

## BROADSIDE 29XX – A HISTORY

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Long ago, Mankind's power and influence spread far and wide across the stars. Two great empires, rivals and bitter enemies in turn, pushed Mankind's technological and cultural prowess to the very limits of known space. Unfortunately, Mankind's reach exceeded its grasp and the lofty ideas of endless progress were shattered with the coming of the MACHINEMEN.

These automatons were without a doubt Mankind's greatest achievement, thinking beings of metal and atomic energy which knew not death, nor fear, nor pain. Yet built in Man's own image and without a soul to temper their base natures, their blind desire for power and prestige grew unchecked until a terrible conflict erupted. The ensuing war engulfed every corner of space in a terrible conflagration which lasted generations.

Putting aside their animosity, the two great empires joined together for one last noble stand, a bold counter-offensive that, if successful, would see an end to the war. The battle raged for days and though many brave heroes fought with courage and skill it came to naught. Mankind's mighty fleets were smashed and the survivors scattered. The MACHINEMEN, now unchecked, marched boldly on to spell the ultimate doom of Mankind.

However as certain oblivion was closing in around them, the survivors in their retreat happened upon a little known and even less understood corner of space, a curious star garden known only to the stellar cartographers as the PALE NEBULA. Seeking refuge and aiming to evade their indefatigable adversaries, Mankind's ragged flotilla pushed into the unknown nebula.

They were shocked and amazed to find that the nebula itself was dense enough to support a thin atmosphere, allowing for exterior travel without a protective pressurized vessel, suit, ship, or otherwise. More remarkable still was that the MACHINEMEN seemed unwilling to follow the survivors any deeper than the ragged edges of the nebula. They would plunge into the cloud to pluck stray ships from the retreating column but then disengage, hastily making for the more hospitable void they were now so used to call their own.

Here, at last, was a place of safety Mankind could rely on to regroup and rebuild. Within the nebula, the remaining forces found astral bodies, terrestrial planetoids which would serve as rudimentary bases of operations. Mankind's ingenuity made these barren rocks into livable worlds, yet progress was slowed due to the persistent harrying of MACHINEMEN incursion. To the dismay of the survivors, they found that any use of the more advanced technological wonders of times past would draw unwanted attention from their erstwhile pursuers.

A reorganization effort took place and experiments were carried out at great risk to determine with what technological limits Mankind was now forced to live. The survivors needed to know how far they could push their technology before making themselves a target. In time a balance was struck and Mankind found that with careful management they could live more or less peacefully within the deeper reaches, free from the covetous MACHINEMEN. Colonies were established and for the first time in many, many years people were at ease.

Nevertheless, without the threat of impending doom the old rivalries began to reemerge and distrust was once again foremost in the minds of those leading Mankind's reconstruction. Dissatisfaction drove a schism between the once unified body of survivors into two governing bodies, represented by their ancestral predecessors, The REGENCY and The AUTOCRACY. Laying claim to the most prosperous colonies, the latter pushed the former deeper into the PALE NEBULA. Outright conflict was avoided, though only just. Mankind was once again engaged in the same bitter rivalry which characterized its old empires.

The REGENCY began establishing colonies on whatever worlds they could render habitable, maintaining their tenuous supply lines with their strong and capable navy. Meanwhile, the AUTOCRACY set to work defending their rich territories with characteristic zeal, building colossal military installations and conscripting scores of soldiers. Despite this undeclared cold war, a period of peace allowed the nascent governments an opportunity to go forth and discover their new home.

As Mankind ventured deeper into their new home they encountered strange and wondrous creatures. Having no names for these animals, Mankind took to describing them as their Old Earth counterparts. There were squadrons of nimble, migratory pterosaurians, and gargantuan, solitary, translucent medusozoas, and enormous pods of

ambivalent, bulbous cetaceans. These and others like them became common sights within the reaches of the PALE NEBULA.

During this long period of uneasy exploration and colonization, Mankind met a new foe, one which would instigate terrible wars of extinction so reminiscent of the stellar conflicts of times past. Smaller colonies in the Deeper Volumes began to go silent and rumors of viscous all-consuming insect swarms began to circulate, rumors which would become all too real. The REGENCY was the first to encounter what would become known as the BUGMEN. These creatures were unlike the others found within the nebula and seemed to be little more than thoughtless, ravenous beasts.

At first the BUGMEN were only sighted within the Deeper Volumes of the nebula and in relatively small number. Occasional skirmishes between solitary ships and small groups of the insects were oft talked about among the sailors but little heed was given to such talk among the larger populace. But as REGENCY colonies began to be seeded farther from the General Volumes, such confrontations became more regular and more costly to overcome.

Before long, isolated colonies began to stop sending trade ships and attempts to reach them by scouts or convoys would fail, the ships and crews never to be seen or heard of again. Soon, large crude dirigibles crafted by the BUGMEN'S own resinous saliva were seen being herded by an enormous swarm which blackened the sky and turned the eternal twilight of the PALE NEBULA into a cacophonous night, blotting the stars and casting all planets before it into shadow. The Great Swarm had begun.

Driven to the brink and barely able to contain the ravenous hordes, the REGENCY was forced to abandon its fringe colonies and regroup. Many thousands of lives were presumed lost so that many more might live. The AUTOCRACY, not blind to the coming doom, offered assistance to its onetime ally and together the two great powers again fought side by side against a common foe. Together, with naval supremacy and large armies, they repulsed the invaders and drove the ravenous swarms back, though at great cost. When all was said and done, news reached the REGENCY that many of its colonies had in fact survived and were now declaring themselves independent.

Their former masters having abandoned them, the larger colonies in the Tails region of the PALE NEBULA had repulsed attack after attack under the leadership of keen and ruthless military minds.

Under such leadership, the CONFEDERATION was born. With little to no navy, their victories against the invading hordes were won by the personal sacrifice of strong men and women. Theirs was a disciplined and militant culture forged in the heart of a desperate struggle. In time the CONFEDERATION would become renowned for bravery on the ground and superb battlefield tactics.

Elsewhere, a group of gallant REGENCY captains having won tremendous victories against the BUGMEN along the Starbirth Frontier saw their accomplishments spurned by the upper echelon of REGENCY high command. During a critical period of the war, their requests for reinforcements were met with silence and they were forced to rebuild and refit their vanguard fleets alone. Desperate for an edge, they began to redevelop outlawed technology and ultimately won out against the BUGMEN using sophisticated weaponry. A conspiracy formed among these captains and together they too declared independence from the REGENCY and soon took to calling their newly formed government the REPUBLIC.

The formation of these two new states changed the balance of power considerably within the PALE NEBULA. In the months following the end of the Great Swarm, skirmishes were not uncommon between the four great powers and many lives were lost though no official war was ever properly declared or recognized by any combatant. These shadow conflicts continued and the nebula saw much suffering until a council was called under the auspices of ancient tradition. Out of this forum, a new pan-governmental body was created, one which would oversee the protection and rights of all Mankind within the nebula: the STELLAR ENTENTE.

This new body was empowered to maintain stability and foster cooperation within the reaches of the PALE NEBULA. Principally a peacekeeping entity, the STELLAR ENTENTE was gifted substantial military resources to defend all colonies threatened by outside adversaries. Agents of the ENTENTE could intercede on behalf of citizens or states on invitation only, but could not initiate action independently. The early days of this informal structure saw great success as many poor colonies sought protection during the long period of reconstruction following the Great Swarm. Trust in the new agreement grew and Agents of the ENTENTE became popular folklore heroes.

The formation of the STELLAR ENTENTE marked a high point in diplomatic relations and sparked a golden age of peace and development which lasted generations. Yet its very success did

more to undermine its continued usefulness than any other critique could. As the four great powers began to reach new heights of power and influence, there were calls for the dissolution of the ENTENTE. Accusations were made that the Agents, once lionized, were now being used as spies or saboteurs, their services going to the highest bidders. Distrust once again characterized all dealing between the great powers.

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Now, in this period of decline and misgivings, there are new, persistent rumors of outside threats. MACHINEMEN grow bolder and venture deeper into the nebula as if drawn by some strange force. Agitated BUGMEN are seen in greater and greater number, attacking with more organized ferocity, guided by an unseen hand. Pirates and political assassins strike at the very heart of establishment power, sowing fear and doubt. Needed now more than ever, the STELLAR ENTENTE struggles to maintain even the barest presence in the regions of the nebula most desperate for help while jaded and cynical governments see little need to provide the means to do so. The drumbeats of war are once again being heard and the people cry out for salvation.

Will you be their savior or hasten the downfall of Mankind's last bastion? Adventure and glory await! Assemble your crew, ready your ship, keep a weather eye on the stars and go forth into the PALE NEBULA!

Welcome to BROADSIDE 29XX!