

Village 13 Mark Delta

Vice Councilor Franks stood at his podium and recalled the day's events. Earlier this afternoon he had presided over yet another launch of an orbital containing the latest generation of children drafted for the wars of the Federation. A second orbital launched this afternoon contained the entire grain harvest for the season. How much more in blood and grain could the Federation demand? His village had barely enough food to survive the winter. He made a speech, recalling the same words he used over and over again with each launch of conscripts. He called them, "an honorable link in a glorious chain connecting generations of proud service to the Federation." He assured the crowd of parents huddled on the launch pad their progeny would return as decorated and heroic soldiers. He knew the words offered little relief for his grieving villagers. Few children returned from the wars and those that did were often mangled in body and mind. His mind went to the monument positioned on the launch pad to commemorate the dead, and recalled the hollowness of his words with disgust.

There were still a few minutes until the council was scheduled to come to order. He busied himself perusing the weekly communiqué from Terra Prime. Most of the com-forms were of little interest, detailing the banal orders of conscription and food production, and there was something about unusual communication blackouts with a few of the outlying villages, but one of the com-forms was marked as critical and emblazoned with the Great Emblem of the United Federation. He slit it open with a finger and read the contents. Outside, the assembly beacon over town hall oscillated brightly as council

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members made their way through bustling streets. The representatives from the Outside Trading Contingency noticed the beacon and began migrating from the central market to the forum. There was village business to be discussed, and news from Terra Prime to be absorbed and delineated to the general population.

As the first of the council members arrived through the forum's open doors Franks read over the com-form marked as critical a second and third time. His eyes scanned the forum as council members found their seats. The OTC representatives were the last to arrive and take their places in the trade section. Franks banged his gavel on the podium and brought the forum to attention, "Citizens, council members, and our esteemed representatives of the Outside Trading Contingency, I hereby open this meeting. The council will come to order."

The secretary rose from his station and read from the official record: "Point of council business, Mr. Vice Councilor. We convened the previous forum without calling for final vote on the matter of the medicinal exchange with Village 2 Mark Charlie. According to council record the vote was to be tabled until today with the expectation that it would be conducted before the delineation of the news from Terra Prime." He gestured to Franks, "With your permission, I will call for a vote on the aforementioned exchange."

A council member immediately stood to attention, "Mr. Secretary, with all due respect to the forum and procedure, I don't believe we finished our debate regarding the finer details of the exchange with Village 2 Mark Charlie. We haven't discussed compensation or hygienic protocol. We don't even have a clear expectation of medical goods from either their donors or ours. The fact of the matter is if we don't make a proper

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exchange with Village 2 Mark Charlie we will be looking at initiating another major rationing this winter.”

“I second the council member’s opposition to the vote,” voiced another member as she rose from her seat. “Before continuing, I would like to secure a final bid from our representatives of the Outside Trading Contingency. What have you to say on this matter?”

“Hold there,” Franks interjected with a bang of his gavel. “I require your attention and silence. I have urgent news from Terra Prime that will displace all matters on today’s itinerary. I require the latitude of the forum to break with protocol and share this urgent news.”

The forum quieted. Franks continued, “As you all know from previous news delineations, the United Federation is in the midst of containing the latest revolt on Colony Ganymede. Indeed, most of our young and able have been conscripted into this endeavor and into the glorious fight against the spread of the secessionist ideology perpetuated by our enemy, the Democratic Alliance. I speak of this with a heavy heart, for as I look about the forum I recognize many members who have lost children to the war.

“What is not generally known however, is the vicious effectiveness with which the Alliance has launched their attacks. The Federation has lost real ground in the fight against secession. It is now believed by Terra Prime, and this I received in secret communiqué some time ago, that the ideology has spread beyond Colony Ganymede. In fact, the ideology has found root in our own world and infected numerous villages.”

A murmur went out among the council members.

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“Hold please. Hold!” A council member stood with his hands held high. “Vice Councilor Franks, I must ask. What does this mean to us? What villages have joined with the Alliance?”

“Terra Prime does not yet have a definite number of villages, but I do have it on good report that Villages 23 Mark Yankee, 90 Mark Tango, and 7 Mark Kilo have all joined with the Alliance. And most recently, it seems, our own neighbor, Village 2 Mark Charlie, has joined with the secessionist cause.”

The forum erupted into a tangle of despairing voices. Franks banged his gavel several times before the forum quieted. “I demand order!” he shouted.

A council member stood to address the forum. “Vice Councilor Franks, how do you expect us to take this news? We have no defense systems and limited weapons. How are we to withstand the onslaught of the Alliance?” Numerous council members nodded their heads in agreement as the speaker retook her seat.

Vice Councilor Franks paused a moment, and then responded. “What she spoke is true. We have no weapons or defense systems. And for how you should take this news, you must take it the only way possible. You must swallow it whole because there is nothing we can do to change the facts, and I have not delineated the worst of the news to you. But first, before I go further, I must ask the secretary to lock all the doors and windows of the forum. If what I am about to share with you is allowed to leave this room before a proper debate is settled we could very well have a mass panic on our hands.”

The secretary adjusted a knob at his desk and then nodded to Vice Councilor Franks. Franks thanked the secretary and continued, “The Alliance’s forces are not great in number, despite the growing popularity of the secessionist ideology. But what the

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Alliance lacks in military strength it makes up in a terribly effective weapon, a biological weapon. According to my secret communiqué from Terra Prime, the weapon is a highly virulent mold that is released into the atmosphere. The mold is inhaled into the lungs where it proliferates by absorbing oxygen directly from the victim's bronchial tubes. Over the course of the next 48 hours the victim suffocates. Worse still, with each exhalation the victim spreads more of the mold spores into the air to doom others. The mold is 100 percent fatal."

The forum was aghast at the description of the Alliance's weapon, and once again a loud murmur set upon the council members. Franks banged his gavel and continued, "I received today the following news through a com-form delineated by Terra Prime:

*To: Village 13 Mark Delta, Vice Councilor Franks*

*From: Central News Delineation Office, Terra Prime*

*Thirty-six hours ago Terra Prime became aware of a new campaign of secession launched by the Democratic Alliance. Orbital satellites have detected the launching of the Alliance weapon in the atmosphere of your colony world. According to computer generated projections, current weather patterns will carry the mold into Village 13 Mark Delta within 12 hours of the dispatch of this com-form. Take all necessary precautions to survive."*

Franks looked upon the faces of the forum and added, "This com-form was dispatched under six hours ago. That leaves us little time to engage evacuation procedures and save our village. Fellow council members, I regret we will never evacuate in time." The forum erupted into panicked mayhem.

"What's going to happen to us?" asked a council member.

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“How are we to survive? What about our families?” shouted another council member.

“What if we locked all the children in the grain shelters, would they survive there?” asked another council member.

Several members attempted to storm the doors, but were held back by council security. Others sat and cried. Others began arguing over evacuation scenarios.

Franks banged his gavel and shouted for order but he had lost control of the council. “Please,” he screamed. “We must not panic!”

Out of the corner of his eye Franks could see one of the members of the Outside Trading Contingency walking through the ruckus towards his podium. He knew most of the members of the OTC attached to his village, but did not recognize this man. The man’s face was calm, as if he was unaware of their dire situation.

“I suppose you will be requesting permission to leave the chamber immediately.” Franks said to the OTC member. “No doubt you have an orbital stationed near. You can be off planet in minutes.”

“Why, yes. I do have an orbital nearby.” the OTC member replied. “But that’s not why I want to speak to you. I wish to save your village, but I have little time to explain. I need to address the council immediately. Please, regain order as soon as possible.”

“But what could you possibly have to tell us? The situation is impossible.” Franks stammered.

“I will explain everything momentarily. I need the council’s attention. There is very little time. Things are not what they seem.”

“What have we got to lose?” Franks muttered under his breath.

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“Council members!” Franks yelled over the forum. “I must have order.” His words did not register. He motioned to one of the security guards. The guard fired his sidearm into the air, and silence fell on the room as a slight dusting of plaster descended from the ceiling.

“Finally, silence.” Franks began, “Council Members take your seats and deny yourself the urge to panic. This OTC representative wishes to address the council. He has assured me that he has information relevant to our situation and to our safety. I instruct you to give your full attention to... I’m sorry but I didn’t get your name.” Franks surrendered his position at the podium.

“Yes. That’s a good place to start. Thank you Vice Councilor Franks.” The OTC representative stood behind the podium. “My name is Brinks, and let me first say this: I apologize for what I am about to say.”

“What information can the OTC possibly have that would be relevant to the deadly mold that even now creeps closer to our village? We need to begin evacuations immediately!” the secretary sputtered.

“I appreciate your urgency, Mr. Secretary.” Brinks began again, “but you should be privy to all the facts before you make a decision. I require your attention for a few short minutes. Please, no more interruptions.

“As I was saying, my name is Brinks. And although I am wearing the uniform of an OTC representative, I am an imposter. I and my comrades have been posing as OTC reps to gain access to your forum. In truth, we are members of the Democratic Alliance.” He pulled a badge from his pocket and showed it to the forum. It was the identification sign of the Democratic Alliance.

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A roar erupted from the forum.

“Are you here to plant your mold on us?” a council member exclaimed.

“Have you come to wallow in our deaths?” another member shouted.

“No. No. Please,” Brinks settled the crowd. “I’ve come to offer you salvation.

I’ve come to offer you a way out. Your Vice Councilor spoke the truth, there is a mold in your atmosphere that will kill every last citizen of your village. Unless, of course, certain steps are taken.”

“What are you talking about?” Franks asked.

“What I’m talking about, Mr. Vice Councilor, is freedom.” Brinks responded.

“What I’m talking about is liberty. What I’m talking about is delivery from oppression. In short, I’m talking about Village 13 Mark Delta joining the Democratic Alliance.”

A murmur set upon the forum.

Brinks raised his hands. “Quiet now, please be quiet. I have more to say and more for you to consider.” Brinks continued, “What is the United Federation to you?”

“It’s our Fatherland!” a council member shouted.

“Our country!” another shouted.

“Really?” Brinks responded. “When was the last time a representative of the United Federation paid a visit to your quaint village?” He pointed to the eldest member in the forum. “You sir, you seem to be one of the oldest among you. When do you recall was the last time your village was visited by a representative of the Federation?”

“I’ve never met a Federation representative.” the man replied.

“Indeed! The Federation cares very little for you.”



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“But we’ve received awards for efficiency, and we receive communiqué and conforms weekly.” Franks interjected and gestured to a brightly adorned plaque on the wall.

“We were ranked in the top one hundred of all the villages for crop production.”

“Yes, food for the Federation.” Brooks shouted. “But not food for the hungry stomachs of the hardworking men and women of Village 13 Mark Delta. Your food, along with the other colonial villages, fuels the Federation, and you should be proud of yourselves for your hard work and tireless efforts. But what rewards do you receive for all of this hard work?”

Again, the council jostled with peaked interest.

“And your children who are conscripted to war and never return, what compensation do you receive for their losses? You have lost too many of your young people. Why, only today my comrades and I remarked on how few boys and girls we saw in your central market.”

“We’re proud of our fallen warriors!” someone shouted.

“Of course you are,” Brinks responded. “But how much pride does it take to fill the grave of one of your lost children? How many plaques, awards, and medals does it take to bring the fallen back to life?”

“My comrades and I are free men. We come and go as we please. We have chosen to dedicate our lives to the advancement of the Alliance because we believe in its ideals. The people who live in this village toil endlessly for a government they have never met. You heap the bodies of your children on an altar that carries no meaning. The Federation has been at war for longer than any of us have been alive. I ask, how many more dead boys and girls from Village 13 Mark Delta will it take before the wars are won? Why,

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even the very name of your village is a military designation.” The council stirred and fell to soft whispers. “You did not choose this life, you were born into it. You are not free. The Alliance offers freedom for all. The Federation offers you toil and death.”

“But what about the mold your Alliance has released into the atmosphere? How does that terrible weapon reconcile with your ideals of freedom and liberty?” Franks asked, his arms folded over his chest.

“It is a terrible weapon, but desperate times call for desperate measures, and the deployment of this weapon is most certainly a desperate measure. But we need your loyalty. The Alliance is not as powerful as the Federation. We don’t have a strong fighting force, but we have our freedom and our willingness to defy. And know this: the weapon only kills our enemies.

“Good people of Village 13 Mark Delta, trust me when I say that all is not lost. I do have the capacity to neutralize the mold. We have the technology to raise the temperature of the atmosphere immediately surrounding your village by a few degrees. The change in temperature, though small and temporary, will render the mold inert and your village and all its inhabitants will be saved.” Brinks reached into a jacket pocket and pulled out a small electronic platform containing a single switch.

“I leave you with this,” Brinks raised the switch so that all members could see it. “Once this switch is struck a signal will be sent directly to my orbital, and I will initiate the temperature modification and your village will be saved. Your allegiance to the Alliance will also be assured and you will receive official instructions from our headquarters shortly thereafter. If you choose not to strike this switch, I will grieve for the loss of your people. But your loss will not slow the momentum of the Alliance. We

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will triumph over the Federation because liberty and freedom always triumphs over oppression and tyranny.”

“Vice Councilor Franks, I have concluded my offer.” Brinks handed the switch to Franks. “You are either with us, or soon to be another dead enemy village. I leave you with the means of your people’s salvation. Please unlock the doors.”

“What if we hold you and your party here until the mold overtakes our village?” Franks responded. “What then? Your ultimatum loses its thunder.”

“My comrades and I have been vaccinated against the mold. We would merely wait until you all perished, and then walk out of your village on our own accords.”

Franks paused a moment, then motioned to the secretary to unlock the doors. Brinks and his comrades left the council chambers.

“We can’t just let them leave!” a council member shouted.

“Of course we can.” Franks shouted back. “We have no choice.” Franks banged his gavel on the podium and called the council to order. “We must decide quickly. We have very little time.”

High above Village 13 Mark Delta, on the bridge of a Federation battle cruiser orbiting the colony world, a soldier noticed a blip on a screen at his console. “Captain, sensors have picked up another anomalous temperature increase.”

“Another one, lieutenant?” said the captain and walked over to the lieutenant’s work station. He gazed at the screen. “Yes, I see it. Looks like Village 13 Mark Delta. That’s our third village in two days. The Alliance has been busy. Make sure to chronicle and upload your observations to Terra Prime.”

The captain addressed missile control. “Weapons control officer, target those villages with alpha grade atomics. We will eradicate each with a single missile.”

“But sir,” the lieutenant interrupted, “isn’t there another way? Why not send an envoy down to confirm their allegiance? There are countless resources at stake.”

“I understand your hesitation,” said the captain. “But we must remain vigilant. We’ve seen this before. You know and I know and every soldier on this bridge knows what that anomalous temperature deviation means. Village 13 Mark Delta has become infected with the ideology of the Alliance. It is up to us to cure this infection, and the only way is with fire.”

“Missiles ready, sir.” the weapons control officer reported.

“Fire the missiles.” ordered the captain.

Franks walked out into the fresh air of the central market. It was bustling in the late afternoon sun with merchants selling minor trinkets and what foodstuffs his people could muster. He enjoyed the energy of the market, and recalled how close his villagers had come to a horrible end. Of course, they had no idea of their brush with death, nor would they ever know for he made each council member swear an oath of silence on the matter. Tomorrow he would call for a town meeting and explain the reasoning behind the village’s transition to the Democratic Alliance. He would focus on the positive. No more grain quotas. No more conscription.

Franks continued his walk and came upon a ridgeline that overlooked the village’s fields of grain. Automated machines turned the soil in preparation for the coming winter. The fields would yield much the following harvest. Maybe they could set up agricultural

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exchanges with the neighboring villages, he thought. Maybe we could turn this small village into something bigger, something important. He decided to make a debate regarding renaming the village the first order of business for the next council meeting.

A sudden brilliant flash in the distance lit the ridgeline up like it was midday. And then there was another. Franks turned away from the light but tripped and fell to the ground. Two deep concussions rippled through the soil sending up clouds of dust. Franks felt the noise in the pit of his stomach, and knew immediately its meaning. He began to run to the central market. "Everyone to the grain shelters! Now! To the shelters!" he screamed. The villagers scattered like rats, but there was no escape. Franks looked up to see a thin contrail streaming like a ribbon in the skies above his village, and then there was nothing.

End