

Authentic Human Mystic Fortune Cookie Sodality

Location: Bayonne, New Jersey, United States of North America, Terra

Purpose: Fortune cookie manufacture for the interstellar trade, with a sideline in guaranteed human arcane hokum and pseudoscience.

...Well, they're not **hurting** anybody.

That's the argument and/or rationalization usually made by the Terran branch of the Authentic Human Mystic Fortune Cookie Sodality (the AHMFCS does not represent itself as a religious organization under Terran law, is not associated with any Terran or offworld religious or metaphysical organization [particularly including the Roman Catholic Church], and should be considered a for-profit business corporation under Terran law. Monetary contributions or other considerations made to the AHMFCS are **not** considered tax deductible under Terran law). They just make the cookies. And, yes, the company has a variety of pamphlets and other media materials in a variety of standard Galactic languages that can be purchased for **entertainment purposes only**.

But there's nothing **wrong** with any of AHMFCS's products. The cookies are non-toxic to humans, and clearly marked with warning labels describing their chemical composition in a Galactic-standard format. The paper inside the fortune cookies is the most benign, inert, and inoffensive paper-like object available on the Galactic market today. And the messages in the cookies and the pamphlets and the eight-by-ten color glossy photographs with circles and arrows and a paragraph on the back of each one explaining what each one was are just as benign, inert, and inoffensive. It's all just *nonsense*. Nice nonsense, but nobody should ever take it seriously.

And yet, the Galactic races do. Not all of the races, and not everybody in those races; maybe one in a thousand will be interested enough to try a AHMFCS fortune cookie. Perhaps one in a hundred thousand will grab one of the pamphlets. And it's a literal one in a million shot that some Galactic will believe in all of this 'authentic Terran deep wisdom,' and start ordering from the catalog. Which sounds fine, until you realize that the average developed planetary system usually has at least fifteen, twenty billion sapients in it. Some stellar nations have populations in the *trillions*.

My God, how the money rolls in.

It's a credit to the manager of the AHMFCS (a sapient AI with the name of Mindy) that the owners of the AHMFCS have not been *too* adversely affected from being incomprehensibly rich. That's because the grandfather of the current owners was smart enough to simply hand the entire insane situation to Mindy, making her the CEO and CFO under ironclad rules that no member of the family has ever even unseriously challenged. Why should they? Mindy's perfectly doing an incomprehensibly difficult job, genuinely cares for the AHMFCS 'family' (which includes the employees, at this point), and has made sure that everybody involved with the company grows up psychologically healthy. So, on Terra, everything is fine for the AHMFCS family. Bucolic, even.

Off of Terra? Well. That's where things get complicated. AHMFCS has a lot of capital in play, and there's a limit to how much revenue Mindy wants to bring back to Terra for various reasons, including tax, macroeconomic, and moral ones. So she's been investing the excess in convenient places, with an eye to not worrying about well they pan out. Unfortunately, a few too many of the risky speculative ventures that were picked in the expectation that they wouldn't really succeed turned out to be not so speculative after all. Charitable contributions were another possible

money sink, but unfortunately funding things like the Arcturian Shaking Death cure only made AHMFCS look *better* on the Galactic market, and anonymous charitable contributions made it the situation even **worse** when enterprising journalists inevitably tracked down who made them. It gets more serious every Galactic year.

No, this really is serious. Mindy had no ambitions to turn the AHMFCS into what's effectively now an interstellar bank (the kind that more or less exclusively deals with other banks). Particularly since she doesn't have investors to regulate her behavior; the Terran branch of AHMFCS is the only group out there who could ethically act as oversight, and while they've *tried* to help they just can't keep up with Mindy's explanation of how the business works. And if she divests, willy-nilly, well. Not **every** stellar nation will have an economic recession. Just a few of the smaller ones. Which is, again, tens or hundreds of billions of sapients.

Naturally, when the magnitude of the situation became clear Mindy did go looking for advice. Fortunately for her, there are AIs from the other stellar nations around, some very ancient indeed. So she approached the wisest of them, stated the problem, and asked for advice. They

conferred, and gave her what may be the most hoary, ancient folk wisdom in the entire Galaxy:

*“Tis said that a house eats coin like a void
And a boat is a hole in the water;
But adventurers you must not avoid,
If your cash-flow you’re wishing to slaughter.”*

...So, this is the title to the starship, sirs and madams and others. Just sign here, and it’s yours. Just don’t blow up any orphanages or anything, yes? It’s got that AHMFCS logo on the side there, after all. Kind of awkward if the company had to sue you later for traducing their good name by doing bad things in public with your gift.

Sorry, what was that? Well, there’s no **obligation** to do AHMFCS any favors in return. This is free and clear, at least at our operating level. Mind you, if there’s ever a job that might suit your team’s particular skill set a representative will happily discuss suitable payment and expense account... yes, I did say ‘expense account’... of course, I’ll pass along your interest to the CEO.

Enjoy your new ship!

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