

The Knights of the Sun

“ The good Bishop of Assisi expressed a sort of horror at the hard life which the Little Brothers lived at the Portiuncula, without comforts, without possessions, eating anything they could get and sleeping anyhow on the ground. St. Francis answered him with that curious and almost stunning shrewdness which the unworldly can sometimes wield like a club of stone. He said, "If we had any possessions, we should need weapons and laws to defend them."

--G.K. Chesterton, *Saint Francis of Assisi*

And Oh boy, did the Bright Way have a lot of possessions, with a veritable army numbering in the billions ready and willing to defend them.

As noted in an earlier post, there's no real defining threshold between the Golden Age and the Age of Decadence. While current ecclesiastical historians who, it should be pointed out, are the ideological descendants of the Pious Dissolutionists, set the transition at the first occasion the High Hearthkeeper attempted to halt interstellar mission work, the reality is there was a slippery slope sliding from religion to megacorp that took place over millennia.

It is in this fuzzy transition period that the Knights of the Sun enter the scene. The clergy were now responsible for multiple planet-wide power grids, as well as a communication and logistics network that was single handedly keeping all of colonized space together. These institutions became attractive targets for pirates, gangs, and other criminal elements.

The interplanetary ferry system was a particularly juicy target for pirates. The typical modus operandi involved setting up a base of operation in a hollowed out asteroid and intercepting passing ferries.

It soon became clear that the clergy would need to establish a monopoly on violence in the system. However, the very strict taboo against females in military roles prevented the clergy from taking matters into their own paws. The hierarchy's solution was to found an order of warrior monks dedicated to protecting the Bright Way's physical possessions.

They recruited pious young men by framing the protection of the hierarchy's material holdings as saving the lives and livelihoods of the people who relied on that power, transport, and communication infrastructure against wicket men who sought to destroy it, painting threats to that power as the very enemies of The Light itself.

To be sure, pirates and gangsters are, as a rule, ruthless and unsympathetic characters that society would be better off without, and the knights were indeed directly responsible for saving countless lives precisely because the infrastructure they protected was vital for interplanetary

society. But the clergy's decision to take advantage of the zeal of pious young men for their own worldly gain would come back to bite them in the tail on multiple occasions.

The first of these occasions was the High Hearthkeeper's first attempt to permanently halt interstellar mission work. While I've portrayed the missionaries and the "corporate" arm of the Bright Way as being at odds with one another, the truth is that both sides were in a mutualistic relationship. The missionaries relied on the funding and R&D provided by the wider clergy, and the clergy needed to at least pay lip service to the missionaries since they were the ones trying to fulfill the Great Commandment, which the entire religion revolved around in the first place.

One particular High Hearthkeeper forgot the importance of that relationship. She saw how much of a dent interstellar mission work was putting in their bottom line, and attempted to "balance the budget" by putting the missionaries on the chopping block. This did not sit well with the Knights of the Sun, to put it lightly.

Here was a group of young men who saw themselves as protectors of The Light's little ones, as upholders of the very core of the Bright Way's mission to find other sophonts, facing the fact that their leader, who they regarded as the symbolic embodiment of that mission, was going to spit in the face of everything they were told was sacred.

They mutinied en masse, laying siege to Yih until the High Hearthkeeper repented of her blasphemous designs.

The knights were also instrumental in the War of Dissolution, but that, again, is something I have to tackle later.

Lodestar, one of the missionaries aboard the Dewfall, is a member of the Knights of the Sun. In the millennia since the war, the knights have developed into a more traditional contemplative religious order, though retaining an emphasis on using one's physical strength to protect the weak and uphold justice.

The knights get their name from the fact that most of their monasteries are located inside the orbit of Hearthside very close to Focus. Their lighthouses are designed with a central aisle leading up to the star hearth, dividing the congregation into two inward-facing "choirs" that chant back and forth to one another as part of their particular liturgical rite. This central aisle is a transparent window looking nadirward toward Focus, allowing the star's light to flood the space from "below".

The knights are known for their ceremonial powered armor, a relic of their more active military role from millennia past. It's much bulkier than the more streamlined form-fitting pseudosine that modern soldiers use, making them look like four-legged knights in shining armor.

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