

# The Spacer Confederacy

"And you're the interim chief?" asked the federal councilman, his voice echoing throughout the cavernous main axis of the newly constructed colony.

"That's correct." said Graypelt.

"Gentlemen, my dame," the councilman addressed the pair of envoys from the Allied Worlds along with the hearthkeeper floating by their side. "Would you allow Graypelt and I a moment alone?" He moved toward the docking port where a shuttle was stationed, beckoning Graypelt to follow.

Graypelt started as the inside airlock door shut behind him. The federal councilman had floated across the threshold of the airlock separating the colony's hull from his docked shuttle craft.

"Why did you shut—" Graypelt began, but the councilman raised a paw to silence him.

"What did the envoys from the Allied Worlds tell you about the Spacer Confederacy?" he asked.

"The laws are few, but the penalty for transgressing them is severe."

"So far, so good," said the councilman, "and what are those laws?"

Graypelt thought for a moment, then began ticking off items on his claws. "Each colony gets one perch on the federal council. The council is responsible for assigning asteroids for colonies to mine. The council levies a tax of twelve per gross on all revenue earned through the sale of the minerals. Colonies may only mine the body they have been assigned. There's a six year mandatory conscription into the federal police for all eligible males upon reaching the age of majority. Any interaction between colonies within the Confederacy must be mediated by the council."

The councilman tilted his muzzle up in affirmation. "Now let me tell you what those glossy-pelted stooges from the AW won't. We get all sorts of kooks coming here to the Inner Belt looking to set up half baked social experiments or off the wall cults."

"We're not—" Graypelt objected, but the councilman raised his paw again and resumed his lecture.

"Everyone comes here for their own reasons. We have about as many world views, ideologies, belief systems, conceptual frameworks, religions, whatever you want to call them, as there are colonies in the Confederacy. But there's one thing we all value. What do you suppose that is?"

"Uh—" Graypelt began, but the councilman cut him off again.

"Freedom!" he barked. "You want to start a gel head parlor? Go ahead. You want to run a tree-dweller baiting ring? Be my guest. Wanna start making mind candy?" He flicked his left ear back,

leaned forward, and whispered, "I'll even give you the name of a supplier."

He slapped the inner hull of the colony with a rear paw. "Whatever you do inside these walls is your own business. But if you so much as stick a whisker outside with whatever nonsense you get up to, then that becomes our problem." he tossed his muzzle back, toward the federal shuttle behind him. "And you do not want the federal police paying you a visit."

"Is that a threat?" Graypelt stammered.

"A warning." The councilman leaned forward, running a claw across a scar on his muzzle.

"I thought this was—" Graypelt once again failed to get a word in edgewise.

"Anarchy? A free for all? A libertarian paradise? Everyone always assumes the Inner Belt is a lawless frontier where they can get away with anything, and you know what? Your roof, your rules, but out there, outside these walls, you're under OUR roof. If you mind your own business, keep your nose prints off of other peoples' windows, you'll be fine. But if you mess around, you will find out.

"Do you think we keep this confederacy together with a bunch of ink on paper?" The councilman made a show of examining the iron-red claws on his left forepaw. "Within a three-day ferry trip from here there are a bunch of Misotheists who would kill every last one of you hearth lickers, pups and all, if they thought they could get away with it. The only reason they won't is that they know exactly what will happen to them if they even try." He pantomimed an explosion with his forepaws.

"You folks wanted freedom, and you've got it, but freedom isn't free."

The councilman pulled the release for the interior airlock door with his tail. He began floating into his shuttle, adopting a cheerful tone for his parting words. "On behalf of the Federal Council, I'd like to welcome you and the citizens of Wayferers' Haven to the Spacer Confederacy."

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