

Prelude to Iron

As a fragile island nation teeters on the brink of a manufactured civil war, foreign empires and corporate operatives secretly converge to claim devastating warforged technology. This unseen collision of rebellion and espionage will inevitably ignite a global conflict.

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0 - Setting Setup and DM Notes

Campaign Overview

Core Premise and Tone. Prelude to Iron is a double blind asynchronous wargame played over Discord. Five players will navigate a manufactured civil war without realizing they are actively playing against one another. The primary themes explore the cost of progress and the inevitability of war. The narrative will highlight how unseen forces in the shadows truly run the world. The setting is high fantasy, but the tone is strictly Cold War espionage. The technological baseline resembles the 1840s infused with heavy magic.

Stakes and Endpoints. Player character death is rare but possible if someone makes a catastrophic error. Political ruin is the far more likely consequence. The campaign will run for roughly seven to ten in game days. The ultimate doomsday scenario is the outbreak of a full global war. If the players somehow manage to deescalate the tension, the world survives and we move on to a different scenario entirely. The Automatica data remains a narrative MacGuffin for this specific campaign.

Contingencies for Player Elimination. The game must remain fun and engaging even if a player fails their primary objective early. If Kristina loses control of the government, she will transition to playing a government in exile. If Jamie's rebellion is crushed, I will provide her with a brand new faction to control. Zavi securing his extraction early will not end the simulation for everyone else. I will simply provide his Wolgari operatives with secondary corporate objectives while the geopolitical chaos continues to unfold around him.

Guarding the Secret. I must protect the secret of the shared player sandbox at all costs. I will actively deflect any suspicions. I am open to introducing fake NPC factions acting as red herrings to throw the players off the scent. Players can send formal diplomatic cables to other nations. I will take these formatted messages and pass them along to the respective players to maintain the illusion of NPC interactions. The grand reveal will happen only during a post mortem debriefing. I plan to host a massive group voice call and present a comprehensive document detailing exactly how all their choices intersected.

Logistics and Boundaries. I expect this campaign to run for about seven to ten days in real life. The pacing requires one post per day with a twenty four hour reply window. If someone misses a day, I will pause the simulation and fabricate real world excuses to buy time with the other active players. I will manage the backend campaign data using Bookstack. I will run the individual games through private 1 on 1 Discord channels. All mechanical trackers will remain hidden behind my screen to maintain a narrative, vibe based experience.

Geopolitical Landscape

The Guilded Nations. This is an international defensive and economic alliance formed directly in response to Beccin expansionism following a recent global conflict. The core members are Harold-Ford, Arfrodir, the Athenaeum, and others. They maintain dual political headquarters located in Harold-Ford and the Athenaeum city of Delphi. The pact guarantees mutual defense if a formal declaration of war is issued against a member state. There is no massive, unified standing fleet. A rapid response force from neighboring allies could reach the Confederacy in less than a day. Mobilizing a full armada to repel an invasion would take significantly longer. This logistical delay is the exact window Iron Bash hopes to exploit by destabilizing the country from within first.

Confederacy of Half Height (The Economic Linchpin) The capital city is Apsley. The entire nation essentially exists as an artificial economic construct and a massive free-trade zone. It functions much like a fantasy equivalent of Taiwan regarding mainland economics. The larger mainland nations maintain absurdly high import tariffs. Global trade naturally flows through Apsley to bypass those costs and launder goods into the broader market. The city itself is built directly into a staggering coastal cliffside, literally living up to the name Half Height. The wealthy elite and foreign embassies sit on the sunlit upper tiers. The working class laborers, rebels, and sprawling WTC warehouses rot in the shadowed lower docks. Their economy relies entirely on Wolgari shipping contracts and maybe some covert Beccin trade.

Iron Bash (The Southern Threat) They are separated from Apsley by a highly contested channel of water. The international community currently views the Empress as a loud nuisance rather than a severe global threat. She has a history of attacking isolated islands instead of mainland targets, lulling the Guilded Nations into a false sense of security. However, she possesses a powerful and deeply motivated navy. She justifies her expansion through an ancient and fiercely held ancestral claim. Her royal bloodline originally ruled the entire southern archipelago before foreign powers arbitrarily carved it up to create the CHH trade zone. She views her impending invasion not as an act of conquest, but as a righteous reclamation of stolen land.

The Beccin Empire (The Sleeping Giant) Bec is a massive superpower far to the east. The Beccin intelligence headquarters is an impenetrable fortress isolated deep within their borders. They view the Guilded Nations with open contempt. Beccin diplomats regularly mock the alliance in the global press while pretending to cooperate on minor international trade deals to keep up appearances. They do not share a close border with the Confederacy, and civilian travel between the two is virtually nonexistent. Because they cannot act openly, they are operating entirely through proxies and shadow diplomacy in this region to secure their buffer state.

Wolgari and the WTC (The Corporate Third Pillar) Wolgari operates entirely outside the jurisdiction of both the Guilded Nations and the Beccin Empire. They are a sovereign corporate powerhouse. The Wolgari Trading Company maintains a massive footprint in Apsley. They occupy a heavily fortified corporate district right in the middle of the city's commercial sector. The working class rebels have a highly volatile view of the WTC. The rebels know Wolgari money is the only thing keeping the island's economy from total collapse. At the same time, they violently resent the WTC because Wolgari private security forces operate with total legal impunity. The Wolgari treat Apsley like a corporate playground, completely ignoring local laws.

Lore

The Static (Magical Interference and Psychic Fallout) The Static is a recent and terrifying disruption to the global magical web. It prevents all instant, long distance communication between the nations. Rulers are forced to rely on physical couriers or highly unstable short range magical bursts. The phenomenon is not just white noise. It is a psychic fallout that actively degrades the minds of those who try to tap into it. Intelligence officers and government mages report hearing grinding gears or ocean waves instead of the voices of their commanders.

Ground Level Effects of the Static The psychological pressure trickles down to the streets of Apsley. The Static creates measurable fluctuations in the public mood. On high pressure "Haze" days, general irritability spikes across the city. This gives Jamie a massive, terrifying advantage for inciting sudden riots. The agents deployed by Zavi and Tyler face even worse consequences. Prolonged exposure causes physical tells like trembling hands or bleeding eyes. Operatives are forced to consume a Vice like Greyleaf just to ground themselves. On rare "Shroud" days, the magical pressure peaks and causes temporary amnesia. This means a perfectly planned Wolgari extraction or Beccin assassination might completely fall apart because the field agent suddenly forgot the location of the safehouse.

The Automatica Paradox The Beccin Empire successfully developed the Automatica deep within the Ossuraian Fortress. These are devastating, magically powered mechanical soldiers capable of turning the tide of the coming world war. A massive intelligence failure resulted in a data leak. Operatives for the Wolgari Trading Company secured the files and are currently holding them in their Apsley corporate office.

The Beccin Shadow Strategy Tyler faces a highly complex objective regarding this leaked data. The Beccin intelligence division actually wants the Wolgari corporation to steal a portion of these blueprints. They purposefully planted fundamentally flawed designs within the stolen cache. They hope Wolgari will spend billions in corporate capital trying to build a failed army, effectively bankrupting their corporate rivals. However, the WTC office in Apsley also possesses the unedited, perfect blueprints alongside the sabotaged ones. Tyler must deploy his Beccin spies to infiltrate the WTC building and destroy the perfect files while ensuring the flawed data successfully escapes the city in the hands of Zavi's operatives.

The Master Timeline

The Calendar and Era The campaign takes place in the year 80 BEC. Every piece of intelligence, diplomatic cable, and military order will strictly utilize the days and months established in the custom calendar system. Forcing the players to date their messages this way grounds them completely in the high fantasy setting. It also serves a critical logistical purpose for my own tracking. If the Static delays a message by two days, having the exact in game date stamped on the letter allows me to easily manage the flow of information behind the screen.

Phase One: The Prelude Phase The campaign opens with a full real world week of setup. This period represents the quiet, paranoid maneuvering before the powder keg ignites. During this phase, the players are simply setting up their boards. Scott will secretly position his naval blockades. Kristina will assign her elite police to specific city sectors. Zavi will establish his WTC safehouses and secure his extraction routes. Jamie will hide her rebel weapon caches in the lower docks. Tyler will set up his Beccin intelligence dead drops. No active combat or sabotage occurs during this week. They are simply loading the gun.

The Inciting Incident At the exact end of the prelude week, the crisis officially begins. A massive explosion will rip through a Wolgari Trading Company supply convoy right on the border of Apsley's upper elite tiers and the sprawling lower docks. The blast will collapse the primary bridge connecting the two districts. This specific event is the perfect universal trigger. It traps Zavi's operatives in the city. It forces Kristina to declare martial law to maintain order. It gives Jamie a massive surge of anti corporate sympathy to weaponize. It provides Scott his first major tick on the destabilization track. Tyler can use the ensuing panic to slip his Beccin spies past the distracted WTC security forces.

Phase Two: The Real Time Crisis The moment the bridge collapses, the calendar locks into a strict one to one ratio. One real world day equals exactly one in game day. Every player will have twenty four hours to submit their specific daily orders to me via Discord. Once all five submissions are in, the game pauses. I will compile the orders, cross reference their geographical locations, and resolve any overlapping conflicts. I will then send out tailored daily briefings to each player. These briefings will only contain the information their specific intelligence networks would realistically know. The Static will occasionally scramble or delay these daily reports to keep them constantly paranoid.

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Tyler - Chat

jaxsnjohnson — 3/15/26, 19:10

Hey Tyler! I've been tinkering a 1-on-1 solo RPGs, and I created a high-level espionage and grand strategy game and I did not know if you would be interesting. You'll be playing as the Director of State for the Beccin Empire (Bec) which is somewhere between the Star Wars Empire and USSR. Are you interested? It would be rules light and Play By Post.

jaxsnjohnson — 3/18/26 10:04

@TotalSundae Hey! I wanted to check in and see if you were interested, I know you are super busy. This pbp would be fairly light given the puppet master style.

TotalSundae — 3/18/26 10:15

I'm interested!

I'd love to know more about it!