

LINE UP

A play in one act

New York, NY

5/17/2024

## SYNOPSIS

In the very near future, a troop of Philippine mothers are recruited by an imperial power to serve as frontline soldiers. If they can survive one year of military service, they and their families will be granted full citizenship and allowed to live within the relative safety and prosperity of that imperial power's territory.

As the troop trains and gets to know one another, they realize that each of them has a son of around the same age.

After a disastrous first battle where almost everyone on both sides is annihilated, the surviving troopers find and care for the only surviving enemy combatant- a child soldier, a boy around the same age as each of their sons.

Upon reestablishing contact with headquarters, they are ordered to kill the boy. Each member of the troop then grapples with what they are willing to sacrifice in the name of safety for themselves and their children.

## CAST

CAPORAL CORDERO	Barely in charge.
FUSILIER BONGCARAS	Barely believing.
FUSILIER GAERLAN	Barely convinced.
FUSILIER CRUZ	Barely keeping it together.
C3 UNIT	Barely caring.
BOY	Barely understanding.
COLONEL EN SECOND DU CHAMPLAIN	Barely there.

The C3 Unit, Boy and Colonel may be played by a single actor.

Note: Especially for the Caporal and Fusiliers, there is a preference for actors of Philippine or otherwise Asian descent. The French military ranks should be spoken with an authentic French accent. The Colonel's words should be spoken with an inauthentic French accent.

CW: War and all the ways it consumes us.

*(A line of soldiers parade march onto a darkened stage, dressed in resplendent red, blue and white uniforms evocative of the French Grand Armee' of the early 1800s. They wear Shako hats inspired by the same period, adorned with shiny badges and bright plumage. They grasp bulky muskets clad in sheet metal connected to long air tubes trailing back offstage. One soldier, grasping a massive gaily decorated flag with the iconography of the Union affixed to a shining six foot pole instead of a musket, bellows out orders in the style and cadence of Baron Von Steuben's 1778 Musket Drill.)*

#### CAPORAL CORDERO

Half-cock... firelock!

(The soldiers pull their musket cocks back one notch and open the frizzens.)

Handle... cartridge!

(The soldiers slap their cartridge boxes to settle the powder, tear open the cartridges with their teeth, then place the opened cartridge under their chins.)

Prime!

(The soldiers place powder into the pan.)

Shut... pan!

(The soldiers shut the frizzen to hold the powder in the pan then hold their muskets upright to  
place the cartridge into the barrel.)

Charge with cartridge!

(The soldiers dump powder down their barrels and place paper wrapped musket balls into the  
barrel.)

Draw rammer!

(The soldiers draw out the ramrods attached to their steam muskets.)

Ram down cartridge!

(The soldiers ram their paper wrapped musket balls on top of the powder with their ramrods)

Return rammer!

(The soldiers return their ramrods back onto their muskets.)

Shoulder... firelock!

(The soldiers hold their muskets ready on their left shoulders.)

Poise... firelock!

(The soldiers place their muskets in the ready position.)

Full-cock firelock!

(The soldiers pull their musket cocks back to second notch.)

Take aim!

(The soldiers level their muskets.)

Fire!

(They fire into the darkness.)

AGAIN! Half-cock... firelock!

*(A row of vertically aligned sleeping sacks hang against the white painted walls of an obnoxiously brightly lit room. The number 15 is stenciled on one wall, the numerals six feet in height. Next to the numerals is a panel flush against the wall outlined in yellow and black, labeled 'Emergency Decompression Kit.'. The wall opposite that is covered in heated food lockers in the style of an Automat such as Horn & Hardarts, with banks of heated food lockers topped with signage such as 'Pastries', 'Sandwiches' & 'Meats'. In the center of the room is a one piece picnic table & bench, also painted white. Laughing soldiers enter.)*

CAPORAL CORDERO

Easy, right? Load, point, shoot and win!

FUSILIER CRUZ

Yeah... yeah. That was cool. I don't know what I was so worried about.

FUSILIER BONGCARAS

Our year is gonna go by so quick, you'll see! Nothing can stand up to us!

FUSILIER GAERLAN

I mean, this time no one was shooting back at us.

FUSILIER BONGCARAS

And no one will! How long was it to walk from the battle deck to down here, fifteen, twenty minutes? This ship's almost half a mile long! Who wouldn't just run away at the sight of us, blocking out the fucking sun?

FUSILIER CRUZ

Is that right, Caporal? Was it like that when you last served on the battleline?

CAPORAL CORDERO

I'll admit, I was nervous my first time. The enemy didn't run away- but they should have! Once our airlock conjoined with their airlock and both our blast doors came down, they hadn't even loaded their muskets! I saw one of them couldn't even tear open their cartridge. Those poor hapless sods didn't get a single volley off. We mowed them down without a single casualty on our side! Command was so pleased they promoted every Fusilier to Caporal that day.

FUSILIER CRUZ

Wow. So where's the enemy ship you took now?

CAPORAL CORDERO

We're standing on it.

FUSILIER BONGCARAS

See that? We've got the edge in training and weapons!

FUSILIER CRUZ

I read our bullets shatter once they get inside someone, tearing up their insides and dropping them with just one hit!



FUSILIER GAERLAN

The enemy's bullets do that too, and it's more to do with not accidentally damaging each other's ships that we're trying to capture.

FUSILIER CRUZ

But... if everyone's using ammunition like that, why won't they issue us body armor?

FUSILIER BONGCARAS

You dare imply our resplendent national service uniform is somehow inadequate?! The mere sight of its bright, defiant colors shall dazzle and intimidate the foe into submission!

FUSILIER GAERLAN

Did I hear that right, Caporal? You said that your last battle was your first time on the line? So you've seen action exactly once?

CAPORAL CORDERO

Well... what I've seen was the demonstrated superiority of our arms and training!

FUSILIER BONGCARAS

Damn right! What need have we of bulky armor to slow us down and encourage cowardice when we have speed, aggression and fighting spirit!

FUSILIER CRUZ

I'm sorry! I'm sorry. Could we perhaps settle down to dinner? The hot food might cool our tempers. If you please, Caporal?

CAPORAL CORDERO

Of course.

(CAPORAL CORDERO opens a gold-lined pouch at her side and fishes out four silver tokens)

One for me, Cruz one for you, Bongcaras one for you, and one for Gaerlan...

FUSILIER BONGCARAS

Why does Gaerlan still get rations? She's been talking back all day!

CAPORAL CORDERO

Fusilier Bongcaras, may I remind you that we are fighting for a democracy free and fair? Thus may those in the Union's service speak as many...

FUSILIER BONGCARAS/CRUZ/GAERLAN

So long as we act as one.

FUSILIER BONGCARAS

Yes sir. I'm sorry sir.

FUSILIER GAERLAN

(taking her token and inserting into one of the automat slots, unlocking it to take the food within.)

Besides, it's in Command's interest to keep us fed, ready and rested for the next battle.

(the others take their tokens and chosen meals to the table, talking as they eat.)

FUSILIER CRUZ

What do you know about our next battle against the Republic anyway, Caporal? I heard from Troop Sixteen that it's gonna be big...

CAPORAL CORDERO

Again, I wouldn't worry. The Republic just doesn't train their P.C.s as well as we do.

FUSILIER GAERLAN

Since the Republic has so many more of them. They made it so you're born a P.C.!

FUSILIER CRUZ

Wait, so everyone born on Republic territory is a Prospective Citizen until they've done their year of service? And they don't have a choice? They don't volunteer to be a P.C. like we do?

FUSILIER GAERLAN

Five years. You need five years of service before you can be a full citizen of the Republic.

FUSILIER CRUZ

Five years? How can anyone survive five years serving on the battleline?

FUSILIER GAERLAN

Helps keep their population down. And you'd best pray we never meet their older troops. Sure, most of them won't make it past a year or two, but can you imagine how sharp and motivated a line of fifth year Republic veterans might be?

FUSILIER BONGCARAS

Again, demonstrating that we are on the right side here. Anyone from the colonies can apply to be a Prospective Citizen of the Union-

FUSILIER GAERLAN

-serve out a single easy year, and secure full citizenship for us and our offspring forevermore, yeah spare me the propaganda pitch. I would prefer to not have to apply for anything- but we all gotta pick our colonizers at some point.

(FUSILIER BONGCARAS opens her mouth to protest but is cut off)

I've got your backs. More we stick together the more chance we have of seeing the end of our year.

FUSILIER CRUZ

Do you think there's a good chance we won't? See the end of our year, I mean?

CAPORAL CORDERO

If we remember our training, our victory is assured! Look, I signed up just three months ahead of you, and I'm already on a Caporal's salary. Who knows what rank you or I will end up with at the end, with all the fat bonuses that'll entail?

FUSILIER GAERLAN

At what rank do we get better food? Or at least something resembling what we have back home?

FUSILIER BONGCARAS

This is our home now! And this is our food! We should learn to love it as much as the Union citizens we're soon to become.

FUSILIER CRUZ

I think it's pretty decent. Maybe a bit bland.

FUSILIER GAERLAN

A bit bland? These people think mayonnaise is a spice.

FUSILIER BONGCARAS

You dare impugn the culinary arts of our host nation?!

CAPORAL CORDERO

Bongcaras! Again, I remind you of our freedoms. In fact, I think now would be a great time to stand tall and engage in some rousing Free Expressions of Discontent, what do you all say!

FUSILIER CRUZ

Ooh! It's been a while.

FUSILIER GAERLAN

I really don't think that'll be necessary-

FUSILIER BONGCARAS

Gaerlan, this is your doing, so own up to it!

CAPORAL CORDERO

OK everyone, let me have it!

FUSILIER BONGCARAS

Fuck you, sir!

FUSILIER GAERLAN

(weakly)

Fuck you, sir.

CORPORAL CORDERO

Louder! With feeling!

FUSILIER CRUZ

FUCK YOU SIR! I DESERVE MORE!

CAPORAL CORDERO

Yes! More! Tell me what you really think!

FUSILIER BONGCARAS

FUCK YOU SIR! I OUGHTA BE PROMOTED!

FUSILIER CRUZ

FUCK YOU SIR! I WANT MY OWN ROOM, AND MY OWN KITCHEN SO I CAN MAKE MY OWN FOOD!

FUSILIER GAERLAN

Is that enough? Can we all sit down now?

CAPORAL CORDERO

What do you really think, Fusiliers?!

FUSILIER BONGCARAS

THAT I SHOULDN'T HAVE TO SHARE QUARTERS WITH UNMOTIVATED INGRATES,  
FUCK YOU SIR!

FUSILIER CRUZ

THAT I SHOULD HAVE A REAL BED WITH REAL COVERS AND REAL PILLOWS  
INSTEAD OF THESE COLD SLEEP-INDUCER SACKS! FUCK YOU SIR!

FUSILIER BONGCARAS

THAT I SHOULD GET MORE ALLOTTED RADIO TIME WITH MY SON, FUCK YOU  
SIR!

FUSILIER CRUZ

THAT I SHOULD GET DOUBLE, NO TRIPLE MY PAY, FUCK YOU SIR!

FUSILIER GAERLAN

That we should make Command either figure out a way to fight that doesn't involve us lining up to get shot across a conjoined airlock, or else get someone from Command to come down here to fight and die with us.

(The room abruptly falls silent. No one will meet GAERLAN's eyes as they all sit down.)



FUSILIER GAERLAN

What? I'm not against fighting. I know what I signed up for. I'm just saying our esteemed higher ups should pay their fair share in blood.

CAPORAL CORDERO

They have more than paid-

FUSILIER GAERLAN

How? When? Do we know for certain if anyone in Command was born in the colonies and volunteered to fight as a Prospective Citizen of the Union?

FUSILIER BONGCARAS

Then their ancestors paid, as we are paying now. It's only fair.

FUSILIER CRUZ

I wouldn't want to.

FUSILIER GAERLAN

What was that?

FUSILIER CRUZ

I wouldn't want to. Risk myself, I mean. I'd want it to be over after this. I'd want to be safe, and for my children to be safe.

FUSILIER GAERLAN

So you'd be happy to just pass this shit down to the next generation of colonial fucks, while most of the Union gets to live out their lives never thinking of people like us?

FUSILIER CRUZ

Yeah. I'm not stupid. I know that the Union got rich by making us poor. I'm just tired of being poor.

FUSILIER BONGCARAS

(towards GAERLAN)

You can always just go back to the Colonies, get conquered by the Republic and be forced to serve out five years instead of choosing to do just one. Gotta pick your colonizer sometime, right?

(FUSILIER GAERLAN is silent, until an alarm klaxon is heard)

CAPORAL CORDERO

We've been ambushed!

FUSILIER CRUZ

Does that mean we'll have to fight?

FUSILIER GAERLAN

That is generally what one does in an ambush, yes.

FUSILIER CRUZ

But we've still got a month of combat drills to go through!

FUSILIER BONGCARAS

Caporal, what do you see?

(CAPORAL CORDERO starts fiddling with her wristwatch)

CAPORAL CORDERO

Republic cruiser bearing down on us..

(FUSILIER BONGCARAS makes for the door)

CAPORAL CORDERO

Ease up, Fusilier. They've caught up to us, and we don't have the speed to escape, but Command is putting as much distance as it can between our vessels. Estimate time to contact in... two hours.

FUSILIER BONGCARAS

(looking towards the hanging sleepsacks)

Figuring in transit and arming ourselves, that at least gives us time for an hour's sleep-sack cycle.

CAPORAL CORDERO

Yes. Everyone, clean this up then hook yourselves into your sacks for rapid sleep. Upon waking, we form up and head to the armory for final briefing and battleline deployment.

FUSILIER CRUZ

I hate the rapid sleep-sack cycle. Not enough time to dream.

FUSILIER GAERLAN

Doesn't matter as long as it refreshes us. Besides, any longer and we'd only have nightmares.

INTERLUDE

*(FUSILIER GAERLAN sits on a darkened stage, facing the audience. Beside her, also facing the audience, is a faceless puppet the size of a small boy.)*

FUSILIER GAERLAN

Toto, can you repeat that? You were breaking up.

BOY

I SAID, dad came in the mail today. Inna little box, made of real wood and everything.

FUSILIER GAERLAN

I... see. I'm sorry you had to see that.

BOY

I didn't HAVE to see anything. The box was wrapped inna flag. I opened it.

FUSILIER GAERLAN

You opened the box?

BOY

Yeah. Dad was in it. He felt crumbly.

FUSILIER GAERLAN

Toto, listen to me very carefully. You should not just play with your father's ashes like that.

Where is the box now? You have to put that away.

BOY

I wasn't playing with it! I wasn't! I miss him! I wanted him to come home! You promised me he would come home, and he did, but he didn't come home like how I wanted him to!

FUSILIER GAERLAN

I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. I miss him too.

BOY

I miss you. When are you coming home?

FUSILIER GAERLAN

Soon. Just a few more months, and when I do, I'll come and take you away from the islands, where we can be safe.

BOY

But I like it here. I want you to come home already and play with me. Mrs. Laig said that tomorrow the solar radiation would be low enough that we could go out to the beach for a whole ten minutes!

FUSILIER GAERLAN

That's not a beach. I wish you wouldn't call it a beach, it's just where the trash ends.

BOY

I don't care what anyone calls it, I wanna play with you here. I don't wanna go live in a fortwuss... fortress...

FUSILIER GAERLAN

Fortress Dome.

BOY

Whatever.

FUSILIER GAERLAN

I want you to live in a Fortress Dome. With me. There's no radiation under a dome. I told you, it's why I'm here- so we can be safe, together.

BOY

Yeah, I know. It's what dad died for. And now we'll never be together.

FUSILIER GAERLAN

Toto Gaerlan-!

BOY

I gotta go. They're saying we can go to the beach now. Please don't die.

FUSILIER GAERLAN

I won't. I promise.

BOY

I've heard that before.

FUSILIER GAERLAN

I mean it this time. Whatever it takes. I promise.



*(A line of soldiers in the red, blue and white uniforms of the Union once again parade march across a darkened stage carrying bulky sheet metal clad muskets with air hoses trailing behind them offstage. Each individual's face reflects a mix of terror, grim resignation and excitement to varying degrees. CAPORAL CORDERO is again bellowing out orders.)*

CAPORAL CORDERO

Troop Fifteen- halt!

(The soldiers halt.)

CAPORAL CORDERO

Atten-SHUN!

(The soldiers stand at attention. A tinny voice plays from a poorly maintained loudspeaker.)

COLONEL EN SECOND DU CHAMPLAIN

My brave, beloved soldiers of the Union! My heart is full, for today we stand together against the Republic that has snuck up upon us in such craven fashion. Could we have attempted to hide? Perhaps. But that is not our way. Each and every one of you chose freely to be here. Today the Republic shall learn the resolve of a battleline of volunteers- of free people, defending their democracy, free and fair! It is through our sacrifice that freedom is won! Though we may speak as many...

ALL

(in unison)

WE ACT AS ONE!

COLONEL EN SECOND DU CHAMPLAIN

As I speak, we have pulled alongside the Republic vessel that has dared to challenge us. The rumbling you feel- for many of you the first time- is that of our airlock snaking out to meet the enemy's airlock. Once connected, both our blast doors shall lower together, and you will meet the foe, battleline to battleline as honor demands! Look straight into their eyes, and aim true! Once they fall, we shall take their vessel and add it to our own glorious fleet! Remember, kill the meat-

ALL

(in unison)

SAVE THE METAL!

(At this, a fantastically loud clanging is heard as the airlocks of the Union and the Republic vessels conjoin, connecting the two opposing vessels across a single corridor, separated by blast doors.)

COLONEL EN SECOND DU CHAMPLAIN

Sargents and Caporals, see to your troops! Forward Freedom! Forward the Union!

(The blast doors of the conjoined airlocks lower at the same time, hinging downward.)

CAPORAL CORDERO

Forward... march!

(The soldiers march onto the now lowered airlock blast door and halt just shy of the threshold  
into the enemy side.)

CAPORAL CORDERO

Load!

(The soldiers now attempt, with varying success, to undertake the 9 separate steps of Baron  
Steuben's musket drill that are incorporated into the 'load' command under combat.)

FUSILIER GAERLAN

Bongcaras, no! You prime the pan before loading the cartridge! It's prime, shut, charge, not  
charge, shut, prime!

FUSILIER BONGCARAS

Shit shit SHIT-!

(FUSILIER BONGCARAS's shaking hands spill powder all over her until now pristine white uniform. As the other soldiers draw their rammers to load their musket balls, FUSILIER BONGCARAS fumbles her own and drops it onto the deck.)

FUSILIER BONGCARAS

SHIT!

CAPORAL CORDERO

Make ready!

(As the other soldiers on the line cock their muskets, FUSILIER BONGCARAS is on her knees, scrambling to find her lost ammunition.)

CAPORAL CORDERO

Take aim!

(As the Union soldiers raise their muskets, a line of enemy muskets can be seen poking out through the far darkness, aimed right at them.)

CAPORAL CORDERO

FIRE!

(Shots ring out as both sides' muskets fire into one another's ranks. Screams are heard on both the Union and the Republic lines as soldiers fall, their Shako caps tumbling to the ground and their uniforms blossoming with blood. No one who is hit gets back up, as the fragmentation bullets have thoroughly torn through their insides.)

CAPORAL CORDERO

Again! Load! Make- Fusilier Bongcaras, what are you doing?!

FUSILIER BONGCARAS

I can't, I can't, I CAN'T-!

(FUSILIER BONGCARAS, having failed to retrieve her bullet and watching several soldiers fall around her as she was on her knees, gets up and turns to run.)

CAPORAL CORDERO

Fuck! Bongcaras, get back here or we're all- fuck! Troop Fifteen, cease fire and secure the deserter!

(FUSILIER CRUZ, FUSILIER GAERLAN and CAPORAL CORDERO turn away from the line and begin to chase FUSILIER BONGCARAS down the airlock back to the ship. They are not yet halfway out when another round of shots is heard, and another succession of screams. No Union soldiers are left standing. A small figure in the red and gold uniform of the Republic crawls onto the stage and collapses amongst the bodies of the Union soldiers. The Republic

soldier's face is obscured by the ceremonial enclosed helm that all Republic soldiers wear. As soon as FUSILIER BONGCARAS manages to exit the airlock, an alarm klaxon sounds. The blast door begins to close. As it hinges upward, the door, now slick with blood, slides and dumps the Union bodies downward into a heap. The small figure in the Republic uniform is almost buried alive amongst the dead and begins to cry out.)

FUSILIER GAERLAN

Caporal, I think one of ours is still breathing back there!

CAPORAL CORDERO

How is that possible?

(Another cry is heard, which they assume incorrectly to be one of theirs.)

Damn, I can hear it too! Gaerlan, rescue your fellow soldier, Cruz and I'll chase down Bongcaras!

FUSILIER GAERLAN

Aye, Caporal!

(FUSILIER GAERLAN climbs over the heap of bodies to grasp the outstretched hand of the Republic soldier, currently too far buried for their uniform to be clearly seen.)

INTERLUDE

*(FUSILIER BONGCARAS sits on a darkened stage, facing the audience. Beside her, also facing the audience, is a faceless puppet the size of a small boy.)*

FUSILIER BONGCARAS

I just don't understand how your mama managed to mess up sinigang.

BOY

I told her we should call you to ask.

FUSILIER BONGCARAS

It's literally a prepackaged powder mix. Even back when we could get fresh tamarind, we mostly just used the powder.

BOY

She blamed the imitation pork.

FUSILIER BONGCARAS

My last paycheck went to buy that imitation pork for you! The ads said it would taste the same!

BOY

Why do you always believe the ads, mom?

FUSILIER BONGCARAS

The ads are what convinced me to volunteer!

BOY

Are you still happy you volunteered? Isn't it scary, fighting the Republic?

FUSILIER BONGCARAS

The Union gives us everything we need to succeed!

BOY

Isn't that a line from one of the ads?

FUSILIER BONGCARAS

Yes, but it's true! Our quarters are as clean as our uniforms. We have the best weapons and the best training. We train every day for our first chance to beat the Republic!

BOY

Wait, so you haven't fought yet?

FUSILIER BONGCARAS

Oh I wish! But no, not yet.



BOY

So you're not scared?

FUSILIER BONGCARAS

How could I be? Your mom's surrounded by lots of other brave, dedicated volunteers. Together, we have nothing to fear.

BOY

I'm glad. Mama's worried about you. She tries to hide it, but I can see right through her. She started crying over the sinigang. She said she wished she could get the recipe right, so she could send you some.

FUSILIER BONGCARAS

Beeto, honey... you're mama's worried about nothing. First off, she wouldn't be allowed to send us food, and even if she did I wouldn't need it. The Union provides us volunteers with every meal for free! Just like the ads said. A few more months and I can bring you to our new apartment in a Fortress Dome to show you!

BOY

Do they have sinigang there, mom?

FUSILIER BONGCARAS

No... no they don't have that. They give us the same kind of food they eat.

BOY

So they give you the food that they like? Do you like it?

FUSILIER BONGCARAS

Sure. It's certainly different... but I think it's just as good. I found one dish that I really like, and that I bet I could make for you once we three are all together. It's called meatloaf, and they make it with real meat!

BOY

I can't wait!

*(The Troop Fifteen living, eating and sleeping quarters, unchanged apart from a few of the automat food lockers being empty from the last meal, and the sleep-sacks looking as though they were hastily reset as the soldiers rushed to their recent and for most of them first battle.*

*CAPORAL CORDERO and FUSILIER CRUZ wrestle FUSILIER BONGCARAS onto the white picnic table.)*

CAPORAL CORDERO

Hold her down...!

FUSILIER BONGCARAS

Let me go! I'm loyal! I'm a loyal Prospective Citizen of the Union!

(FUSILIER CRUZ holds FUSILIER BONGCARAS down until CAPORAL CORDERO produces bright red plastic handcuffs from a pouch and begins to tie FUSILIER BONGCARAS' wrists together.)

FUSILIER CRUZ

I'm sorry, but I don't think that's quite true anymore.

(FUSILIER CRUZ helps CAPORAL CORDERO tie FUSILIER BONGCARAS' wrists to the table.)

CAPORAL CORDERO

Fusilier Bongcaras, you have abandoned your position on the battleline during a crucial engagement, endangering the lives of your fellow soldiers and the freedom of the Union. As your immediate superior I am hereby placing you under arrest for desertion. What have-

FUSILIER BONGCARAS

Endangering whose lives? I saw everyone in Troops Sixteen and Seventeen go down in the first salvo! Everyone we left back there is dead!

FUSILIER GAERLAN

(entering, cradling the small figure in the Republic uniform from the last battle in her arms.)

Not everyone.

CAPORAL CORDERO

Fusilier Gaerlan, what.. who is that?

FUSILIER GAERLAN

The shaking hasn't stopped since I pulled this one out of the heap of our comrades. Clear the table, and help me get this helmet off!

(CAPORAL CORDERO hesitates, but FUSILIER CRUZ goes to help set the Republic soldier down and onto the table. Fusiliers CRUZ and GAERLAN then set about removing the full face helmet.)

FUSILIER CRUZ

This metal's so light! Does the Republic have some kind of advanced material that-

FUSILIER GAERLAN

It's light because it's thin, and it's thin because it's cheap. This helmet is about as bulletproof as the Caporal's shiny hat.

CAPORAL CORDERO

Fusiliers, I direct you to the matter at hand! We have to deal with... fuck.

(All look in stunned silence at the newly revealed face of the Republic soldier. This Boy is the same faceless puppet from the interludes, but is a Republic soldier and not any of the troop's children. He is operated by any member of the cast who happens to be handling him at the moment.)

FUSILIER BONGCARAS

(still tied to the wall handle)

He's just a kid. He looks the same age as my-

FUSILIER CRUZ

He can't be more than ten!

FUSILIER GAERLAN

(checking the boy)

He's not wounded.

CAPORAL CORDERO

How...?

FUSILIER GAERLAN

I'm guessing us leaving the line left a gap in our side's volley fire.

FUSILIER CRUZ

If he's not wounded, why won't he stop shaking then? And why's his face like that? Like he's looking far out into the black.

CAPORAL CORDERO

I think he's shell shocked.

(As soon as the CAPORAL says those words, a metal torso and head unfurls from the wall.

Metal arms fold out from the the torso and move into an open inviting embrace.)

C3 UNIT

Superior officer verbally indicating possible combat stress reaction detected. Care and Comfort Counselor Unit activated. Beginning PTSD prevention protocol.

(The metal torso, head and arms take on an unsettling approximation of an active listener offering a hug.)

So, bring me up to speed.

FUSILIER GAERLAN

Ah fuck, C3 no not right now-

CAPORAL CORDERO

C3, belay that protocol. We just need to-

FUSILIER CRUZ

This kid isn't responding-

(FUSILIER BONGCARAS begins to laugh maniacally.)

C3 UNIT

What I'm hearing is that you all think you don't need to talk things through. Can any of you speak to that?

CAPORAL CORDERO

C3, this situation does not call for you. Please deactivate yourself.

C3 UNIT

May I pause you for a moment?

CAPORAL CORDERO

Absolutely not!

C3 UNIT

Can we explore this more?

FUSILIER CRUZ

Explore what? We're all fine, its this kid that-

C3 UNIT

I'm noticing that you keep referring to one or more of your fellow soldiers as a child. Correct me if I'm wrong, but the Union has a strict policy against combatants under the age of fifteen. Help me to understand why you insist on infantilizing one another.

FUSILIER CRUZ

We're not infantilizing one another! There is a kid here!

C3 UNIT

Would you like to hear a different perspective?



CAPORAL CORDERO

No! C3, shut down!

C3 UNIT

What would happen if you all gave yourselves permission to feel your emotions?

FUSILIER GAERLAN

(grabbing a chair and, with it, smashing the C3 Unit as punctuation to every word she shouts)

WHY. WON'T. YOU. SHUT. THE. FUCK. UP!

C3 UNIT

(fading, sparking and destroyed)

That's a reaaaally good questioooooonnn what do youuu thiiink...

FUSILIER GAERLAN

(chair in one hand and C3's severed head in the other)

I'm sorry. Fuck, I'm sorry. I just couldn't... I mean it wouldn't... I'm sorry.

FUSILIER BONGCARAS

We're not getting out of this alive, are we?

CAPORAL CORDERO

You're not. I am prepared to commend Gaerlan for her initiative in stopping you from your attempt to damage Union property in addition to your desertion.

FUSILIER BONGCARAS

What?! You can't pin our C3's dismemberment on me!

CAPORAL CORDERO

I very much can, and I'll do it gladly if it saves at least one of my Fusiliers. I'm sorry, Bongcaras. I don't see a way out for you, but maybe this way I won't need to discipline Gaerlan as well.

FUSILIER CRUZ

What am I missing here?

FUSILIER GAERLAN

How behind are you on your civics studies? Both desertion and wilfully damaging property are hanging offenses under Union law.

CAPORAL CORDERO

Except that there's cameras on the battleline but we're guaranteed the right to privacy down here. The way I see it Bongcaras, your life was forfeit the second Command saw you turn tail.

BOY

(stirring & wailing)

Mother? Mother, where are you? I can't see.

FUSILIER BONGCARAS

What is that? What's he saying?

FUSILIER CRUZ

I don't understand.

CAPORAL CRUZ

Neither do I.

BOY

Mother, I'm cold and I can't see!

FUSILIER GAERLAN

I think... I think he's speaking English.

INTERLUDE

*(CAPORAL CORDERO sits on a darkened stage, facing the audience. Beside her, also facing the audience, is a faceless puppet the size of a small boy.)*

BOY

Mom, your new rank thingie is so shiny!

CAPORAL CORDERO

It's not a rank thingie, it's called an insignia- and thank you. You like it?

BOY

Yeah! I'm gonna tell all the other kids at school how you're in Command!

CAPORAL CORDERO

I am not in Command! Well, maybe someday. I'm on my way at least. But I'm not in Command.

BOY

But you're the big boss lady of a whole Troop!

CAPORAL CORDERO

Yes, but the people in Command are in charge of entire vessels, each with dozens of Troops. I'm in charge of just one Troop.

BOY

You tell them what to do every day?

CAPORAL CORDERO

I suppose I give each of them at least one order a day. But it's not like I can control every minute of their waking lives.

BOY

Like you controlled every minute of miiiiine when you were home?

CAPORAL CORDERO

Excuse me, it's your father who's the controlling one.

BOY

He's making a funny face off screen right now so you can't see him.

CAPORAL CORDERO

Tell him I love him.

BOY

Eww.

CAPORAL CORDERO

There's nothing wrong with love, Chester. In fact, can I tell you a secret?

BOY

Always.

CAPORAL CORDERO

I love the people in my Troop. I want to see them grow, and succeed, and thrive. I know we're technically supposed to have a degree of emotional detachment from the lower ranking soldiers, but how can I when we live and train so closely together? When we come from such similar backgrounds? For example- did you know that each of us has a son?

BOY

Doesn't the Union only take island volunteers who are already parents? So it's not actually that big a coincidence.

CAPORAL CORDERO

I suppose not. Still, it's fun getting to compare strategies on how to raise each of our kids.

BOY

That's not fair! I have to resist the power of four whole moms?

CAPORAL CORDERO

Again, I just want to see you grow, and succeed, and thrive. We can do that together once we get our new Fortress Dome home.

BOY

Dad bought a real calendar with real paper to cross dates out until you're done. It was so expensive. He lets me pick the marker colors. Mom, do you ever wish you had a daughter?

CAPORAL CORDERO

If anything, I think of the Troop under me as my daughters.

BOY

Do you have a favorite?

*(Troop Fifteen's living, eating and sleeping quarters. The BOY is hooked up to a sleepsack, unconscious. CRUZ, GAERLAN and CORDERO are gathered around a handcuffed BONGCARAS. The wrecked C3 unit hangs headless from the wall it emerged from.)*

FUSILIER BONGCARAS

What if I refuse?

FUSILIER GAERLAN

Same shit. Punishment's the only thing the Union is happy to share collectively.

CAPORAL CORDERO

I would appreciate a reduction of snark given that I am doing my best to save your life, Gaerlan.

FUSILIER GAERLAN

Are you sure it's not because you'd look silly being promoted to Sargent with just Cruz under your command?

FUSILIER CRUZ

The Caporal's doing whatever she can to keep as many of us alive as possible! And it's not like anyone's getting promoted after that last fight.

FUSILIER GAERLAN

How would you know? I imagine that fight opened up a lot of vacancies.



### CAPORAL CORDERO

The code of conduct is clear! The penalty for dereliction of one's duty to the Union is death by hanging. The penalty for the wilful destruction of the Union's property is death by hanging. The troop that fails to enforce penalties constitutes the dereliction of that troop's duty, the penalty for which is death by hanging.

### FUSILIER GAERLAN

So it's not enough that they make us kill their enemies, they make us kill each other too. I love being a labor saving device.

### FUSILIER CRUZ

(getting up and grabbing Gaerlan's uniform collar)

I am so fucking sick of your back bench moralizing! I want to fucking live! I want to see my wife and my kid in our beautiful new Union apartment under the most heavily armored fortress dome we can afford, and never have to pick up a musket or march or hear another gunshot in my life! The Caporal is offering us an out, and she's offering you an out! Fucking take it!

### FUSILIER BONGCARAS

To clarify, the out you are referring to is you rightfully hanging me for desertion while also wrongfully hanging me for Gaerlan's little anti-therapy outburst.

FUSILIER CRUZ

You can only die once. And I don't have sympathy for someone whose incompetence endangered my shot at a better life. We do not have the option to be anything less than the best. I thought that somewhere in the middle of your pre-battle propagandizing, you understood that.

FUSILIER BONGCARAS

Excellent point. I then take it you'll follow this line of thought to its logical conclusion and pin your harboring an enemy fugitive on me as well?

FUSILIER CRUZ

That's... he's...

CAPORAL CORDERO

We will deal with one problem at a time. It already took us too long to get the boy quiet earlier.

FUSILIER BONGCARAS

You tranquilized him with a sleep-sack needle! Is that how you get your own son quiet?

CAPORAL CORDERO

One problem at a time! As I have been saying, Fusilier Bongcaras, as your superior officer-

FUSILIER BONGRACAS

My sole surviving superior officer-

CAPORAL CORDERO

(intoning)

As your superior officer I have now laid out the charges in front of you, and you are now required to claim, consume and enjoy your final meal in our presence. The Union thanks you for your service. Regrettably, your merits have been deemed insufficient to ascend from Prospective to Full Citizen of the Union. Take comfort in the knowledge that while you have failed the Union, the Union will not fail you in providing for the most comfortable transition possible into your post-life nonexistence. The C3 unit-

FUSILIER BONGCARAS

Ha!

CAPORAL CORDERO

The C3 Unit is unfortunately unable to provide counseling at this time, but the automat is currently preparing a meal made to your specifications as per your previous submission of Form 99-O, Preferred Meal Prior To High-Risk Engagement/Terminal Disciplinary Action. It should-

(CAPORAL CORDERO is interrupted by a loud ‘ding’ from one of the automat food cubbies.)

Ah, there it is now. Fusilier Cruz, if you please?

(CAPORAL CORDERO fishes out a golden token from her pouch and holds it up between her forefinger and thumb. FUSILIER CRUZ gets up, takes the token, inserts it into the automat and brings out the most recently completed meal to lay in front of FUSILIER BONGCARAS.)

FUSILIER CRUZ

Here. Eat your goddamn meatloaf.

FUSILIER BONGCARAS

No.

FUSILIER GAERLAN

Eat it or they'll punish all of us.

FUSILIER BONGCARAS

They should be punishing at least two of us! Why am I the only one who has to eat the meat from our ground up comrades?!

FUSILIER CRUZ

You weren't complaining earlier, when we were eating the people who used to live on this ship- the same enemy Caporal Cordero got promoted for defeating!

FUSILIER BONGCARAS

That was different. That was the enemy! That was our right! To the victor go the spoils! Where else are we supposed to get protein this far down?

FUSILIER CRUZ

(gesturing towards the sleeping boy)

You- no, we- we were all happily eating kids just like him. Maybe they were his friends. They were definitely his comrades. What's your problem with eating our own? Win or lose, as soldiers of the Union, we have the meats!

CAPORAL CORDERO

The wasteful, craven Republic certainly doesn't do that. Their dead Prospective Citizens have their bones ground to dust so they can be used as fertilizer.

FUSILIER GAERLAN

In their own way, I suppose that means both sides practice Esprit de Corpse.

(All present pause in grave silence.)

FUSILIER BONGCARAS

I didn't know they were kids. And I didn't think I'd ever have to eat someone I knew. All that Union propaganda, I thought-

FUSILIER GAERLAN

You thought it meant we'd never lose?

FUSILIER BONGCARAS

I thought that we're supposed to either win or die. Bread or a bullet. This surviving shit is terrible.

CAPORAL CORDERO

(gently, taking BONGCARAS' hands)

Then stop drawing it out. I'm sorry Bongcaras, I really am. If I could do anything more for you, I would. I'm not here to follow the rules. I need to save who I can save, and I don't mean just Gaerlan. If Command comes down here for collective punishment, that's going to be for all of us.

(CORDERO looks towards the BOY.)

If I spin this right in the paperwork, say you were all good until it just got too much and you took out all that aggression and grief over failing your comrades out on the C3 unit, I believe I can get back pay sent over to your son.

FUSILIER BONGCARAS

You 'believe', is that right?

CAPORAL CORDERO

More than just back pay. Let's say... that Fusilier Bongcaras suffered a tragic, psychotic break during the course of her duties, which manifested in the destruction of the C3 unit deployed to aid her. A psychological casualty still counts as a casualty. The Union cares for our minds as well

as our bodies, right? This way, it could be an honorable execution, expunging all guilt from the record, for you and.. well, your progeny. Because the alternative...

FUSILIER BONGCARAS

(dawning realization)

Fuck. FUCK! FUCK!

CAPORAL CORDERO

The alternative would be barring your immediate family from applying to be Prospective Citizens. At least this way, your wife can still volunteer. She and your son would both still have a chance.

FUSILIER BONGCARAS

I'll hold you to that, Caporal. From the Deep, I'll hold you to that.

(she eats and finishes her meal.)

FUSILIER GAERLAN

I'm sorry, Bongcaras. Thank you, comrade.

FUSILIER BONGCARAS

Fuck you.

CAPORAL CORDERO

Fusiliers Cruz and Gaerlan, prepare the nearest airlock for the hanging.

(CRUZ & GAERLAN exchange looks)

FUSILIERS GAERLAN & CRUZ

Oui, mon Caporal!

(a glass booth or similar facsimile of an airlock criss-crossed with rope is lowered in front of the audience. GAERLAN & CRUZ bring BONGCARAS forward and tie her to the ropes, leaving her leaning/hanging in a cruciform pose. GAERLAN & CRUZ then lock BONGCARAS into the booth.)

CAPORAL CORDERO

Though one or many may fall-

FUSILIERS GAERLAN, CRUZ & BONGCARAS

-you cannot kill an idea.

CAPORAL CORDERO

Freedom endures.

FUSILIERS GAERLAN, CRUZ & BONGCARAS

The Union endures.

CAPORAL CORDERO

Open the airlock! Let in the deep-



FUSILIERS GAERLAN, CRUZ & BONGCARAS

-and let out the weak.

(Water rushes in, filling the airlock. FUSILIER BONGCARAS, hanging and bound, is drowned.)

INTERLUDE

*(FUSILIER CRUZ sits on a darkened stage, facing the audience. Beside her, also facing the audience, is a faceless puppet the size of a small boy.)*

BOY

I hate you.

FUSILIER CRUZ

You don't mean that. Take that back.

BOY

Mommy hates you too.

FUSILIER CRUZ

She does not! How can you say that? This is not how we raised you!

BOY

How would you know? You're not here. You're never here.

FUSILIER CRUZ

I sacrifice so much to put food on our table!

BOY

It's shit food. The food is shit. Shit food.

FUSILIER CRUZ

Where did you learn to say that rude word? You don't say that word.

BOY

I can say whatever I want. We're all free under the Union, my teacher said so.

FUSILIER CRUZ

I am fighting to protect that freedom! To make sure we're all free!

BOY

Why can't you fight from home?

FUSILIER CRUZ

That doesn't make any sense. You don't even know what you're saying.

BOY

I know what I'm saying!

FUSILIER CRUZ

I am out here so you can be safe back there.

BOY

Mommy says it's never been safe here. She says it's why you left, cause you hate the islands and you hate her.

FUSILIER CRUZ

I don't hate you! We will always be your loving mothers, nothing will ever change that.

BOY

If you love me, why are you always leaving me alone?

FUSILIER CRUZ

I never wanted to leave you alone. I was working. Three, four jobs at a time I was working. But now- now you'll see. I just need to leave you one last time. One last job, and I'll never have to leave you again. Just a few more months and I'll be able to come back and take us all away to a better place! We'll all be full citizens of the Union!

BOY

My classmate Mimi says you're not coming back. Hardly anyone ever comes back. Mimi's mom never came back.

FUSILIER CRUZ

More and more people make it to full citizenship every year. And besides... I'm different from everyone else.

BOY

What makes you different?

FUSILIER CRUZ

There is nothing I wouldn't do to see you again.

*(The Living, Eating & Sleeping quarters of Troop Fifteen. The Boy now lies on the picnic table next to the emptied tray that once contained FUSILIER BONGCARAS' final meal. FUSILIER CRUZ and CAPORAL CORDERO are fussing over the boy as FUSILIER GAERLAN stares at the automat.)*

FUSILIER GAERLAN

Hey, Caporal?

CAPORAL CORDERO

Can it wait, Gaerlan?

FUSILIER GAERLAN

I was just wondering, how long do you figure it'll take for Fusilier Bongcaras to show up on the menu?

CAPORAL CORDERO

I feel that at this point, speculation would not serve to-

FUSILIER GAERLAN

I mean, it would be a shame if we went through all the trouble of tying her up and Command didn't make immediate use of her.

CAPORAL CORDERO

You are referring to what was left of her. Once drowned, that body was no longer Fusilier Bongcaras. That was a husk. The Deep flowed in and washed her and her weakness away. We were left with meat and a society stronger for having so decisively cut out its cancers.

FUSILIER GAERLAN

So what am I?

CAPORAL CORDERO

Your superior officer has deemed you salvageable.

FUSILIER GAERLAN

And the kid?

CAPORAL CORDERO

The... enemy combatant... that is, the...

FUSILIER CRUZ

A potentially valuable source of crucial enemy intel, obviously.

FUSILIER GAERLAN

Obviously?

CAPORAL CORDERO

Yes. Obviously.

(The BOY begins to wake.)

CAPORAL CORDERO

Thank God-!

FUSILIER GAERLAN

I thought the sleep-sack cycle was supposed to be safe?

FUSILIER CRUZ

I was worried too since we didn't know what else was wrong with him when we put him under.

On account of somebody fucked up our C3 Unit.

FUSILIER GAERLAN

Advice from that glorified wind-up toy was about as useful as looking up symptoms online! We

don't get real doctors 'till we're real citizens.

FUSILIER CRUZ

Prospective Citizens are valued-



BOY

Where am I? Is this home now? Did we win?

CAPORAL CORDERO

-shush, both of you! He's trying to say something.

FUSILIER GAERLAN

Yes, let's both be quiet so the Caporal can utilize the comprehensive English skills she's acquired over the last few hours.

CAPORAL CORDERO

(speaking her native tongue- not English- slowly while making exaggerated gestures)

Safe. You are safe with us. Saaaaafe.

BOY

Elders! Elders, forgive me, I cannot find my face! Where is my face?!

(The BOY bolts up and away from the table as the survivors of Troop Fifteen attempt to catch him. He bounds around the room just barely evading the others until he finds his ornamental battle helm and puts it on, then drops to his knees in supplication.)

BOY

Please forgive my transgression, Elders! I know I have yet to earn the face of a full Citizen. We must first be Many, until we can be One!

FUSILIER CRUZ

What's he saying?

CAPORAL CORDERO

Damned if I know. Seems to find the helmet comforting, so I say we let him keep it.

(A loud 'ding' is heard from the automat, and a number of new dishes populate the previously vacated food lockers. The BOY flinches at the sound and cowers in a far corner.)

FUSILIER GAERLAN

Caporal... a token, if you please?

CAPORAL CORDERO

(Fishes out a token from her pouch and tosses it to GAERLAN.)

Good thinking, Fusilier.

(GAERLAN approaches the automat, inserts the token and takes out what remains of BONGCARAS, now rendered in what looks to be a delicious light broth.)

FUSILIER GAERLAN

Hungry, kid? Here, I'll get you a straw.

(The BOY eyes the bowl and straw warily. As soon as GAERLAN leaves the bowl in front of him, the BOY leans in, slips the straw under his helmet and begins to greedily slurp the hot bone broth.)

FUSILIER CRUZ

Jesus, when do you think they last fed him? His limbs look as thin as sticks.

FUSILIER GAERLAN

They couldn't have fed him much, at that.

CAPORAL CORDERO

No wonder my first battle was so easy. The enemy... the kids we faced. They must have been near delirious with hunger.

FUSILIER GAERLAN

Why'd we get pasted on the last one, then?

FUSILIER CRUZ

Most of us never finished our training, for one.

FUSILIER GAERLAN

So we've got our own illustrious Union throwing us half-trained newbies into fights against the mighty Republic's malnourished children. Exactly how badly is this war going, Caporal?

CAPORAL CORDERO

I don't know. They wouldn't tell a Caporal, or even a Sargent that kind of information.

Command thinks-

FUSILIER GAERLAN

We are literally harboring an enemy combatant in our fucking quarters, and we haven't heard from Colonel de Fuck Fuck since the battle. I don't think Command is thinking anymore. I don't think Command even -is- anymore!

FUSILIER CRUZ

Gaerlan, what the hell are you talking about?

FUSILIER GAERLAN

Eight hours! It's been eight hours! Three since we executed... murdered Bongcaras. We haven't heard a single announcement, or update, or even threat from Command. And I was the last one out the battle line, I saw, no one from the other Troops made it out-

FUSILIER CRUZ

-so what? What does that mean?

CAPORAL CORDERO

She's saying we might be the only ones left aboard.

FUSILIER CRUZ

We're... they've... what? How?

FUSILIER GAERLAN

Remember what Bongcaras told us? About how we win or die? There's not supposed to be survival for us. Survival is expensive. Cheaper, better for everyone all around, to cut us loose. To let out the weak.

FUSILIER CRUZ

You're telling me that Command's just... what, just run away? After all our training, and their talk of not taking one step back, and desertion spelling our deaths, they're the ones that turned tail and ran?

CAPORAL CORDERO

Shit!

FUSILIER GAERLAN

How long's it been since you've been unable to raise Command?

CAPORAL CORDERO

... the battle. I haven't heard from them since the battle.

FUSILIER CRUZ

If we're the only ones left aboard, who's piloting the ship? Shit, we killed Bongcaras for fear of collective punishment! Who's left to punish us?!

FUSILIER GAERLAN

We can find out. Can't we, Caporal?

CAPORAL CORDERO

Yes we can. I know where the Command deck access is from when I helped take this vessel.

Boy, with us.

(gesturing to the BOY who has by now completely finished his bowl of Bongcaras bone broth.)

All of us... Troop Fifteen! Mount up and follow me! We march to the Command deck! And we're stopping by the armory on the way.

## INTERLUDE

*(The BOY, a faceless puppet the size of a small boy and dressed in the ceremonial battle armor of the Republic sits on a darkened stage, facing the audience. The BOY is in the process of putting on his Republic Battle Helmet. In front of the BOY, with their backs turned to the audience, are the members of Troop 15, playing the role of Republic ELDERS. They may alternate their line deliveries.)*

BOY

Thank you Elders, for the gift of my face. With this, I am Many. After five years of struggle and sacrifice, I shall earn the right to remove it, and become One. A Full Citizen of the Union.

ELDERS

What else are you thankful for?

BOY

Thank you Elders, for the gift of Earth. In my past it has provided nourishment, and in my future my bones shall be ground up to rest within it, fertilizing the grains that shall feed all future soldiers of the Republic.

ELDERS

What else are you thankful for?

BOY

Thank you Elders, for the gift of Fire. With this musket I shall rend the slovenly Union soldiers, and free their island colonies from the oppression of Union Command.

ELDERS

What else are you thankful for?

BOY

Thank you Elders, for the gift of Water. Submerged in the deep between the Fortress Domes, I am safe from the surface solar radiation. I am free to roam the deep in search of our enemy.

ELDERS

What else are you thankful for?

BOY

Thank you Elders, of the gift of Air. With this I survive underwater, and through this I charge at our foe. It carries the words and the will of my betters, and it carries the roar of our battle cries as we fall upon the foe.

ELDERS

With these gifts, what is your charge?



BOY

To repay the Republic for the gift of my birth into our righteous state. To repay you, my dear beloved Elders, for freeing me of the choice to remain a child coddled by my mother, and instead lifting me up as one of the Many soldiers that serve the Union. In five short years, I shall be One, safe, righteous and free.

ELDERS

Your mother was most thankful to us for giving her the right to birth and raise you.

BOY

Elders... where is she now?

ELDERS

How disappointing. Children ask after their mothers. Soldiers must concern themselves with their Elders. You are a full decade old. You are no longer a child.

BOY

Yes, Elders. Forgive me, Elders.

ELDERS

We are not angry. Only disappointed. Know that your mother was most grateful to have been of service to the Republic in raising you to be strong and good. Know that she had nothing but

gratitude and thoughts of you as we escorted her to become fertilizer. Know that you shall soon be reunited; the grains grown from her bones shall be among your first battle rations.

BOY

Yes, Elders. Thank you, Elders.

ELDERS

Remember. We are born Many...

BOY

Until we become One.

*(The ship's Command Information Center. It of similar modular construction to the quarters of Troop 15, with a few specific elements changed. Screens showing the status of various ship's systems and the broader war glow, illuminating half finished meals and beverages. One of the larger screens labeled 'DEPTH' has a number steadily ticking up from 10,000. The largest screen is a map of the ocean floor indicating the disposition of friendly and hostile vessels as well as the borders of the Union and the Republic. Against one wall is a stenciled sign that reads 'Emergency Evacuation Minisub', and under that is a screen that reads 'DEPLOYED' in angry red lettering. The remnants of Troop Fifteen, now armed with their muskets, enter along with the BOY.)*

FUSILIER CRUZ

That was easy.

FUSILIER GAERLAN

You sound disappointed.

FUSILIER CRUZ

We didn't even need to kick in the door or anything.

FUSILIER GAERLAN

Were you perhaps hoping to fight off an army of security automatons? We see anything that outnumbered us, we'd be better off using our single shot on each other to end it quicker.

FUSILIER CRUZ

Who'd take care of the boy?

FUSILIER GAERLAN

For once I actually thought our stalwart Caporal made the right choice in deciding not to give a musket to the kid who was shooting at us a few hours ago. Wait, by take care of the boy did you mean like who would raise him, or did you mean we should've given him a musket so he should join in my circular firing squad idea?

CAPORAL CORDERO

Stand to, Fusiliers! Cruz is right, there should have been guards posted, we- hey, boy, stop playing with those!

(The BOY is stacking, tipping over and clacking together poker chips found on one of the larger tables. Printed on the table are numbers similar to that of a roulette table at a casino.)

FUSILIER CRUZ

Check out this table, it looks like it's got a number for every Troop onboard!

CAPORAL CORDERO

Likely it's a means of tracking each Troop's status.

FUSILIER GAERLAN

You don't believe that. Why're they physical? We're surrounded by perfectly serviceable holo screens.

FUSILIER CRUZ

(picking up a fallen thick notebook from the floor)

Maybe this'll explain! There seem to be pretty detailed logs of... wait, no this can't be right. All our names are here, organized by Troop, along with... dollar amounts? And the enemy cohorts are listed too!

CAPORAL CORDERO

What's the matter? Here, let me see. Obviously this is some kind of ledger. It of course would behoove Command to detail what it costs to maintain our-

FUSILIER GAERLAN

(grabbing the notebook)

These are odds. Gambling odds. It's a fucking betting log.

FUSILIER CRUZ

What? What does that mean?

FUSILIER GAERLAN

It means Command's been playing us and the Republic off like we're sports teams.

FUSILIER CRUZ

That can't be right. That can't be right! What about the war? The fleet actions and the ships and fortress domes changing hands? What about our comrade's lives?

CAPORAL CORDERO

(rushing over to the holographic map)

This indicates the two nations are actually fighting, trading submarines with each victory or defeat. Just... not territory.

FUSILIER GAERLAN

According to this map, each side, the Republic and the Union, are down to just one fortress dome each.

FUSILIER CRUZ

But the brochures! The presentations and ad campaigns back in the colonies! The Union and the Republic were supposed to have been founded around the great ancient fortress domes of the ocean floor, with either side laying claim to dozens of domes each! We were supposed to have our pick of which one to settle in once we became full citizens!

FUSILIER GAERLAN

Not according to these data screens. Every full citizen of the Union and the Republic are crammed into each side's single remaining fortress dome apiece. The Republic's down to Fortress Dome... Xiamen and the Union's got Fortress Dome... let's see, Fortress Dome Bagong Maynila left. All the others were destroyed in the early stages of the war, when they were shooting at each other with everything they had. Before they implemented... shit. Before they implemented the battleline and musket drills and the Troops. Before they implemented, well, us.

CAPORAL CORDERO

Limited warfare for limited resources. Kill the meat and save the metal.

FUSILIER GAERLAN

Meanwhile, keep their populations distracted by turning the war into a sport and have them betting on our very lives.

FUSILIER CRUZ

How... how could they?

FUSILIER GAERLAN

Every empire is built on the belief that some people's lives are worth less than others. I kind of respect that ours is up front about it.

FUSILIER CRUZ

Where's Command in all this?

CAPORAL CORDERO

(gesturing to the screen reading DEPLOYED)

As the sign says. They abandoned us as soon as it looked like we'd lost the battle.

FUSILIER CRUZ

But the metal! Don't they still want this ship?

CAPORAL CORDERO

I'm going over the Command crew's final communications. It seems they intend to set this ship to automatically sink to the ocean floor, then send a small recovery sub to recrew it.

FUSILIER CRUZ

And what about us? Their camera feed should have shown us chasing after Bongcaras.

FUSILIER GAERLAN

Should have- but look. The screens with the camera feed are all dead. In fact half the consoles in here are dead. This whole place is really badly maintained. They probably figured that if enough of us were left to charge forward we would take the enemy ship. When we didn't, Command just assumed we were all dead.



COLONEL EN SECOND DU CHAMPLAIN

An assumption we deeply regret, my dear Fusiliers.

(The Fusiliers reflexively point their muskets toward the source of the voice, only to lower them upon realizing it is coming from the communications console speaker.)

CAPORAL CORDERO

(saluting)

Colonel!

FUSILIER GAERLAN

What the fuck are you doing, Caporal?

CAPORAL CORDERO

The chain of command has been restored, Fusilier! I expect you to fall in!

FUSILIER GAERLAN

The chain of command left us to fucking die!

FUSILIER CRUZ

After they put bets on how long we'd live!

CAPORAL CORDERO

My apologies, Colonel! Troop 15 is exhausted from hard fighting, and thus are exercising their freedoms somewhat, ah, freely. Please be assured that once we failed to ascertain the reason for your thankfully temporary absence, we made it our first priority to seek you out and reintegrate ourselves into the order of battle!

COLONEL EN SECOND DU CHAMPLAIN

My dear, loyal soldiers of the Union, I shall grant you the honesty befitting your current status. It is indeed true that we almost left you to die in the deep. It is indeed true that full citizens occasionally indulge in the harmless pastime of betting upon the battles of the brave, all the better to invest in your successes both figuratively and literally! Nevertheless, I-

FUSILIER GAERLAN

Back up. You said 'current status'. What is our 'current status', and why has it got you suddenly telling us the truth?

COLONEL EN SECOND DU CHAMPLAIN

Why, that you are heroes. Heroes of the Union. We could not know until you stepped in front of the Command Information Center monitors, but it is now apparent that you, the noble soldiers of Troop 15, stand victorious against the Republic.

FUSILIER CRUZ

Did we even win? We only barely surviv-

CAPORAL CORDERO

(making a cutting gesture)

Indeed, Colonel! While Fusilier Cruz here maintains her noble humility, it is my duty as ranking officer left aboard to report the truth. We stand victorious against the foe!

COLONEL EN SECOND DU CHAMPLAIN

And you shall reap your just rewards! As you are aboard that vessel and we are not, we can instruct you in the procedure to recover both your own ship and the Republic you just defeated- no, liberated, in the name of freedom!

FUSILIER GAERLAN

I'd rather not drive myself to my own summary execution, thank you.

CAPORAL CORDERO

Fusilier!

FUSILIER GAERLAN

What's stopping you from drowning us to sweep this all under the rug? Apart from saving you the expense of sending a recovery crew.

COLONEL EN SECOND DU CHAMPLAIN

With you alive and well, our last battle goes from being a tragic massacre to a glorious victory against the odds. Very inspiring. Our colonial recruitment campaigns have no need of more martyrs.

FUSILIER GAERLAN

But you can always use an occasional lottery winner to dangle hope in front of people like us.

FUSILIER CRUZ

We knew that when we signed up.

COLONEL EN SECOND DU CHAMPLAIN

Take these two ships back to the Union Fortress Dome to claim what your brethren's blood has bought!

FUSILIER GAERLAN

Oooh, don't tell me- we get to be Caporals and Sargents together?

COLONEL EN SECOND DU CHAMPLAIN

Promotions all around, certainly. But nothing on the battleline- accomplishments such as yours are to be rewarded by elevation to join us in Command. And of course, those in Command are also granted full citizenship, for yourselves and your families.

(a collective silence falls upon the surviving members of Troop 15, until Caporal Cordero speaks.)

CAPORAL CORDERO

Colonel. Thank you. Thank you. We-

FUSILIER CRUZ

Hang on, when the Caporal won her last battle, she and everyone else was only promoted once! And that was a total victory, without a single casualty on our side!

COLONEL EN SECOND DU CHAMPLAIN

It is a regrettable but unavoidable fact of life that given existing material considerations vis a vis available space in our last Fortress Dome, granting full citizenship to so many at once would have been untenable. What would our current citizens say? You, however, in surviving such a harrowing battle, have demonstrated extraordinary ability.

FUSILIER GAERLAN

Ah, there it is.

CAPORAL CORDERO

Colonel... I knew those other Caporals. We were Fusiliers in the same troop together. All of us newly minted Caporals fought in the last battle. They could've...

FUSILIER GAERLAN

How are you surprised that their criteria is arbitrary bullshit? Migrants gamble, and in our case the Union's the house that always wins. The task at hand is now to glean what the Colonel wants out of whatever flowery euphemism he's about to spout.

COLONEL EN SECOND DU CHAMPLAIN

...precisely. Now, Command comes with privileges and responsibilities alike. We are expected to conduct ourselves with discretion befitting our station.

FUSILIER CRUZ

You want us to stay quiet about the betting, and about how few spots are actually left in the Fortress Dome.

COLONEL EN SECOND DU CHAMPLAIN

We are all of us fellow citizens expected to maintain order in our shared society. A society that must remain focused on the liberation of the Republic and its poor, oppressed people, despite the regrettable, unavoidable cost.

FUSILIER GAERLAN

You want us to not mention to any of the troops you'll have us command that we'll be ordering them to shoot kids.

COLONEL EN SECOND DU CHAMPLAIN

The Republic's indoctrination of its prospective citizens into fanatics is as tragic as it is dangerous. It is unfortunate that such fanaticism is impossible to rehabilitate, and must, for freedom's sake, be expunged. Posthaste.

CAPORAL CORDERO

You want us to- shit. Fusilier Cruz, lower your weapon!

FUSILIER CRUZ

(calmly taking aim at the BOY)

The chain of command has been restored, Caporal.

(CAPORAL CORDERO dives in front of the BOY just as FUSILIER CRUZ fires. CAPORAL CORDERO is killed by the bullet intended for the BOY.)

FUSILIER CRUZ

(dropping her musket and going toward CAPORAL CORDERO)

Fuck, no! Caporal, I'm sorry, I was aiming for-

(The BOY, wailing by CAPORAL CORDERO'S corpse, takes CAPORAL CORDERO's musket and shoots FUSILIER CRUZ as she approaches, killing her. Rather than try to reload, the BOY instead stares at FUSILIER GAERLAN. GAERLAN stares back, her own weapon at her side.)

FUSILIER GAERLAN

I guess Cruz had what it took, in the end.

COLONEL EN SECOND DU CHAMPLAIN

Do you?

(the BOY removes his helmet to look at GAERLAN.)

BOY

Mother?

(a stillness. FUSILIER GAERLAN raises her musket to point at the BOY, then lowers it. FUSILIER GAERLAN approaches the BOY puppet and peels off the BOY's ceremonial Republic battle uniform, to reveal the BOY dressed as FUSILIER BONGCARAS' son.

FUSILIER BONGCARAS' SON

Mom?

(FUSILIER GAERLAN peels off the next layer of clothing to reveal FUSILIER CORDERO'S son.)

FUSILIER CORDERO'S SON

Mom?



(FUSILIER GAERLAN peels off the next layer of clothing to reveal FUSILIER CRUZ's son.)

FUSILIER CRUZ'S SON

Mom?

(FUSILIER GAERLAN peels off the next layer of clothing to reveal FUSILIER GAERLAN's  
son.)

BOY

Mother?

(FUSILIER GAERLAN steps back and raises her musket toward the puppet. Darkness. The  
crack of a gunshot.)

*(A darkened room. The BOY enters- not in a Republic military uniform, for it is not the BOY from the previous scene. This BOY is the son of former Fusilier GAERLAN. He is carrying a small wooden box containing the remains of his father, GAERLAN'S husband.)*

BOY

Mother?

GAERLAN

Yes, yes Toto, give me a second. I know you're excited, but that trip got me exhausted. And your father's remains down, won't you?

BOY

Why didn't you use the sleepsacks they assigned us while we were on the way down? Didn't you used to use them all the time when you were a Fusi... fus... Fusilyeer?

GAERLAN

I'd... really rather not. Especially since your mother's a Colonel now, we get to live here now- there's real beds upstairs!

BOY

It's smaller than our old house.

GAERLAN

This is a Colonel's quarters, but if I keep working hard I'll get to be a General, and get an even bigger house for us! In fact our old Colonel used to live here, before he got promoted.

BOY

I miss our old house.

GAERLAN

It's safer here. Nothing can harm you. You can even go outside for as long as you want.

BOY

But there's no sky above us. Only steel.

GAERLAN

There wouldn't be much to see anyway, this far down. The important thing is, I won't have to leave you anymore.

BOY

You don't have to go to work anymore?

GAERLAN

The Union guarantees that we individuals are free, but we must earn everything else. We get the right to live here, but I've still got to pay for rent and your schooling. And what if you get sick?

The Union has the best medical care under or above the sea, but we need to make sure we can afford it.

BOY

Your new Colonel's salary can cover all that then?

GAERLAN

... mostly. Why don't you run upstairs and get ready for bed? I'll just get a little work from home done, then I'll come tuck you in.

BOY

Okay. I'm glad I don't have to see Mrs. Laig anymore. She scares me.

GAERLAN

Neither of us will ever have to be scared again.

(As the BOY leaves the room, GAERLAN opens a dresser and begins to put on a resplendent Union military uniform, much more elaborate than the one we first saw her in. Once dressed, she moves toward a mic stand with a large 1920s style ribbon microphone attached to it.)

GAERLAN

Colonel en Second du Gaerlan reporting. Patch me into general troop address in sixty seconds... and before that, please register my personal wager for the upcoming battle. Half of this month's salary on the newly reconstituted Troop 15. Yes... I feel like they'll have what it takes.

*(A line of soldiers in the red, blue and white uniforms of the Union once again parade march across a darkened stage carrying bulky sheet metal clad muskets with air hoses trailing behind them offstage. A tinny voice from a poorly maintained loudspeaker is heard.)*

COLONEL EN SECOND DU GAERLAN

My brave, beloved soldiers of the Union! My heart is full, for today I have the honor of bearing witness to your courage and sacrifice. It is through that sacrifice that freedom is won! Though we may speak as many-

ALL

WE ACT AS ONE!

(a volley of gunshots ring out. screams.)

(end of play.)