star Faith. Demonstrating its knack for adapting to the times, this oddball religious sect pretty much runs its own affairs via links to the Faith in Clan Wolf and others. Disagreements exist between Clan and Spheroid

adherents, but so far they're coexisting, despite rumors of agitators stirring up unrest on backwater planets in the Occupation Zones.

## Herotitus

The culture-war seesaw continues between the New Hedons and the homegrown puritans, with neither side gaining the upper hand. This planet is principally valuable to the region's bigger players as a vacation stop and minor trade crossroads, though its ongoing political struggles have lately put a damper on the pleasure-seeking tourist industry.

## PIRATES

Pirate activity has yet to fully recover from the Clan onslaught that began in 3049, not that plenty of pirates aren't still out here making trouble. The current biggest baddie is Paula "Lady Death" Trevaline, onetime ruler of the Tortuga Dominions. The Davions ousted her from there in 3042 and kept her on ice for years, but now she's back—operating from the Pirate's Haven star cluster—and out for blood. A series of raids on the Calderon Protectorate showcased Lady Death's nasty new battle armor, and everybody's guessing as to where she got it. Baron Kithrong of the Protectorate is hiring mercs to defend his tiny realm against this notorious pirate queen.

The planet Antallos remains a brutal bandit haven, with pirate king Vance Rezak battling Clan Snow Raven for his

very existence. Rezak leads the Band of the Damned, and absorbed most of Vinson's Vigilantes after repeated clashes between those two bandit groups. Nowadays, though, Rezak's having a tough time. The Snow Ravens obliterated his former stronghold, Rezak's Hole, and are after his hide on Antallos as well. Scuttlebutt talks of near-daily Trials against Rezak by Snow Raven warriors and even a few surviving Smoke Jaguars. No one's sure how long he can hold out.

A few bit players deserve mention—mostly because out here, you never know how long they'll stay minor. Susie Morgaine-Ryan grabbed sole command of the New Belt Pirates from Morgan Fletcher in 3066, after blaming her erstwhile partner-in-crime for significant losses to a Clan Wolf pirate-hunting unit. Morrison's Extractors got their noses bloodied by Able's Aces in the Rim Collection awhile back and have yet to fully recover. Hopper Morrison's still breathing, so he's likely to pull some sort of "comeback" maneuver. Finally, rumors persist of Clan "Dark Caste" bandits, though no one seems able to nail these stories down. The creepiest variations speak of genetically modified "monsters," complete with tentacles and gills and giant glowing eyes. Highly unlikely among Clanners, if you ask me—even Clanners cast out from their own society. Then again, out in the Periphery, the only thing stranger than a tall tale is the truth.



## HISTORY OF THE PERIPHERY

**T**he Periphery was born in the fires of battle, in the minds and hearts and determination of those who'd survived the Outer Reaches Rebellion. Fought in the 2230s, the Rebellion pitted the authoritarian technocrats of the Terran Alliance against their own most distant colony worlds, many of whose people had gotten fed up with the ham-fisted rule of an ossifying planetary government light-years removed from local concerns. The Freedom Declaration—a watershed document comparable to North America's ancient Declaration of Independence—embodied the colonists' passionate desire to be left alone. All they wanted was liberty. They received destruction and death.

Like many an empire before it, the Terran Alliance did its level best to enforce political unity at the point of a gun. From 2236 through late 2237, the Alliance Armed Forces unleashed its power against the rebel colonies and their sympathizers, only to find that armed might could not prevail. The colonies were too dispersed, the army stretched too thin, the opposition too determined. Even when Alliance forces won the day, they could not hold what they had taken, and ultimately had to withdraw. In their wake, they left shattered infrastructures and traumatized populations, for whom "Terran unity" had become at best a hollow promise and at worst a deadly threat.

The Rebellion shook up the Terran Alliance as well. The resulting political upheaval brought the Liberal Party to power in Terra's 2237 elections and ushered in a period of serious retrenchment. The temporary political demise of their Expansionist Party foes, however, only made matters worse for the battered colonies of the Outer Reaches. Facing huge military-driven budget deficits, the Terran Alliance could no longer sustain its colonial empire—and, some still believe, no longer wished to support the "ungrateful" rebellious worlds. Within months of taking office, the new government cut off all colony worlds that lay beyond a thirty light-year boundary from Terra. The people on the edge of human-explored space now had their liberty, but at a stark price. They would get no assistance in rebuilding their homeworlds or keeping them viable—no economic aid, no security against bandit assaults, no tax breaks, no trade. They would make it on their own, or not at all.

The prevailing reaction from the newly independent colonies was summed up by a still-famous newspaper headline from the world of Freedom, which as the epicenter of the Rebellion had received a particularly vicious pounding. In giant boldface type, the 12 October 2242 edition of the *Freedom Gazette* proclaimed, "TERRAN ALLIANCE TO COLONIES: DROP DEAD". Though some sought consolation in the liberty they had won, most colonists knew only too well that they faced an impossible task without Terran resources to fall back on. Two choices loomed before them: beg for readmittance to the Alliance, or strike out toward the unknown stars in hopes of better fortune. They chose the stars. And to that choice—a blend of courage, grit and gambler's pluck—the Periphery owes its existence.

### GOOD NIGHT AND GOOD LUCK

Two major groups struck out for unexplored space within fifteen years of the Rebellion's end, under strikingly different circumstances. Hector Rowe and Samantha Calderon never met, and their destinies played out in different regions of what would eventually become the Periphery—yet both were trailblazers for the human race, driven by stark necessity and hope. Calderon would lay the groundwork for the Taurian Concordat, the oldest unified interstellar nation, older even than the Inner Sphere with which the Concordat would later find itself at odds. Rowe's Rim Worlds Republic no longer survives—but the circumstances of its demise would echo the demons that drove its founder.

### WAR IS HELL: THE RIM WORLDS REPUBLIC

"The villainy you teach me, I will execute; and it will go hard, but I will better the instruction."

—Shylock, *The Merchant of Venice*; Act III, Scene 1

In many ways, Hector Worthington Rowe was the last person anyone might expect to found a nation—let alone one that would loom so large in humanity's later history. An undergraduate classics and history student at the University of Thebes on Alexandria, Rowe had no military inclinations until the Terran Alliance Armed Forces assaulted Alexandria in 2237. Rowe volunteered to defend his homeworld, and soon rose to the rank of sergeant in Reinfield's Third Alexandrian Militia. The Alliance eventually prevailed in its four-month siege of the planet, but at a staggering cost: three thousand rebel soldiers and even more Alliance troops dead on the battlefields. In one of the ironies of warfare, the Alliance could not consolidate its gains, and withdrew from Alexandria by June of 2238. It left behind a broken and bewildered citizenry barely able to pick up the pieces.

Like many of his fellow soldiers, Rowe could not put the war behind him. The unassuming student, fired by patriotism, had given way to an embittered veteran itching for revenge against the victorious enemy. The Alliance withdrawal only made matters worse. Rowe saw it as a gesture of contempt, proof that the Alliance had never truly valued Alexandria. Instead, its military had wreaked havoc solely as punishment for defiance. Starting in 2239, Rowe created an outlet for the hatred that was eating at him. He founded an anti-Alliance political club, which grew over the next five years into a formidable paramilitary force. By 2244, this so-called Theban Legion was ready for action. All Rowe needed was a suitable target.