

Thermopylae

"Human perfection and technical perfection are incompatible. If we strive for one, we must sacrifice the other: there is, in any case, a parting of the ways. Whoever realises this will do cleaner work one way or the other."

— Ernst Jünger, *The Glass Bees*

Memes: Asceticism, Individualism, Militarism, Humanism

Adherents: ca 70,000

Brinker habitat/subculture in the Jupiter moon Themisto. Originally founded in 25 BF, it is one of the older and larger Brinker groupings. Since 1 AF a member of the Jovian Republic.



Background and philosophy

"If we look on idly, heaven and earth will never be joined. To join heaven and earth, some decisive deed of purity is necessary. To accomplish so resolute an action, you have to stake your life, giving no thought to personal gain or loss. You have to turn into a dragon and stir up a whirlwind, tear the dark, brooding clouds asunder and soar up into the azure-blue sky."

Yukio Mishima, Runaway Horses

The Thermopyloi started as an offshoot of the Laconian Rebirth movement, a militarist movement reacting to the decadence of Earth culture. The founders, most notably the Australian survivalist Bruce Moorebank and the anonymous Chinese mercenary/poet "Zhuge", felt that mankind had stopped aiming for personal excellence and was increasingly addicted to instant gratification. They urged people to embrace asceticism, self-control, physical discipline and a constant testing of one's worthiness to survive. They gained a dedicated following but the movement soon began to splinter ideologically. A sizeable fraction embraced modern technology and eventually evolved into the Ultimates. Another fraction took a bioconservative turn under the influence of Shintaro Morita and became the Thermopyloi.

The philosophy of Thermopylae is that it is the last ditch defense of humanity. The name comes from the idea that they are the tiny group of Spartans that spiritually hold back the encroaching posthuman world by being an example to others. Even if the struggle is futile it must be fought, since to not do so would be to betray the human spirit. The teachings of the group are a mixture of old Greek and Roman virtue philosophy and stoicism, various warrior philosophies such as bushido, a survivalist ethos and the idea of being a spiritual warrior that fights against the loss of the true human. Ideally each member should become a sovereign individual fully responsible for all aspects of their life, able to survive on their own. It reveres writings by authors like Yukio Mishima and Ernst Jünger.

The movement is skeptical about technology. Technology embodies its own ideology, dictating how people can live and think. This leads to a wholesale rejection of most advanced technology (especially human enhancement) except for technology necessary for survival. This is one of the

main roots to the disagreement with the Ultimates. The second is the role of spiritual warriors in regards to the rest of mankind: the Ultimates think it is every man for themselves, while the Thermopyloi think they should stand apart but act as an example or paragon to inspire others.

Under Morita the Thermopyloi migrated to Themisto, setting up a beehive habitat inside the moon. The motivation was partially to avoid cultural contamination and partially security (they had previously had problems dealing with local governments and autonomist networks taking exception to their militarist ways). Polemach Morita was also concerned about the survivability of the inner system in the case of a "major, imminent disaster". When the Fall occurred he was proven almost right.

Outside relations

"Time only strengthens my conviction that it was a good and strenuous life, and that the war, for all its destructiveness, was an incomparable schooling of the heart."

Ernst Jünger, Storm of Steel

The Jovian coup was an unconnected, welcome surprise. While the original foreign policy of Thermopylae was near-total isolationism the inhabitants felt a great deal of kinship to the Junta. Here was a group of military men and women willing to take a stand to save transhumanity and bring order to the Jovian system. The Junta found the Thermopyloi idealistic supporters, helping to improve their claims that the coup was not just *Realpolitik*. The habitat is of little importance on its own, but having young Thermopyloi regularly join the Jovian marines is a boost to morale. The representatives from Thermopylae in the Republic parliament might not be very powerful, but they provide a reliable hardliner core on many issues. Conversely the Thermopyloi found themselves liking the idea of being part of a larger alliance: while they are staunch individualists they also encourage people to voluntarily form tight teams. Joining a tight team of bioconservative defenders of humanity seemed to be the right thing to do.

Economically Thermopylae exports a few minerals and maintains a set of navigational signals. The location of the moon between the inner regular moons and the outer irregular moons makes it tactically relevant: the Jovian Navy has a sensor installation on the moon that is maintained by Thermopylae.

Outsiders are increasingly visiting Thermopylae after it joined the Republic. The habitat doesn't accept "tourists", but it does maintain a retreat (the "agoge") where outsiders can be immersed in the harsh teachings of the culture. They are kept partially away from the mainstream of the habitat but successful trainees may end up trained together with the youth of the Thermopyloi. It happens that some join the group, usually after grueling tests to see if they are totally committed to becoming warriors of the spirit. Since such recruits are often more doctrinaire and dedicated than the native born they serve to balance to the few dropouts that abandon the habitat every year.

While Thermopyloi support the Jovian Republic they do not quite buy into the fascist or collectivist mindset it often seems to foster. While they have nothing against marching in their uniforms, they do it because *they* want it, not because of any collective will or need to belong. To some Jovian officers this suggests a worrisome political unreliability of the Thermopyloi, but

since few have any interest in making an officer career or preach anything this is tolerated. Conversely the Thermopyloi are sometimes amused by how much the Republic takes its own propaganda seriously.

The transhuman fractions are all viewed as lost causes. Maybe a few individuals can still understand what it means to be human, but it is doubtful. Thermopyloi in particular do not get along with ultimates: both groups think the other has misunderstood a fundamental ethical principle and sold out. Anybody calling a Thermopyloi an Ultimate should get ready for a fight.

To outsiders the Thermopyloi look silly – they always seem to try to make things as hard and inefficient for themselves as possible, taking great pride in it. While their courage and spirit might be romantic it is simply no match for modern technology. Of course, the Thermopyloi are willing to rise to the challenge.

Society

“I am an anarchist – not because I despise authority, but because I need it. Likewise, I am not a nonbeliever, but a man who demands something worth believing in.”

Ernst Jünger, Eumeswil

Thermopylae is a rigidly ordered society where everybody claims total individual freedom – a not too uncommon paradox in autonomist or Brinker habitats.

In theory all citizens are equal and sovereign. They are anarchists, free to do whatever they want and to take the consequences. The rules of Thermopylae society are only rules to those who choose to obey them. But in practice disobeying them will bring severe chastisement since everybody else chose to obey them. In the Thermopylae philosophy of law there is nothing fundamentally moral about rules: they just exist. The rules the Thermopyloi have decided to submit to aim at training them to become better warriors and to survive the threats the history will throw their way.

Thermopylae runs on a system of seniority and reputation. In many ways they are identical: a person who has survived this life long is worthy of respect. Unlike most rep networks it is normally maintained entirely socially rather than with computer support. People know who their superiors and inferiors are, and are expected to show it. Disobeying orders from seniors is a serious matter, often swiftly punished or leading to a formal duel.

The most respected citizens form the elder council. Most elders are responsible for one or more functions of the habitat such as power, training of youths, medical care etc. but may also be responsible for more general issues like strategic planning or analyzing doctrine. The council acts as a court if needed, making decisions by majority vote.

The council (and hence Thermopylae) is led by the Polemarch, the elder responsible for the ongoing battle. After Shintaro Morita stepped down due to old age in AF 6 and committed seppuku Polemarch Darius Belew has led the habitat. He might not be the inspirational leader Morita was, but he is a keen networker that keeps things running and focused.

Upbringing is unsurprisingly harsh, an endless set of tests and challenges to force children and youths to grow into true warriors. Practically any trick from any warrior culture is sometime thrown at a young Thermopyloi – grueling physical exercises alternating with tough intellectual questions in hot high gravity chambers, being given nails to pierce cheeks or limbs with, surprise depressurisations, bloody competitions for food rations or sleep spaces, live exercises with weapons deliberately made to malfunction...

The training tends to make Thermopyloi tough, unafraid of pain or damage (despite the self-imposed limits of their medicine) and always ready – and good at – striking back. A Code duello managing the kinds of accepted dueling (from minor fights among friends to serious duels to the death about matters of great importance) channels the violence that could otherwise easily disrupt their society. Courage and honor are held as the highest values. It is sometimes expressed about a respected person as “she is a true human”, meaning that she upholds the highest standards of courage and integrity.

An aspect of Thermopyloi culture that few outsiders ever notice is their interest in culture. Knowledge transforms how we see the world, art and beauty enriches the spirit. But while there is an ideal of warrior-poets able to both handle close combat and express the beauty of the situation the practically minded Thermopyloi have never been much for academics, frivolous waste of resources or impractical things: the best art is functional, it does something. The more that can be expressed with less, the better. Similarly holding deep religious or spiritual commitments is viewed as fortunate, but they tend to be austere and deeply private.

While Thermopyloi often appear to take insane risks they always aim at survival: when they are planning to die it will be very obvious. Just like a well lived life is not futile, a good death is not regarded as futile either. It is the final decisive period of a sentence.

Thermopyloi characters

“Perfect purity is possible if you turn your life into a line of poetry written with a splash of blood.”

Yukio Mishima, Runaway Horses

As a faction, being a Thermopyloi gives the character the advantages: +20 to Fray, +10 to two other skills, Pain tolerance level 1. Disadvantages: may not start with anything but a Flat or Splicer morph. Splicer thermopyloi will not have a cortical stack; the few outside recruits who have stacks remove them in a ceremony upon becoming full citizens.