

Missing Syndicate? (Abridged)
Corporate Intent Series Book #4

By Hallett German
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Corporate Intent

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Chapter 0: Introduction

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Some corporations are real and some exist only in the mind. This is a story about the latter, presented both as a fantasy and as a mystery. Nothing more than that.

This is the fourth, longest, and last book in the Corporate Intent series. These books were not originally planned. But, somewhere along the way, arose the idea of doing a business thriller against a dystopian backdrop. And after some effort, Corporate Intent #1 was created. Two follow-ups were written quickly -- Book #2 and the first series story, "Missing Profits." Even though Book #2 was finished first, Book #3 was released before Book #2. This was due to the extensive editing involved.

This book was created differently than previously. To prepare for this work, I reviewed each prior book. In the process, I tracked previously unfollowed leads, and noted the details provided about each character and on DCRI itself. After doing this pre-work, an outline for this book was written which was partially followed.

I am pleased to say that this last book met its desired goals. In this finale, I wanted things to be a little more dangerous and unpredictable. It was also a rare chance to explore deeper the major players of this dynamic universe. I hope you enjoy the countless surprises, unforgettable characters, and larger philosophical/sociological themes that appear throughout this ending to this unique, original, and dynamic series.

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Chapter 1: Corporate Conference

The Homeworld Ancients discovered the forces of the universe and assigned a deity to each one:

Creation/Rebirth – The moments of birth, renewal, the unfolding of potential, the springtime of one's lifetime and much more.

Maintenance – The state between creation and destruction. It can be a period of unsteadiness, eventually leading to a time of redefinition and new opportunity. On the other hand, it can be a time of a peace, stability, and unbridled prosperity.

Destruction – A time of fire, anger, removal of the existing establishment, and facing constant unknowns. The scars produced during this period can have long-standing implications.

The most dynamic times are when multiple states arise and occur simultaneously. One example of this is the simultaneous death of one thing and the creation of another object. That scenario is what follows below.

The Universe at the time was a dramatic, unpredictable dance of the above states reverberating throughout these organizations. At any given time, there were a series of checks versus counterchecks, public and private skirmishes, mergers and dissolutions, alliances and

unfriendly takeovers. The variety of groups trying to occupy peacefully or forcibly the same limited space was the major cause for the ongoing excitement. These include:

The Consortiums – They started as a set of small businesses that grew into conglomerates and then blossomed into consortiums. Their evolution was aided by a power vacuum in the government. Once formed, the Consortiums divvied up most of the universe except for part of the Pacific region. The Red and West Consortiums were the most powerful, dangerous, and unpredictable of the bunch.

The Cooperative – Comprised of a loose federation of Planets. They are more into commerce than power. However, on occasions, they flex their muscles and swallow up an unwary Consortium. (See the Corporate Intent free story, “Missing Profits” for more details.)

The Non-aligned Planets – They are the balancing force in the Universe by keeping the Cooperative and Consortiums in check. They are the watchdogs and judges for all of the galaxies.

The Government – Exists at local, planetary, galactic, cross-galactic, and universal level. Their behavior alternates from overseeing actively the Consortiums to kowtowing deeply to them. Currently, there is a mix of actions. Outrageous deeds negatively impacting customers are looked upon with a stern eye. Yet, typical Consortium activity is accepted quietly as the usual price of doing business. Extra-governmental groups such as the resources of DCRI (Dysfunctional Corporate Research Institute) and other entities aid the activities of these official organizations.

The Two Cores – (See Corporate Intent Book 3: Missing Company for more details.) Out of nowhere, two groups formed to challenge the existing order. The now deceased General Wexbalt and perennial DCRI villainess Lucinda Terano oversaw what was formerly the “Pure Core.” They tried to develop a powerful new energy source called Firexion that would have changed forever the balance of power. Fortunately, they were stopped by DCRI. In addition, there is the “True Core” group of which little is known. In the past, they were very small. But their size was offset through their clandestine and generous financing by various leaders. Their followers were fanatical and cunning including two that had been in contact and betrayed DCRI. Their mysterious presence kept DCRI staff up at nights worrying what their next move would be.

The Centauri Knights – (See Corporate Intent Book #3: “Missing Company” for more details.) This is a shadowy organization fighting for the almost forgotten ideals of Justice and Truth. However, recently, their management was corrupted by big dreams of easy money and unchecked power. Fortunately, DCRI stopped that nightmare in time and the remaining knights (including DCRI staff) are working hard to return to the ideals of the past.

The Syndicates – Currently there are only three. These are organizations united together to promote commerce and increase power and representation of their emerging areas. By forming a Syndicate, they ensure that their area would be trouble-free of Consortium interests.

This story is about one such Syndicate. The Pacific region is enormous. It has more than enough room for a Consortium and a Syndicate. The Pacific Syndicate was fiercer and more powerful than their other two counterparts were. No one would dare to cross them because of fear of deadly and immediate repercussions. On paper, The Pacific Syndicate was not too impressive nor mighty. To the unsuspecting eye, they were just a handful of conglomerates, small-/medium-sized businesses, and a dedicated cadre of businessmen overseeing it all. In reality, the Syndicate has a large military, commerce, and transportation presence that made them a tough and ruthless competitor. Outwardly, they shunned publicity and did everything well under the radar. So it was nearly impossible to anticipate what they would do since the bulk of

their activity was not visible to the public eye. However, there was an overt recent change in their behavior due likely to new management. It was apparent to nearly everyone that the Pacific Syndicate was becoming more visible and the reach of their extensive power was growing.

The most public sign of the policy change was a lavish ceremony launching their new headquarters. The display of extravagance was to promote aggressively one message. "Our Syndicate is strong and powerful." No doubt, to many organizations, this exhibition of organizational muscle was viewed with great trepidation. Things were already crazy enough without a new player emerging onto the scene.

The two-hour ceremony was to take place on the four million square acre Syndicate headquarters campus. No expense was spared. There were seemingly endless rows of oversized transportation vehicles and well-stocked armies. Chefs from all twenty of the region's top restaurants were flown in for the invitation-only meal. Thousands of Government, Consortium, and Cooperative officials were on hand to welcome the opening. However, as expected, the invitation for DCRI staff was apparently lost in the recesses of the Galactic communication networks or was never sent. The ceremonies would be broadcasted to almost the entire inhabited universe. It was truly an event not to be soon forgotten.

The official ribbon-cutting ceremony was ready to begin and it looked like all was going smoothly without any hitches. But in one blinding moment, things took a turn for the worst. Out of nowhere, an overpowering white light engulfed the entire headquarters. This was followed shortly by screams, shouting, and other loud sounds of ensuing panic. Then a different set of sounds became heard clearly. Audibly visible were deafening ceaseless repetitions of "Long Live the Perpetual Anarchists and our leader Warica Arcane. Long live the DCRI Army and our chief Judy Duty." Then for one brief moment, the light temporarily cleared. A poster with the words DCRI and Perpetual Anarchists, plus Judy's and Warica's images came into view. A haunting voice spoke taunting the now assuredly terrified and stunned viewers. "Hello dear ones. I am positive that you want to know the perpetrators of this deed. We will tell you and make it easy to find them. Simply hunt down DCRI and have them sentenced for long overdue justice. DCRI is run by those perpetual menaces Judy Duty and Warica Arcane. They have at their command sizable, uncontrollable armies that are daily committing savage, inhuman atrocities against the innocent citizens of the universe. They are the sole cause for any deaths or hurt souls today. Demand that your local authorities find them and throw them in the unfriendly depths of Shadownight prison for a long, long time. Let their bones rot away forever. We are innocent of any bad deeds. They blackmailed us in ruining this fine Syndicate. Please help serve the scales of Justice soon for DCRI. Goodbye my friends." And with that, the light disappeared and all the shocked viewer saw was a four million square mile gaping crater where the Syndicate headquarters had once proudly been. In reaction, the social media and news forums started buzzing. The pundits would talk about nothing else for days. The cosmos was in a determined mood for revenge and swift retribution. People wanted answers to what happened and justice to the guilty participants. Ubiquitous talk show host Lee Garson ranted away each evening demanding blood and heads on a platter. His lengthy unhinged nightly tirades amplified this situation. Unrelenting searches were taking place in six galaxies. But the fruitless results raised only the frustration level and the din of those that wanted immediate resolution. To many, the obvious and the inevitable path to the truth all began bringing in the officers and staff of DCRI, pronto. Inhabitants of each world were glued to their video screens breathless awaiting for the next news update to appear. The pressing question on everyone's lips was -- why had DCRI not been found so far?

Chapter 2: The Story So Far

Earlier that week

Late summer evenings at “The Castle” could be uncharacteristically quiet and humdrum. It was a momentary respite for the building’s workers that almost all took advantage. Some years back, it was agreed unofficially and quietly to allow a brief lull from work activities during these three weeks. This included those conglomerates whose sole aim was to make money at the expense of their unsuspecting customers. Still, the office’s sole owner was still hard at work, albeit at a more relaxed pace. In fact, Judy Duty looked forward to catching up on things during this time. Judy was the President of DCRI (**D**ysfunctional **C**orporate **R**esearch **I**nstitute) and was immersed in cleaning up and organizing the web of numerous unclassified electronic files. This needed to be done because DCRI’s ongoing mission is to research and pursue the Universe’s greedy and dysfunctional conglomerates. Judy smiled listening to the calm and the ticking of the wall clock. All of the other investigators were using this time to get away. Moreover, the usual weekend duty was placed on hold. As a result, the standard non-stop activity was ceased currently. (However, should an emergency situation occur, all of her staff were ready to return at a moment’s notice)

This time of year was especially hard for Judy being when her father and DCRI founder Lee Duty had passed away. He had been sitting in this very office chair watching a meteor shower high above the Many Miles River when he had collapsed. With his untimely departure from the Homeworld plane, Judy was entrusted with running the many complex operations of DCRI. She reflected back about her Dad’s past and proud legacy. At a young age, he had been ripped away from his parents’ loving arms and placed in a Loan Default Orphanage. This was because his parents fell behind unexpectedly on their bank payments for their first time in their lives. At age eighteen, he was free to leave the Orphanage. Because of his inexperience and excess emotional energy, he bounced from job to job. Then one day, he made two decisions. The first vow was thereafter he would be only his own boss. As a result, he started his own business. And the second vow was that there would come a day when he would begin taking his vengeance against all unethical corporations.

He worked hard at his business and success came to him at age thirty. Lee found a way to make quickly and at low cost triangular donuts. Customers loved the new slogan, “we have more sides than our competitors.” After a couple profitable years of operation, he sold the business enterprise to a major food company. With the generous sales proceeds, he retired comfortably from the business world at a still relatively young age.

Lee began to think of how he could fulfill his second promise made so long ago. Since he had more than enough money to live well, he started DCRI -- Dysfunctional Corporation Research Institute. The Headquarters, known to locals as “The Castle” was built on a hilltop overlooking the Many Miles River. From there, Lee could watch all the passing ships go by and plan his next moves. And what was an imposing structure it was. There were fifteen meeting rooms on three floors plus a secret basement. In addition, another twenty-five rooms served as offices, storerooms, restrooms etc. So, there were always a variety of places to meet.

A galactic accident gave Lee an unexpected gift. A jumbo spaceliner on its way to a distant planet caught on fire and there were no survivors. This included the children of some prominent families that were on a school trip. The subsequent outcry demanding a thorough investigation paid off. It showed that several conglomerates were negligent of performing simple maintenance ensuring a successful voyage. The result was the passage of the Harmful Corporation

Elimination Act. It created a new governmental group, Bureau of Non-Official Corporate Inquiries (BNOCI) which licensed and oversaw the activities of CBFs (or Corporate Bounty Firms). Because of the high license fees and stringent acceptance criteria, there were only a few approved CBFs. Lee worked hard to get DCRI licensed as one of them. Once authorized, they were allowed to conduct non-governmental investigations of suspected companies without punitive recourse. He actively supported a company's right to make a profit but had no tolerance for those companies where greed and harm of their employees, customers, and countless worlds were the only motives.

Once licensed and under Lee's guidance, DCRI pursued relentlessly unmasking companies that had a wanton disregard for the public interest. All of the targeted firms became ensnared successfully in DCRI's grasp. Along the way, he made DCRI into a feared investigatory body. This new CBF struck terror in the hearts of corrupt corporations everywhere on the planet. Somewhere between the numerous chases and inevitable captures, Lee fell in love with a young woman while investigating her father's firm. Since she was estranged from her father and abhorred his harmful business practices, Claire returned passionately Lee's advances. They fell in love quickly and were married. Sometime after, they had a baby girl. Claire loved her new family. But her time with them was abruptly terminated when her heart unexpectedly stopped.

Lee was devastated. After a painful period of reflection and mourning, he doubled the intensity of his investigations and worked on raising alone his four-year old daughter. He reared her the only way that he knew how -- by having her actively take part in DCRI activities. His real focus was to give his child, Judith Ann Duty the best education and appropriate knowledge to run eventually DCRI. (Yes, she was bestowed the unusual name of Judy Duty). This included many lectures on corporations, consortiums, and other entities. He also explained how to bring them to justice when their malevolent behavior warranted. Then one evening he passed away and Judy in early twenties became the sole overseer of DCRI's operations. She took it all on her shoulders and exceeded beyond everyone's expectations.

Each year, she seemed to undertake more involved and dangerous challenges. Fortunately, she had the outstanding staff to do this. This included the following:

Established Stars Team

Warica Arcane-Lemay, Chief Operating Officer and Business Partner. She had a varied history of challenging her brothers as a one-woman anti-corporate army (See "Corporate Intent Book #1: Missing Employees" for more details.) Along the way, she re-established ties with fellow DCRI employees Johnny Lemay (now her husband) and her cousin Laura Garfield. She and Johnny were raising their son Victor (named after her mother Victoria).

Laura Garfield-Tychato, Head of Research. She is blessed with a brilliant mind and amazing body. She married Prince Bobby of Mirwint. They have a daughter named Warica after her cousin. (Although Mirwint is a small and not well-known kingdom, both Laura and Warica learned at a young age fluent Mirwintean. This allows them to talk privately if needed.)

Johnny Lemay, Lead Investigator. A master spy, super IT geek, and perfect to use in any corporate case. He is happily married to the woman of his childhood dreams, Warica.

Desmond Tewes. Investigator and Lead Research Analyst. Analytical but sometimes hotheaded. Well-connected into all things military-related. Likes getting Warica upset. Divorced. His ex is an acclaimed performance artist. Currently likes dating female Centauri Knights.

Rising Stars Team

Lisa Wimont, Investigator and Team Leader of the "Rising Stars." She bought at a great price a former executive house. After making some effort, has hit it off with Warica and Laura.

Monroe Pendleton Investigator. His father was a flight captain. Thinks well on his feet. Has a tempestuous relationship dating Lisa.

Holly Wedgemont Junior Investigator. Former hotel employee and has an estranged brother that is one of the founders of the “True Core”, one of those fringe groups trying to gain power and become a major player.

Judy had completed fixing the unclassified files up to the Js when she got a frantic call from her on-again, off-again boyfriend, Floyd Starcrest. “Sweets, have you seen the news? It is awful. Get out of there, fast! You are being blamed falsely for the disappearance of the entire Pacific Syndicate! I know it was not you! This looks very bad. Sending you the news clip.” Judy watched the first few seconds in horror and did not need to see anything more. She took some things from her desk, grabbed her always-packed “emergency trip” suitcase, and sent a coded message to her entire team to go to the well-disguised Satellite Office #3 as soon as possible. She would pick up details along the way. DCRI blamed as ruthless outlaws? Not even her Dad had gone through that situation.

Chapter 3: From a Place of Fearlessness

Judy was always thinking ahead. She always tried to ensure that her team had the flexibility and tools that they needed at all times. This included DCRI’s crown jewel – “The Hospital” and multiple satellite offices. “The Hospital” is an amazing “wonder lab” located in a secure location. Once there, her team could easily find clues that other forensic teams might miss. Some time back, Judy had anticipated the need for a series of secret, fully equipped satellite offices where the DCRI staff could work if their headquarters were compromised. These had only been used three times before. Satellite #1 was created as a fake office to throw off anyone that visited there. Satellite #2 was her typical choice. It was located under an abandoned rail station outside of the city. However, given the urgency of the team to hide, Satellite #3 became their new temporary home. And there were other offices scattered throughout the universe as well.

Of all the various satellite offices, #3 was truly unique. The major reason for this was it resided in plain sight plopped in the middle of town. Even if entered by someone, it would not be obvious that it was a DCRI hangout. That is because most of the time it served as a legitimate four-star boutique hotel. Sometime back, Judy had invested the DCRI reward funds into buying the hotel. Of course, she had bought it with off-world lawyers and third parties. She also made sure the transaction was not traceable by using an ordinary-sounding alias and wearing a carefully planned disguise. The hotel was very profitable and well recognized in the area. Part of her prerogative as owner was setting conditions for her investment. This included the right to bring in new employees within twenty-four notice, the right to take over any room with no notice, and finally run an unlimited tab for room service. Judy did not want to bleed the hotel dry or attempt to ruin its reputation. So, she had exercised rarely this right. And if she had, she would have offered to reimburse for any costs that exceeded her profit share. Still, she was in a terrible bind and DCRI staff needed a place to stay immediately.

Within eight minutes of getting Floyd’s call, a well-disguised Judy was on the way to the hotel via a well-hidden underground pathway from “the Castle.” Judy left not knowing if she would ever return. Once emerging again, she grabbed a bus to downtown. On arriving at the hotel, the staff greeted her. Immediately comprehending the situation, they said the entire fifth floor with its meeting and eight bedrooms was ready for her. (Note all rooms were conveniently

soundproofed.) It had been a slow month for the hotel with everyone vacationing elsewhere. Judy said that she may need it for some time and of course, the staff was fine with that. She may have other demands later that day but that was it for now. It was a good time to rest as her staff hustled back to the “office.” Once everyone was there, the real pretty much non-stop work would begin. So, being utterly exhausted and emotionally drained, Judy entered a sound sleep for what could be the last one for a long while.

It was dark when Judy awoke. She looked at her communication device and was relieved. Everyone on the established and star teams had received the message and was heading back. She also had asked a former employee to join them as well. All of the other DCRI employees were placed on a paid vacation until further notice and were welcome to hide in the Threadville satellite office (#4). Given that the whole seediness of the area and its residents appeared to be hanging by a thread (hence the name), it is unlikely that anyone would go hunting for them there. It was the sort of area that few questions were asked and everything was in a transient state. A fight or a robbery could happen at any minute. But if you were seen as an outcast or on the run, you were generally left alone. Judy connected her computer to a secured network and started to research what had taken place. Many things bothered her of the whole incident and she began to write these down. She rang room service and her dinner was brought up promptly. She was going to make sure the entire hotel staff got a good-sized bonus after this case was over. Judy became encased in a wave of doubt. But before diving further into those emotional waters, she recalled the last advice from her father:

“It will come a time when there will seem to be no ground under you and all is disintegrating. That is not the time to fall apart. It is just part of the job description. Any of those gnawing shadows are only self-imposed. Instead of anxiety and fear, come instead from a place of fearlessness and faith in your abilities. Keep focusing on your analysis. By doing that, you will be able to conquer any situation.”

Judy recalled how sure he seemed at the time. Did he know that his time was nearly up? Or had he a premonition that something was about to break in the corporate universe? She could only speculate but would never know for sure. In any case, his advice seemed sound, and she was going to follow it. Analyze the event. Ask questions. Look at the data. Follow the money trail and the players involved. What had happened? And who was behind it? Once knowing that, the answer to the why question should become more apparent. Just then, Judy heard a firm knock at the door. She was now traveling her first steps on an uncertain and intensively demanding road to reach the truth.

She opened the room door and saw Diana’s friendly but disguised face. Once DCRI’s head of research, she had retired with reward money from a case and started making pottery. (Discussed in the free Corporate Intent story, “Missing Profits.”) They embraced briefly and Diana entered. She took one look at her former manager and could see the stress in her face. She started by quietly saying, “I’m glad that you invited me. I needed a break from the kiln. I am getting a bad case of pottery burnout.” Judy responded in kind. “Understood, I need the best minds that I know on this one. People that I can trust. And yes, your hands need to heal from those annoying blisters.” From there, they talked briefly about old times. However, there were more pressing matters to consider. Diana also shared what she had heard from the video casts on the way over. “The Universe is trying hard to find ways to drop or suspend DCRI’s CBF license. There are THREE inter-galactic commissions looking into the whole matter. There is visible activity of innumerable patrols pretty much everywhere looking for you. Plus, that darn Lee

Garson is the self-appointed non-stop dispenser of vile lies against you. I'm never seen anything as crazy like this."

Judy responded quickly. "Thanks for the update. But the CBF licensing was created to be resistant to political winds. It cannot be dropped. So, the best that they can do is not renew the license when it comes up in three years. They cannot take away the license until then. I can live with that. What about..." Another knock and moments later, the first of her current teams came in. Then there was more talking and knocking until the entire room was filled with DCRI staff. Judy spoke up loudly, "Time to move to the meeting room." And everyone walked down the hall to where they were going to congregate and talk through all that mattered for now.

[To learn about the rest of the series, visit <https://sites.google.com/site/hallettgermanfiction/series-books/corporate-intent> The complete book is available for reading.]