

War?

A TAG Editorial

January 18th - 29476

"Call for war, and war will heed your call."

-Henry Radiman



December 19th, 29475: An apartment building in Omni-1's entertainment district is leveled to the ground by an anti-matter explosion. 160 people die; some are above or below insurance age-limits, others simply cannot afford, or have neglected to, insure themselves. Rubi-Ka Headline Services uses the phrase "domestic terrorism" in connection with the incident. Word begins to circulate that the Dust Brigade – a

radical clan faction responsible for terrorist acts against civilian and military targets on both sides during the last civil war – has claimed full responsibility. The Omni-Tek Corporation chooses to tread cautiously. They refuse to comment on the terrorist rumors, point the finger at no-one, and launch a large-scale Omni-Pol criminal investigation. Public response is muted; the dead are soon forgotten, and the matter brushed under the proverbial carpet.

It appears that no one *really* wanted to know the truth. A few Omni-Tek employees cried bloody murder, and clamored for their superiors to launch all-out war against the clans. But this was a vicious minority, a lynch-mob unconcerned with the human tragedy, interested only in a chance to live out their sadistic fantasies with an official sanction.

On January 15th, the criminal investigation into the blast is completed, and the facts are laid on the table for all to see. This was an act of domestic terrorism, Omni-Pol concludes in their report, an act conducted by a radical splinter group that has assumed the nomenclature "Dust Brigade", and who claims to fight for the clan cause. Whether or not this is the same Dust Brigade that terrorized our planet five years ago is a moot point; a snake by any other name is still a snake. Negotiations between Omni-Tek and the Council of Truth are broken off, and the situation, once again, escalates. And still everyone focuses on the same old tired rhetoric, turning this into a clans-versus-Omni-Tek situation, refusing once again to face reality; that we are faced with a new and

potentially deadly threat to our society. This is about a lot more than politics: it's a matter of life and death.

And then Philip Ross decides to use the dreaded W-word in a personal statement to all Rubi-Kans, and suddenly *everyone* is up in arms. It took one man's opinion to do what callous murderers and terrorists could not; to unite clan-members and OT employees in a common front.

It's not hard to see why. It's been less than six years since the last war ended, and there's not a man, woman, or child on this planet who weren't personally affected by that war, physically or emotionally. We don't *like* to be reminded of the things that cause us pain, especially when those memories demand that we take action. And, let's face it, it's easier to cry foul than to step in and do what's right. It's easier to attack Philip Ross for his choice of words than to take action against the terrorists.

It's not often that TAG actively and publicly supports Philip Ross – or Henry Radiman – but in this case we have no choice. When Ross calls the Dust Brigade terrorists, it's not an affront to the clans; it's a warning to criminals who believe that political goals are attained through violence, chaos, and anarchy, and who think that they can hide behind the clan ticket and remain unsullied under the pretence of supporting a "cause". In his statement, Ross makes it very clear that, "If this is a war, it's not a war on the clans, or the Council of Truth. It's a war against terrorism, against radicals and extremists who treat freedom and justice with contempt." You can *not* get any more specific than that. And while not everyone will approve of Ross' choice to use the word "War", seeing as how the negative connotations are still strong in people's minds and hearts, it is important for him to show Rubi-Kans that terrorism

will not be tolerated, that those who oppose peace will never find peace, and that the Omni-Tek Corporation is willing to use any means necessary to eliminate this appalling threat to our world security – even war.

Henry Radiman and the Council of Truth have come out in support of Omni-Tek's hard line against the Dust Brigade. If the Council has done little to assist in the investigations, it would be because of their precarious political position. They are caught between opposing clans – some who clamor for war, others who yearn for peace – and, unlike Omni-Tek, the Council cannot make arbitrary and hasty decisions. The Council answers to its members, to all affiliated clans, and this severely limits its ability to respond as quickly and efficiently as Omni-Tek. Thus the Council may appear to waver and procrastinate, which, to a corporation like Omni-Tek, trying to run a complex investigation, may be interpreted as an unwillingness to cooperate.

The peace-question-mark that we wrote about last year now appears to be in mortal danger. So, appropriately but unfortunately, we've changed that peace-question-mark into a warquestion-mark. But the greatest fear right now is that this question-mark becomes an exclamation-mark, setting us right back to where we were fifteen years ago, at the outset of another prolonged and bloody conflict. It's important, therefore, to truly listen to what is being said, no matter who says it, and not what we think has been said. It's important to react appropriately and immediately to events that require our attention, even when those events bring forth uncomfortable memories. And it's important to stand together, not apart, when faced with a threat that could very well lead us – God forbid – into a new civil war.

Ramos Kawamoto
Editor-in-Chief

Close Encounters of the Freaky Kind

A TAG News Brief
January 24th - 29476

Look! Up in the sky! It's a bird! It's a plane!

Nope. It's a weird glowing thingy.

As if the current situation in Sabulum wasn't enough, several Omni-Tek employees partaking in the "police action" against dissidents in the insignificant little hole-in-the-ground – a perpetual wastelands hole-in-the-ground, no less – reported seeing a "large, glowing ball, like a small sun" moving rapidly towards their position before suddenly stopping and dissipating after coming into contact with a building.

The weirdoes, fanatics, and conspiracy-buffs immediately started screaming bloody murder. No surprises there. You can always trust the weirdoes, fanatics, and conspiracy buffs. Some yelled "UFO!", others cried "Secret Dust Brigade weapons! Duck!", yet others blamed the Council of Truth and/or Omni-Tek for using everything from a flamethrower to atmospheric anti-matter detonations. "Balefire," some fantasy fiction retard claimed. "God's vengeful fire," wept a New Catholic. The most inventive ones claimed that the authorities had released hallucinogenic gases into the air. They wish.

Yet someone's got to be right, and, as the famous saying goes, once you eliminate the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be fact. Plain and simple.

Was this thing a UFO? Certainly wherever this thing came from, it was an Unidentified Flying (or Floating) Object. On Earth in ancient times, UFOs were considered vessels from alien worlds, controlled by extra-terrestrial intelligence. We all know this couldn't be the case; whatever secrets our galaxy still harbors, there aren't any aliens. Life has attempted to get a foothold on thousands of planets, but, as far as we know, the only place where it's managed to crawl beyond the most rudimentary of stages is good old Earth. If there's anyone home in another galaxy – and you know there has to be, somewhere – it's a bridge too far to cross. You simply can't travel across the divide. So: UFO? Yes. Aliens? No.

We're willing to bet that this strange and otherworldly sight wasn't caused by secret military experiments or terrorist weapons either. In all probability, Rubi-Ka just threw us another natural curveball. It's been said before, and we're not afraid to say it again: This planet's screwy. It is. Live here all your life, you'll never really *get* it. After all, Rubi-Ka gave us notum, Rubi-Ka gave us weird nano-technical visual special-effects, and Rubi-Ka gave us the leet. What more do you need to know? Love it or leave it, Rubi-Ka has enough weirdness to last at least another seven hundred years.

Which leaves us with the question; "What was that weird glowing thingy?" And the answer is; "It doesn't matter." It really doesn't. It's just nice to see that even the boys in blue can be fascinated by the magical beauty of this enigmatic planet.

"Leets are people, too!": The Idolisation of the Leet

A TAG Feature
January 28th 29476
By Etha Bailor

There was a time, not long ago, when the leet was just another rat. There was little sympathy for the common leet. It was a rodent like any other. Every world has at least one species like it: small, industrious, and all-pervasive - an easy prey for inexperienced hunters looking to improve their shooting-skills and make a little cash. It was indicative of the leet's unpopularity that when Omni-Tek specifically targeted the critter for extinction, few bothered to complain. The leet was a pest, plain and simple.

Then someone had the bright idea to transform our unloved leet into a kiddie-friendly, cuddly toy property, and suddenly the rules had changed.

That someone was, surprisingly enough, *not* Omni-Tek's own successful toys-and-games subsidiary, FunTek. For once, they failed utterly to see the market potential of the leet, and certainly never anticipated that a mere vermin could be the next *SlymeSlammer*® (a hugely incomprehensible phenomenon that has finally lost most of its momentum, allowing parents across the galaxy a brief sigh of relief until the next incomprehensible and disgusting phenomenon comes along). Instead, FunTek put their money into the struggling *Kybo-Ants*® property this holiday season, whilst the mother-corporation renewed its efforts to rid Rubi-Ka of the leet.

So FunTek missed the boat on this one, leaving a bitter rival for the galactic toy crown – Sol Banking Corporation's subsidiary Soltoyz - to be the one to realise the rodent's true potential. Soltoyz became aware of the leet after coming across reports of its increasing popularity with Rubi-Ka's more indulgent, some would say *bleeding heart*, citizens. Putting their award-winning robotic toy technology to good use, Soltoyz quickly churned out the first run of the animated Leet® dolls, and virtually overnight the next Big Thing had arrived. The dolls were snatched off store-shelves across the galaxy quicker than Soltoyz could replenish supplies. Starting on Earth and moving swiftly to outlying colonies, the trend was evident: Every kid wanted a Leet®.

In no time at all, Soltoyz had come up with a variety of Leet-branded toys, from the simplest of huggable synthetic toys to the most advanced kiddie-friendly automatons, capable of doing everything from feeding baby and telling bedtime stories, to playing rudeball and protecting junior from organ-bank snatchers. With Grid-games, shows, and flicks on the way, the Leet® has become the very symbol of cuddly cuteness for an entire generation of youngsters. And the phenomenon doesn't appear to be slowing down any time soon.

So far, so predictable. Omni-Tek are, of course, beating themselves up for missing out on the opportunity to cash in on their own creation, and they are considering a suit against Sol B.C. for stealing an OT-created property (a case that, admittedly, will be hard to argue seeing as Omni-Tek was - still is - actively trying to exterminate the leet from Rubi-Ka's ecosystem).

What wasn't so predictable, although anyone with a modicum of insight into human nature ought to have seen it coming, was the subsequent outcry from environmentalist and conservationist organizations across the civilized galaxy. Swayed by their children's idolization of the idea of the leet (few outside Rubi-Ka have ever seen a live one), they quickly picked up the leet's case and are even now waving their banners, filing their complaints and suits, and screaming foul. "Treat the leet with dignity!"

they proclaim. "The leet belongs to everyone!" is an incorrect but catchy slogan. "Leets are people, too!" is an obvious favorite.

It doesn't make sense, but it does ring true: To most people, sheltered in their safe and padded corporate-owned existences, it's a heck of a lot easier and safer to empathize with a small, cuddly rat than it is with the rest of humanity. This is how modern humans make themselves feel compassionate and caring. Standing up for the existence of a declared vermin that is confined to one planet on the outskirts of the galaxy isn't nearly as complicated as, say, arguing the rights of BigBurger's blind salt-mining sentient humanoids - modified and intellectually reduced Solitus; pale and helpless facsimiles of human beings – on Mayeda, or MTI's indentured servants on Fulton Prime.

Ironically enough, the controversy hasn't reached our planet. Yet. But it's bound to. Omni-Tek's increasingly liberated media policies mean that TruSpace broadcasts are coming through mostly uncensored, and there are enough environmentalists on Rubi-Ka to ensure the leet's cause is picked up and carried forth under banners and signs and catchy folksongs about how "leets are people, too".

So where will that leave the ever-popular leet? Omni-Tek is still adamant - now more than ever - to rid the planet of the rat- sorry, this unique, resilient, and no doubt very intelligent (according to pro-leet activists, that is) being. If they can't get their hands on the license, Omni-Tek's eager to see Soltoyz losing their giant sales-success, which is threatening to make Sol B.C.'s toy offshoot even bigger than Omni-Tek's. And, to be fair, Omni-Tek knows that the leet is an increasing and genuine threat to Rubi-Ka's biosphere. It breeds faster than rabbits, it attacks children who try to pet it (and if you've tried to treat a leet-bite, you know what a mess that can be), and it erodes the foundation for the flora, reverting large areas back to arid desert.

But, as we all know, the toy industry is the undisputed king and queen of children's hearts and minds. As long as kids idolise the leet, their parents will fight for the leet's cause. Sooner or later - because kids are fickle – the leet will be out of fashion, and the environmentalist groups will move on, as one, to the next Important and Worthy Cause. In the meantime, Omni-Tek is smart enough to see a public-relations catastrophe coming their way. It's just a question of how stubborn they want to be: Let the leet live, and continue to battle the environmental effects, or wipe the leet out, and face a galaxy-wide outcry from both environmentalists and toy-loving children.

It's a dilemma for Omni-Tek, sure, but for the time being there are still plenty of leets to go around, at least locally. If store-shelves on Earth are empty; well, why don't we start freezing down and shipping real live leets to other worlds?

That way, we'll solve two problems in one go!

When Free Speech Became the Victim

February 13th 29476

By Etha Bailor

Tensions remain high, certainly, but does that give the Omni-Tek Corporation carte-blanche in ignoring regulations, stipulations, laws, and treaties? If the Voice of Freedom can be charged with "espionage" for their often insightful, sometimes inciting, reports and editorials, what prevents the Corporation from taking similar steps with this publication, or with other independent or non-OT affiliated media sources?

It's a frightening prospect, yet it's not purely science-fiction. Omni-Tek has done it before, and, if they feel threatened - as they certainly must now that they have to deal with the Dust Brigade, the collapse of the peace-talks, and a general antagonism evident across Rubi-Ka - they will do it again: Gag the media, control the information, and curb public opinion.

TAG isn't about to claim that Omni-Pol's investigation into the Voice of Freedom's operations in Omni-1, and the subsequent raid, is baseless and illegal, as UCC has just done. But we do question the wisdom in cracking down on a recognized and respected, not to mention popular, clan station in this manner (Omni-Pol didn't even hold a press-conference, and has subsequently spoken only with the Herald, another violation of ICC regulations).

Terror is once again the motivating factor, and the effects of the Dust Brigade's actions can now be seen in how the Corporation chooses to deal with the media. Instead of appealing to clan and neutral channels for assistance and support, they instead take steps to silence as many voices as possible, fearing criticism - no matter how constructive it may be - fearing that other systems will pick up on the story - thus reducing the influx of new colonists - and, last but not least, fearing the lack of control that the Corporation holds so dear, the key to its success (they think), and the solution to all problems.

Here is TAG's promise to you, the reader, and to the Omni-Tek Corporation: We will keep our eyes and ears

open, and though we will report fairly and accurately as we always have, we intend to watch the Corporation's actions closer than ever. Because free speech must survive, even in the face of stark terror.