CLASSIC BATTLETECH™

BLAKE ASCENDING™

CATALYST game labs™

A JIHAD PLOT SOURCEBOOK COMPILATION

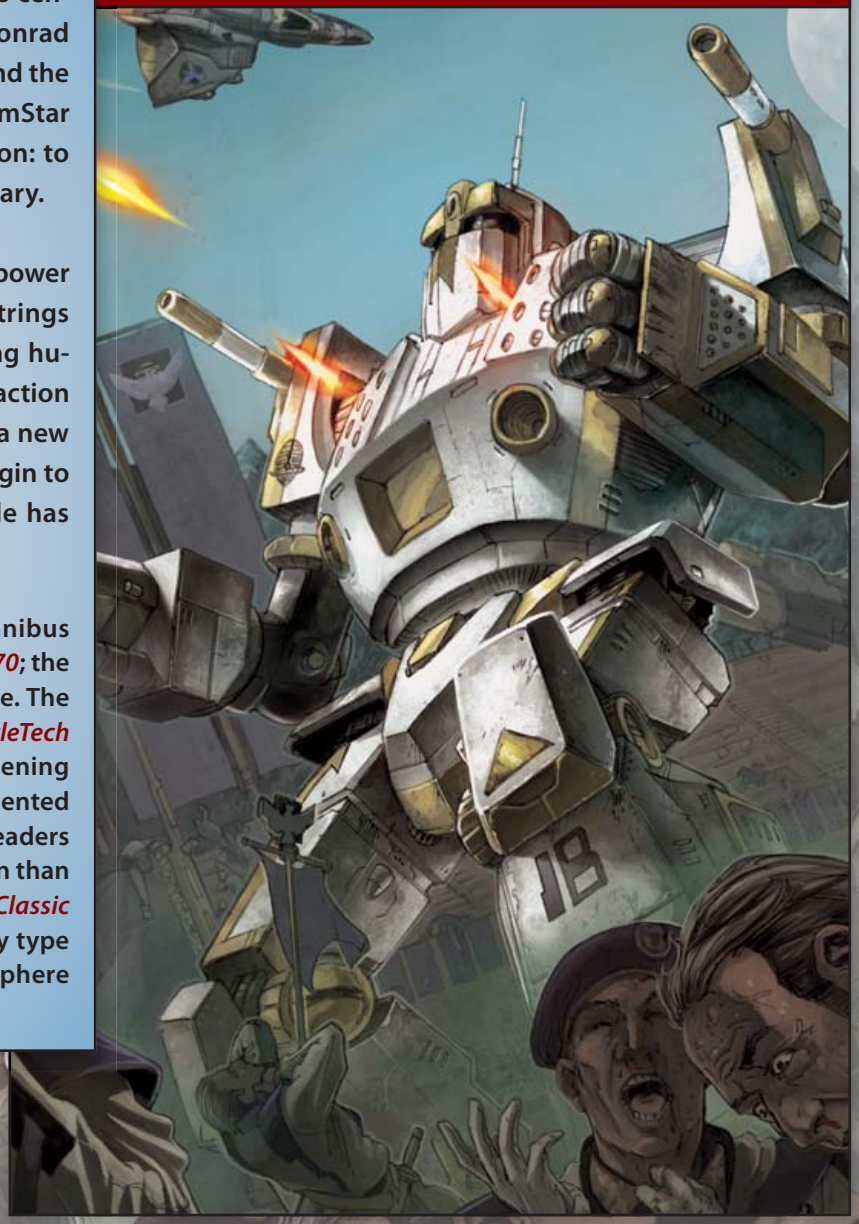
THE EARLY YEARS OF THE JIHAD

November 3067 saw the culmination of work two centuries in the making, work begun by Primus Conrad Toyama of ComStar, successor to Jerome Blake and the man responsible for single-handedly turning ComStar into a pseudo-religious organization with a vision: to lead mankind to the light…by any means necessary.

When the Star League self-destructs, a shadowy power behind the fanatical Word of Blake pulls the strings taut in righteous anger, launching a war to bring humanity to its knees. Confusion reigns, and each faction finds itself isolated amid its own turmoil. Yet as a new decade dawns, glimpses of the greater whole begin to appear through the dark clouds. The true battle has only just begun.

Blake Ascending: A Jihad Compilation is an omnibus reprint of *Dawn of the Jihad* and *Jihad Hot Spots: 3070*; the first two sourcebooks in the seminal Jihad plot line. The *Blake Ascending* sourcebook shakes the *Classic BattleTech* universe to its foundation, documenting the opening years from 3067 to 3070. The series of events presented in this book unfold in a rolling format, allowing readers to immerse themselves more directly into the action than ever before. Players of both *Classic BattleTech* and *Classic BattleTech RPG* will find framework rules to run any type of campaign in regions through out the Inner Sphere during this chaotic time.

KNIGHTS OF THE INNER SPHERE FIGHT EXTINCTION



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INN NEWS UPDATE...

Blake Ascending

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THE DEVELOPER'S SAY

The Word of Blake first appeared in 1992 with the publication of the *ComStar* sourcebook, a direct result of events from the novel *Lost Destiny* by Michael Stackpole. As with any major schism within a fictional setting—especially one revolving around a pseudo-religious order—the plan from inception was to ultimately stage an apocalyptic future battle between the sundered halves of ComStar. However, as with so many plot threads weaving through the *BattleTech* universe, at that point in time the unfolding of events was nebulous at best.

In 1994, FASA held its first fiction summit concerning the *BattleTech* universe. At each of these large-scale summits—which have occurred every two or three years for the past decade—the *BattleTech* developers and editors, the president of the company, game creator Jordan Weisman and the primary authors of *BattleTech* sourcebooks and novels met to develop the next several years' worth of plot threads, which they could then weave into novels and sourcebooks. At the 1996 meeting, participants began to firm up the nebulous plan, using the word "Jihad" for the first time to describe the coming battle. However, the major events of the Twilight of the Clans and the FedCom Civil War still needed to be developed and published, making any jihad many years distant. At the next fiction summit in 1998, the Jihad received a little more meat on its bones, though the meeting participants spent most of that time spelling out the details of the huge FedCom Civil War.

The summit in late 2000 saw serious effort to develop the Jihad event. Authors and developers finally put on paper a series of novel ideas and concepts (along with rough sketches for accompanying sourcebooks) to begin what would become the Word of Blake's crusade… and then everything came crashing down. FASA closed its doors in January 2001, and it appeared *BattleTech* might die.

Fortunately, the *BattleTech* community refused to let that happen.

WizKids, Inc. purchased the *BattleTech* Intellectual property and went on to publish *MechWarrior: Dark Age* (the collectible miniatures game set 65 years in *BattleTech*'s future). Meanwhile, FanPro licensed the rights to continue publishing *BattleTech* sourcebooks and rulebooks. Since that day, FanPro has published a new base box set and more than twenty new sourcebooks and rulebooks, while getting additional products back into print as well.

However, a key element temporarily went missing. From the beginning, *BattleTech* has been a living universe, growing and moving forward, its characters, nations and people constantly evolving. After the FedCom Civil War plot line ended in 2001 and 2002, the *BattleTech* universe went into hibernation of sorts—stuck in 3067. This hiatus allowed us to explore numerous facets of the universe never before fully developed (such as publishing construction rules for battle armor and support vehicles, generating badly needed revisions of such books as *AeroTech 2* and *Technical Readouts: 3026* and *3057*, delving into some of the "supposed" powers behind the Clans and Houses in *Interstellar Players*, launching the *Historical* and *Handbook* series, and so on), but the lack of forward progress in the timeline made itself felt.

The hiatus took place for numerous reasons. It allowed FanPro to firmly establish its ability to produce quality products (including the creation of a fact-checking group of fans to help maintain continuity/quality), and enabled WizKids to firmly cement its own timeline and game before starting to close the gap. The decision to "pause" the *BattleTech* universe was not made lightly. In 2003, I proposed that by 2005, all other criteria should be met and we could finally delve into the Jihad.

We soon realized that the framework for how the Jihad would take place and develop had changed almost beyond recognition since 2000. Instead of presenting to the community a largely unexpected event (beyond foreshadowing laid down across the past decade), as FASA had done with the Fourth Succession War and the Clan invasion, the history of the *MechWarrior: Dark Age* timeline spelled out in some detail the events of the Jihad, including its ending. We also did not have the primary venue for conveying such a mammoth storyline; no novels about it had been written. (WizKids did launch a new and successful line of *MechWarrior: Dark Age* novels, continuing to flesh out a new and exciting universe and characters, but these books don't provide the support needed for *Classic BattleTech* fiction.)

So when we convened another summit at the end of 2002, we quickly realized we had to think outside the box across the board. The standard, all-inclusive, mostly straightforward style of sourcebooks published for *BattleTech* over the past twenty years simply would not cut it. Instead, writers needed to generate a completely new style that would put the players directly into the events of the Jihad, unfolding them as time and sourcebooks progressed.

We also had to deal with continuity as never before—not only to tie in and develop the past ten years and more of plot threads across dozens of FASA/FanPro published products and novels, but also to work in the numerous threads leading *back* from *MechWarrior: Dark Age*. We needed to develop these plot threads through the Jihad to create the "next era" for *Classic BattleTech* stories and sourcebooks in the Jihad's aftermath, and also to lay the foundation for events planned for the future of *MechWarrior: Dark Age* (game and novels). All this while attempting to provide action-packed storytelling rife with suspense and surprises to shock and entertain; not just to keep the community coming back for more, but to generate new excitement for the *BattleTech* universe.

To achieve that goal, more front-end work has gone into this product than any of the roughly fifty others I've worked on. We spent half a year alone kicking ideas around and fleshing out a proposed style of presentation that all Jihad sourcebooks will follow, its outline and the accompanying timeline: a ten-thousand word proposal. Because this project would start to move into *MechWarrior: Dark Age* territory, more so than any other *BattleTech* product published by FanPro to date, it would require WizKids' approval to move forward. I consider it a testament to the work all the various authors put forth that WizKids approved it without a single requested revision.

THE DEVELOPER'S SAY

Based on the proposal, detailed writing assignments were generated. Once written sections came in, they were handed off to the fact-checking team, which—combined with the playtesters and authors—generated more than two-thousand e-mails in the weeks (and months) of review and counter-review. Outside of the fantastic work they've done in making the *Handbooks* a quality line, they earned their keep and then some with the mammoth effort they've poured into helping make this product and the Jihad as a whole all it can be.

Overall, we've done more front-end and back-end work than for any previous product I can think of…and all for a product that covers only the first year of the Jihad!

As you dive into *Dawn of the Jihad*, you will notice that the short fiction piece at the front not only ends in a cliff-hanger, but that the continuing story will not be published in future sourcebooks. Instead, it will continue at www.battlecorps.com (the official online source for canon *Classic BattleTech* fiction).

I made this decision for several reasons.

First, the cliff-hanger aspect of the fiction piece fits *Dawn of the Jihad* as a whole; this is only the first year of the Jihad and the whole product ends on a cliff-hanger, waiting for the story to continue in *Jihad Hot Spots: 3070*.

Second, while the *BattleTech* sourcebooks have always been entertaining in their own right, players would have missed the full experience of any major *BattleTech* event (from the Fourth Succession War to the Clan Invasion, Twilight of the Clans, the FedCom Civil War and so on) without the accompanying novels. I believe *BattleTech* has survived for more than twenty years *because* of those novels and the dynamic storytelling format that began in 1986 with the publication of the first *BattleTech* novel, *Decision at Thunder Rift*.

As FanPro has grown over the past three years and increased the quality, size and scope of its products in preparation for fully accepting the *BattleTech* mantle and moving the timeline forward once more, BattleCorps has grown as well. While able to explore numerous aspects of the *BattleTech* universe—including historical fiction—I believe BattleCorps' true contribution to the *BattleTech* property and more importantly to the community will be felt during the Jihad. In what has already generated a huge buzz of online excitement, "Shadows of Faith"—the first of many stories supporting, fleshing out and weaving through the various future FanPro Jihad sourcebooks—appears at the front of this product.

I have always contended that every license, from the million-selling computer games and novels, to decals and miniatures, to the Heavy Metal software line, all provide essential support for the *BattleTech* universe. BattleCorps is no different. Even though so many people have poured so much time and effort into the *Dawn of the Jihad* sourcebook to make it as exciting and dynamic as possible, *BattleTech* fans will miss the full experience of the Jihad without the fiction BattleCorps provides.

So now comes the test.

You hold in your hands the culmination of nine years and thousands—if not millions—of man-hours, the beginning of what I hope will be a fantastic and enjoyable ride for several years (and numerous sourcebooks) to come.

In the end, none of this would be possible without the *BattleTech* community. Though it is my sincerest hope that this product will generate the excitement needed to spark interest among a new generation of players, while bringing back those who have parted ways, this book is dedicated to those fans who have stayed the course with *BattleTech* through thick and thin. It is because of you that *BattleTech* still exists and because of you that we've dedicated so much effort to making the Jihad the most enjoyable event yet in *BattleTech's* long, illustrious history.

Only you can judge whether or not we succeeded.

Thank you.

Randall N. Bills
Classic BattleTech Line Developer

[*Assistant Developer's Addendum: There's really nothing I can add to the above except a heartfelt dedication of this product to the fans at large. Thank you all for your stalwart support and love of the game, even in our lean years. Starting now, I hope, we can repay your patience and devotion in full.*

Herbert A. Beas II
Classic BattleTech Assistant Line Developer]

SHADOWS OF FAITH - PROLOGUE

NOTES

A people always ends by resembling its shadow.
~Rudyard Kipling

The truest light often casts the darkest shadows behind men. The power of true faith is never to be taken lightly.
~Jerome Blake

World Cathedral
Hilton Head, Terra
12 September 3067

"Something must be done!"

Cameron St. Jamais smiled, hearing the strong voice of Alexander Kernoff rise above the din of the arguments. He hid his grin behind a hand, smoothing down his thin, dark goatee as Kernoff's powerful command swept through the dimly-lit Spire reverberating in power not wholly natural. Its sheer volume shook the five crystalline podiums growing up out of a translucent floor, but an undercurrent of angelic harpsichord and some time-delay echo gave Kernoff's voice its real strength of conviction and god-like authority.

Precentor ROM had broken the safeguards restricting use of behavior modification synthesizers within the Spire. Again. Or he'd subverted the latest True Believer tasked with maintaining those encryption algorithms.

Either way, Cameron counted it another victory for the Toyama.

Someone, after all, must bring order. Especially as this latest gathering of the Ruling Conclave had gone the way of so many before it. A tug-of-war between Word of Blake's two strongest factions. Power brokering. Agendas to promote. Plans laid against the future. And, always, a wealth of resources to divide.

Hilton Head Island was no stranger to such activity, of course, having been so long under the aegis of ComStar. And here as well was where Word of Blake chose to return their own seat of power, constructing their World Cathedral over the ruins which had once housed the First Circuit. A grand edifice, unlike anything conceived or built by Terra's former tenants, the cathedral was a perfect wedding of state and church, historical tribute and technological advancement. Brilliant, white marble façade set over strengthened ferrocrete and coated with a laser-refracting glaze. Wide, columned portico, its thick pillars cored with electronic countermeasures. And a functional space-defense system—capital class lasers and particle cannon—hidden within several tall spires along the roof.

Inside, such devotion to "militant aestheticism" was just as complete. Walls of the nave and chancel paneled with holographic plates, able to dissolve into the illusion of a woodland setting, a star-lit spacescape, or battle-scarred plains (among many other choices) at a command from any one of the Conclave leaders. An eight-bay transept, each station fully shielded and capable of assuming full local control over Terra's hyperpulse generators and—with careful coordination—the HPGs of several neighboring star systems as well.

And atop the *Genius Loci* Tower, the *presiding spirit* of the cathedral, was the main Spire where only a member of the Ruling Conclave could be admitted.

A domed observatory with full holographic control of its environment, currently the five senior precentors manned their individual stations beneath a nighttime sky filled with bright, bright stars. Arranged equally around the circular arena, each crystalline podium was alive with a soft, golden glow radiating from deep within. And as the three men and two woman traded glances with each other following Kernoff's excited (and excitable) outburst, a backwash of light splashed up against expressions of annoyance, and concern, and not a little anger.

The bickering faded. Though more, Cameron suspected, as the others quickly readjusted their own filters to prevent Precentor ROM from wielding undue influence.

As he himself did, sliding his fingers across the holographic controls displayed above his podium's glowing, faceted surface. The dim light played little against his dark skin, and the gold striations radiating at the heart of his podium—"god stars" Precentor Willis had once called them—dimmed even further beneath a strong, blood-red tint. A not-so-subtle hint at the processing power being used by the Precentor Martial. More than any others among the Conclave.

"Something *is* being done, Alex." Precentor William Blane finally answered Kernoff's demand. "The Allied Mercenary Command is being slowly marginalized."

Precentor Blane stood to Cameron's left. Leader of the True Believers faction and a friend of Captain-General Marik, Blane was often the public face of Word of Blake. As usual, he leaned lightest on his podium's resources. His "heart" was pure and golden. The backwash of light turned his white, brocaded robes a soft, buttery gold. His eyes looked like sunken pits, however. His face drawn and haggard.

Too many days spent fasting? Or too little sleep?

Blane passed a shaky hand over his podium, activating a preset program. Overhead, the holographic representation of a Milky Way spacescape faded down to black, to be replaced by a much more basic map of the Inner Sphere. The five Great Houses. The minor powers, including what was left of Rasalhague. The Clan holdings. Thousands of star systems representing billions upon billions of lives, all paying homage to their petty, nationalistic governments.

Two systems in that backdrop glowed unnaturally bright. Terra. Birthplace of humanity and seat of power for Word of Blake.

And Tharkad.

SHADOWS OF FAITH - PROLOGUE

"It is a time to tread cautiously," Blane said. "The third transfer of power is upon us. In just over two months, the Star League convenes its fourth triennial conference. The first order of business will be a motion to elevate Word of Blake from probationary status within the new Star League to active membership with full voting rights." He looked about. "We do not want to tip our hand ahead of time."

"Nothing is more important," said Precentor Laura Chang on Cameron's right. A tall, slender woman with military bearing, towering above her podium, and another True Believer if only by default. One of few Expatriate leaders to survive the last two years of purges, she kept a strong core of her followers under Blane's guidance to help balance out power within Word of Blake.

"Of course you would agree with Precentor Blane." Dampening fields dropped Kernoff's voice to an acceptable level, though a *slight*, off-focus timber had Cameron wondering if Word of Blake's spymaster still slipped behavior modification undercurrents into his tone. "It took Victor Davion's ascension as ComStar's Precentor Martial to open your eyes to the light."

Chang leaned away from St. Jamais, toward Kernoff on her other side. "My eyes have remained always open, Precentor ROM."

Still, Cameron did not miss the shadow which drifted across her face. Similar to the one which darkened the "god star" shining in the heart of his podium. Again, Cameron stroked the thin goatee shading his chin.

What was Chang hiding?

Not her aversion to Alexander Kernoff, or the Toyama faction, that much was certain.

Cameron lowered his hood, laying it back across his shoulders, then returned his hands aside the podium to grip the cool, faceted edges. "Precentors," he said. "We've no time to quarrel."

He let a soft touch to his voice carry where shouting might have been ignored. As the man who commanded Word of Blake's military arm, he had no need to run roughshod over the Conclave. No one could afford him as their enemy. There were still whispers about Willima Willis. "God stars" indeed.

"If Precentor Blane has new concerns about the Star League summit," he said, "I would like to hear them. Perhaps the ComStar audit has been more successful than he let on?"

An attack, but a subtle one. And not without merit, his concern. The resurrection of the Star League in 3058 was, by one way of thinking, mankind's first enlightened step in over three centuries. Three hundred years of deprivation and depredation—as the Blessed Founder, Jerome Blake, had forewarned. Now, possibly, on the verge of recovery. At the last conference, Blane working closely with the Free Worlds League's Captain-General, Word of Blake had been admitted to the august body as a probationary member. But there had been…concerns. Mainly that the Free Worlds League enjoyed undue influence over Word of Blake due to their close political and economic ties. ComStar had been charged with the investigation.

If the light which flickered so uncertainly on Tharkad (host to this year's conference) was indeed Blake's promised beacon, it would not do to be caught unawares.

Especially by the heretics.

"No," Blane said. He waved a thin hand. "Nothing so terrible. ComStar's lack of faith makes it easier to blind them to the truth. They could never believe a pack of 'zealots and misguided faithful' could possibly hide anything from their 'all-seeing' eyes."

Which summed up the difference between Word of Blake and their false brothers quite well. Both believed in the safeguarding of technology, though for the Blakists it was a divine charge. And both organizations still oversaw portions of the vast interstellar communications network which tied together the systems and worlds of the Inner Sphere. But just as ComStar's secular changes under the Mori Heresy, led by the devil Anastasius Focht, caused an irreparable schism, they'd also wrapped the heretics in self-righteous agnosticism and logic.

They'd forgotten the strength of true faith.

They'd forgotten how to keep the real secrets.

"A copy of ComStar's audit has been forwarded to your personal attention," Blane promised. "They found no more than point-eight percent discrepancy against our original declarations."

"We could have done better."

This last was from Precentor Anuska Brezhnic, the fifth of the Ruling Conclave's five precentors. She sat on the far side of Blane in her powered chair, shattered legs bumped right up against her shortened podium. Once a part of the Counter-Reformists, smallest of the ruling factions within Word of Blake, she now led them in place of the late Willima Willis as a splinter-group of the Toyama; in the same way Cameron St. Jamais led the revolutionary 6th of June and Alexander Kernoff the growing One Voice movement. She rarely spoke unless asked a question of and even more rarely voted, preferring to abstain. It was how the Toyama and True Believers kept the peace now that they had split the Conclave between themselves.

"I say we could have done better!" When she did voice an opinion, Anuska Brezhnic would not be gainsaid, or ignored.

"We could have," Blane finally said. "But anything less would have looked suspicious in the *absence* of corruption. Even one full percent in graft, kickbacks and payoffs would be considered light by way of the Successor Houses."

She pounded a fist against the arm of her powered chair. "We are *not* a Successor House." Cameron nearly smiled again, thanking her for the continued attention leveraged at Blane, but did not. "We are Blake's shepherds. Though we may not always know his will, we continue his work."

"We all continue the Blessed Blake's work," Kernoff said, careful not to patronize her, "in whatever way we must." A pause. His bright blue eyes found each precentor in turn. "And I *still* argue that we must not let a pack of filthy mercenaries challenge our divine cause."

SHADOWS OF FAITH - PROLOGUE

Back to Wolf's Dragoons and their Allied Mercenary Command.

It put Cameron in a difficult position, with Kernoff leading the Toyama these days and the fact that he shared the other man's frustrations with the meddling mercs. In the last year, especially, the Dragoons and their allies had thwarted military operations on Hall, on Helios, and made difficult further undertakings on another half dozen worlds surrounding Terra. Undertakings aimed at the establishment of a new Terran Hegemony. It had taken Precentor Blane's chief political handler sent to Hall to rescue that situation.

But by making it an issue among the Conclave, Kernoff opened the door to an internal investigation of the Precentor Martial's methods. His effectiveness. Precentor Blane had opened too many such doors himself in the last few years; it didn't do to give him a standing invitation.

"Outreach," Cameron said, naming the Dragoons' world. Turning it into a sneer of distaste.

A few quick-keyed commands made the system glow brighter on the overhead star map as well, flashing a dangerous, glaring red. Only two jumps from Terra. The world responsible for over sixty percent of all mercenary hiring within the Inner Sphere. Seat of the Mercenary Review and Bonding Commission.

"Our on-planet agents make a convincing case for a preemptive move." Were incredibly strident on the subject, in fact. "Maybe it *is* time to…review…our failsafe position." Said in such a manner to promote action, not more administration.

And as he'd suspected, Blane wanted no motion brought forward to actually do anything. Not so close to the third transfer of power. Not when everything they'd waited for all seemed ready to land in the lap of Word of Blake.

"We can entertain that at our next meeting," Blane said. "Perhaps. Any application of hidden assets, do not forget, will set off a flag against ComStar's *completed* audit."

Stressing once more the value of fast-approaching Star League summit.

Oh yes, Blane had his own agenda to promote. Or, more to the point perhaps, he had *Captain-General* Marik's agenda to promote. The ruler of the Free Worlds League would likely be the next First Lord of the Inner Sphere. He and Precentor Blane relied much on each other, and no doubt Blane saw their alliance giving him power to break the Conclave and assert himself—finally—as Primus. Formal director over Word of Blake.

Was that blood Cameron smelled? A vulnerability?

"A wise decision." He folded arms across his chest. His dark, voluminous robes draped easily along his lean frame. "I should, naturally, undertake a personal review of all contingency plans before making any recommendation. And any course of action would be precipitous, considering our lack of strong intelligence concerning the Dragoons' movements."

He would seem to be capitulating to Blane, and scoring fresh blood against the leader of his own faction at the same time. But if the True Believers' leader saw it coming, he had the sudden steel to not let it show on his face.

"Of course, I would then submit that Precentor ROM be given access to further resources. In order to investigate any possibility of threat from a mercenary action."

Kernoff did not bother to hide his smile. Even went so far as to nod his encouragement to St. Jamais. "Did not Blake once say, 'information is ammunition?'"

Blane hesitated, then nodded. "And whose resources do you propose we gift Precentor ROM?" the precentor asked. He shrugged, as if the question hardly concerned him. No doubt girding up for a battle over shared resources between True Believers and Toyama.

Blood. Oh, yes. Salty and warm. "We still have unallocated forces and material resources stemming from last week's decision to pull our support from Sian. Sun-Tzu's decision will not to be without repercussions, after all."

There were several thin smiles. Even Chang, though likely everyone in the room knew very well Blane had already marked those "freed and unallocated" resources for his continuing efforts within the Free Worlds League. Not that he could admit to it.

"It is a simple shift to task those resources to support our efforts in the Chaos March and against Outreach," Kernoff said, assuming there would be no objections.

There would not be. Precentor Blane was cagey enough to poll the room on his own, see that there were three obvious votes in favor, and even Chang would have trouble arguing against the allocation. Cameron watched the argument play out over Blane's face. Saw him nod. "Very well. Shall we meet again to discuss what these resources have purchased us? In…one week?"

"I shall need at least three to begin new operations."

"We seem to have settled on two."

Two weeks. The outside limit before Cameron and Blane had to leave for Tharkad. For the summit. As it was, they would rely on a partial command circuit of JumpShips, relaying from one star system to the next, before splitting up to join their WarShip escorts already en route.

Which meant any oversight of Kernoff's actions would be slight, at best.

It worked nicely.

"Blessed be those who walk along Blake's shining path," Blane said, offering a quick prayer for the end of the council, and their continuing efforts to prepare. "May they avoid the shadows of desolation, and be ever ready for the darkness ahead."

"Blessed be," the others said. Including Cameron.

And then he was rudely disconnected from the Spire's interface.

To others in the room, *physically* there, he knew his body had slowly faded away before their eyes. But for him the Spire suddenly blinked out of existence, to be replaced by a swimming feeling of vertigo as the neurofeedback loop which had kept him connected between Mars and Terra suffered complete degenerative failure.

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Darkness.

Falling.

A cold, metallic taste at the back of his throat.

And then the world came crashing down on him from all sides in a riot of color and sound and labored breathing. A world turned one hundred eighty degrees from what he had believed only seconds before.

In theory, it was an elegant solution for when Cameron or Kernoff visited the Mars Research Station. Point the MRS hyperpulse generator at one of the Terran stations and create a real-time link. No appreciable time delay. Devote high bandwidth to carry a full-sensory virtual reality signal, and link his podium within the Spire to the replica built here within the simulation chamber.

In fact, the local technology was so very similar to what Cameron had once used in MechWarrior training, though advanced far beyond a simple combat simulation.

The ultimate in telecommuting.

But while his consciousness had never been truly transferred earth-side, the illusion had built up *momentum*. Similar to the way a man on a treadmill, running in place for any length of time, can step off the track and then suddenly reel back as his mind was torn between the idea of running without moving, and then not moving without running.

Here, his reality had been stretched for so long within the illusion, it truly felt like a rubber band, snapping back into form, or nearly so.

Cameron St. Jamais sagged to his knees. Pounded a fist against the side of his leg, using the pain to help focus his thoughts.

With care he stripped the sim-gear away: a cloth cap wired with electrodes which had fit snugly over his head, and the wired gloves. Then he laughed, dry and brittle, and slowly hauled himself back up the podium.

Gone was the darkened arena of the Spire. The simulation chamber had reverted back to simply displaying the MRS lab, relying on the same image-transference technology used in the mimetic armor of a Purifier battlesuit. Not quite perfect. A watery distortion blurred his surroundings.

He ignored this and checked the logs still displayed on the podium's holographic screen, confirming his suspicions.

Then he cracked the seal on his chamber, and stepped out into the real lab with its stainless steel fixtures and white porcelain countertops. A static charge in the air made the short hairs on his arms and the back of his neck immediately stand up, bristling. The ozone scent of warm electronics left an acrid taste in his mouth. Reels of fiber optic micro-cable lay strewn about the room, along the walls and spooling over the floors, connecting the large computer core resting within one workstation bay to various stations filled with diagnostic equipment.

CSDI-2103 was stenciled on the block-shaped core.

Two doors led from this room. A double-wide sliding door of brushed steel. And a much smaller personnel access hatch recessed in the back wall of the lab. Not secret, the smaller hatch, but definitely not for just anyone's use. Cameron paused near the hatch, and thumbed his DNA onto the small control panel. The hatch irised open and he activated the communications circuit as well.

"Lab A-14, cleared for use," he said. The technicians could return now, and complete their latest analysis.

Then he stepped through the hatch, which whispered shut behind him.

Cameron stood in a long corridor hewn through solid rock, fused and polished until the walls gave back a dark reflection. Glowing runners along the floor and ceiling provided enough light to see by, just.

He turned to his left and pushed off in a gliding walk, perfectly at ease in Mars's point-three-eight gravity. His boots scuffed the floor between long, casual strides. His formal robes would have been impractical, and so had also been a construct within the virtual reality illusion. Instead he wore a uniform jumpsuit of light gray, with a high, dark collar, and a simple cloak weighted at the hem to flow more naturally in the light gravity environment.

"There was a problem?"

The voice whispered through the corridor, pushed through hidden speakers. It had a scratchy sound to it, as if it had been poorly scrubbed by filters to prevent identification. Though Cameron knew such was not the case here.

"Nothing but a small demonstration of ability," he said.

He directed his comment in no particular direction. The corridor—the entire research station—was wired with thousands of omnidirectional mics for sound pickup. He knew this as well.

"Precentor Blane has broken our safeguard locks on the Cathedral's priority override system." He anticipated the next question. "It would be a waste of resources to try and rebuild them. If he's willing to let us know his progress, it is because he's sure of himself."

"Circles within circles," the bodiless voice said.

More like boxes within boxes. Blane had yet to figure out that he was hardly tunneling through security walls. No doubt the True Believer thought himself digging deeper into the mysteries of Word of Blake. Certainly he still believed himself in a position of true power.

The truth would be made clear to him, to them all, very soon now.

A four-way junction. Cameron caught himself at a handhold, looked left and right, out of habit. He saw one of the trusted adepts hauling a large sled of components down the right-hand corridor. Ahead, he knew, the corridor bent around toward an underground hangar bay. He turned left again.

"And Kernoff?" asked the voice.

"Is frustrated by the Dragoons' efforts to camouflage their next move. The mercenaries are shuffling around their regiments and independent battalions. Two of them, he is certain, are registered incorrectly with the Mercenary Review and Bonding Commission.

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They will claim it was an oversight, and pay a small fine. But now that the Northwind Highlanders have activated escape clauses in their current contracts to head home…it is suggestive."

"Or it may be nothing but shadows," the whispers said, chasing him along the corridor. "To err is not merely human, Cameron. It is often an imperative of the species. In the absence of knowledge, or faith, ignorance rears a dark and terrible head. But who errs? Is it Kernoff? Or do the mercenaries truly tempt our wrath so close to the third transfer of power? The agents of chaos and subversion, challenging Blake's light?"

Cameron recognized the rhetorical questions. Knew the way his master often thought out loud, even in the abstract. He came to another hatch. One of several along the corridors, and no different than any of the others. Not at a glance.

But it was different. Oh yes.

Beyond *this* hatch the mysteries of the universe were often challenged, wrestled with, and thrown down. It was where Blake's shining path truly began.

He placed his thumb against the control panel, and waited while a DNA sample was checked against the security clearances, the time, and the whims of the man who was the true strength behind Word of Blake.

It irised open, and Cameron slipped into the large underground workshop. Dropped immediately to one knee. His cloak billowed behind him as if stirred in a breeze.

He kept his head bowed, though his gaze was up and searching the shadows. There was the computer center rotunda at which he'd already logged thousands of hours, combing through rosters and force strength estimates and countless communication logs. And the holographic imaging table, capable of working with new technology simulations or battlefield displays or anything in between and of a combination.

The sensory deprivation tank, now wheeled back against the nearby wall, lid standing open as if waiting for its next victim. Perhaps an Inner Sphere leader next time. Perhaps St. Jamais. Again.

There were the sounds of motion far back in the dimly-lit space. Cameron had no way of knowing if the sounds came from Him, His automatons, or His protégé.

No way to detect his master's presence at all, until the shadows parted and a man shuffled forward. Not a giant of a man. Not even a great deal of physical strength in the way he moved, or stood, or occasionally shifted from side to side as if he might change his mind at any moment to return to his all-encompassing work.

But power—true power—was rarely measured in such small-minded details. *This* had been the greatest lesson to learn of them all. Strength of will. Strength of thought. Strength of *faith*. These were what mattered. These were the blades capable of slicing clean through those knots tied into the fabric of the universe by the actions of unenlightened men.

Someone, after all, must bring order.

"We have many plans to set in motion," that same voice whispered.

And raising his head, Cameron St. Jamais smiled.

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Harlech
Outreach
18 October 3067

"Gray One to all Dragoons. Wolf Actual…down! Wolf Actual is down!" A crackle of static. Then, "Set Condition Feral."

Wide swaths of Harlech still burned. Entire city blocks lay in flame and ruin, and dark, roiling smoke scorched the sky, blotting out the sun for the third straight day. Fires baked the air so dry it stole the moisture from a man's body the moment he cracked his cockpit hatch. As if Hell itself had come visiting.

Yet Captain Jason Williamson of the Dragoons' Home Guard felt ice spike into his gut at the transmission. A thick, frozen blade digging around inside him, then ripping its way up his spine. For an instant—one incredibly long and painful heartbeat which thundered in his ears—he was back on the high, frozen plateau of Jolo Island, on the world of Elgin, listening to his comms sergeant relay another damning message. Another defeat.

Another commander lost.

A single heartbeat was all the time he had. The rogues weren't above striking while his guard was down. Caught in a crossfire between an ancient –3U *Clint* and a fresh-from-the-factory Earthwerks *Thunderbolt*, his own *Gallowglas* shook desperately as the *Clint's* particle cannon carved into one side and the *T-Bolt's* light Gauss hammered a hard-edged blow on the right. Ruby lances and emerald darts slashed in behind, the lasers scarring and scoring deep, deep into his BattleMech's armor.

The *Gallowglas* stumbled backward, out of the intersection Jason had been holding. Thin-poured concrete on the street's sidewalks cracked and caved in beneath his feet.

It took him out from under the *T-Bolt's* crosshairs—not a small favor—and all that prevented the seventy-ton machine from going down was the five-level parking garage he fell against. He caught at one of the metal guardrails with his BattleMech's left hand, tearing the steel rail half out of its concrete foundation, twisting it into a ruin.

Leaning forward, putting his own balance to the test, Jason dug in with throttle and foot pedals to lever his *'Glas* back into the fight. Large hands wrenched at the BattleMech's control sticks. Already his finger tightened down on the main trigger.

Dragging his targeting crosshairs up and over, he found the *Clint* advancing at a run, coming right at him down the double-wide street, and centered the target right dead-center across the other BattleMech's square-bodied torso. In a crackling, violent discharge, the PPC on the *Gallowglas's* right arm struck at the *Clint* with a twist of hellish, blue-white energies. It cored through all that was left of already too-thin armor. Burning. Gouging. Then Jason thumbed the firing stud mounted on the upper ridge of his control stick and added both lasers from his right-side chest to the injury.

One sliced deep into and through the *Clint's* right arm, dropping a severed hand to the ground.

His second laser punched a bright-red lance into the gaping wound already burned through the 'Mech's chest. Through the *Clint's* gyroscopic stabilizer. And right out the back.

Forty tons of upright, walking war machine relied on many critical systems, not the least of which was a highly skilled, highly trained pilot. But a MechWarrior was more than a simple throttle jockey. Through the heavy neurohelmet all MechWarriors wore, his sense of balance—his "inner ear"—was translated into a regenerative feedback signal which worked with the gyros, fed it information, and strained against gravity.

Jason had just cut that particular cord.

The *Clint* staggered and sprawled out across the street, grinding sparks beneath it as it slid across the intersection. It ground to a halt not ten meters in front of Jason's *Gallowglas*. Struggled to right itself.

Sweat burned in Jason's blue eyes and his breathing came in careful, shallow gasps as the waste heat from the 'Mech's fusion reactor bled up through the cockpit deck. His temperature gauges, never good to begin with as he fought his way through the burning city, spiked hard through the yellow and edged into the red.

Condition Feral.

Elgin.

Jason chopped back on his throttle, and sidestepped his machine toward the *Clint's* head. He brought one large foot up, and

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then crashed it down once…twice against the side of the angular "face."

After the second stomp, there wasn't much left but a tangle of metal and ferroglass and (somewhere inside) mangled flesh.

"On your right, Captain!"

The warning very nearly came too late. As it was, it barely gave Jason a second to think before the warning screams of a missile lock pierced through the cockpit's tight confines. But a lot could be done in a second.

Enough time for a glance at his heads up display, to see the golden icon of friendly forces moving up behind and that bright, burning red of an enemy target as the *Thunderbolt* cleared the corner and took the intersection.

More than enough to shove down hard against his foot pedals, cutting in his jump jets.

The thrusters lifted his *Gallowglas* on fiery jets of plasma, rocketing up, up over the street as the *T-Bolt's* missiles slammed into the ferrocrete street and blew a few extra holes in the corpse of the hapless *Clint*. The light Gauss slammed out with another of its nickel-ferrous slugs, taking down a street lamp and bowling over a parked car stranded curbside.

Committed, there wasn't much the *Thunderbolt* could do except throttle back and try to make Jason's jump a hard reach. But too late. City fighting favored close-in scraps and brawling tactics, and the rogue mercenary had been too eager for the kill.

Leaning to one side, working his own sense of balance against the already-overtaxed gyros, Jason turned the *'Glas* though an almost-graceful jumping spin. Timing the short "flight," he feathered back on his thrusters to dip low as if ready to crush the *T-Bolt* beneath two shovel-bladed feet in much the same treatment he'd spent on the *Clint*. One last goose on the jets, though, and he cleared the wide-shouldered BattleMech with a half dozen meters to spare and then cut the burn completely to drop in a bone-jarring crouch just behind the sixty-five ton enemy machine.

Speared his targeting reticle dead-on over the *T-Bolt's* wide back.

Wolf Actual is down!

Saw the crosshairs burn with a deep golden tone.

Set Condition Feral.

Tied every weapon into his master circuit with a quick toggle and a yell of blinding rage. Yanked back on the trigger. Again. And again.

Elgin.

And again.

His particle cannon worked the most devastating damage against the stricken *Thunderbolt*, flailing at the other 'Mech with a scourge of manmade lightning. Deep, raw-edged rents carved down the back of the machine's powerful outline. Shards and splatters of molten composite rained down over the street's black ferrocrete.

He had little but a guess that his first PPC blast might have cut into some of the struts which helped support the *Thunderbolt's* massive gyro. He knew that his first combination of scarlet lances and flurry of emerald darts cooked away at least a ton…ton and a half of armor spread all across the back and legs of the *T-Bolt*.

The impact. The armor loss. Before Jason's second furious salvo the machine already staggered forward, dropping to its knees then sprawling full length to pile up against the already dead *Clint*.

His second blistering assault carved away more armor, and chewed in behind a knee to ruin the joint. Power spikes put a strain on the reactor, and his temperature gauge pushed heavy into the red. Jason slapped at the shutdown override.

His third salvo (maybe) was the one that put a laser beam into the back of the *T-Bolt's* head. His fourth certainly found the ammunition bin caved in the struggling 'Mech's right side. It erupted in a tall gout of fire and smoke and debris, blowing out through special blast-directed chambers to preserve the BattleMech and the MechWarrior's life. Whatever was left of either.

Not a great deal. From further down the street, an assault-class *Annihilator* stalked forward leading a short column of armored vehicles and tanks, including a pair of Badger tracked transport vehicles.

As Jason beat against his overrides, preventing a heat-induced shutdown, the *Annihilator* raised one double-barreled arm and blasted all that was left of the *Thunderbolt's* head clean away.

An abrupt lull after several frantic moments. Jason stared down at the two dead machines, at mostly his own handiwork, and found he did not have a great deal of pity left to spend on these rogue mercenaries. Not after three days of slaughter and setbacks and non-stop battle. He barely remembered the three hours of sleep he'd been forced to take before he was back in the cockpit again. Nor would he accept another forced rest period. He might be a battlefield orphan, adopted by Wolf's Dragoons after his abandonment in the Chaos March, but Outreach was his home as much as he had one. And that home was in danger.

It no longer mattered to him who the attackers were, even. He knew the Fifty-first Dark Panzers were in on it. Some said Smithson's Chinese Bandits as well. *Everyone* talked about Colonel Waco: his *BattleMaster* had been caught on battle ROM footage leading the charge from TempTown. And many suspected Word of Blake. Especially after one of their Bloody Hand *creations* had been hauled out of the rubble at the power generator station.

But these two? The *Clint* and the *Thunderbolt*? They were simply his enemies. Same as the ones who had detonated fuel-air explosives in the Home Guard barracks three days before. Same as those who led the first assault, or the second, or the third. Just the same.

Jason was past putting a name to the machines. No member of Wolf's Dragoons had that luxury today. Not now.

Not anymore.

He stepped back from the wreckage, panting heavily as he sucked at the scorched air in his cockpit. Every breath pulled white-hot coals down into his lungs. Sweat burned with a salty taste on his upper lip. Stung at his eyes.

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Blinking to clear his vision, he surveyed the approaching forces. The information on his HUD tagged them as Home Guard, as did the insignia on the *Annihilator* and both Badgers. But the way the 'Mech had moved, and continued to move, said something else entirely. As did the casual skill with which the other MechWarrior had decapitated the *T-Bolt*.

Targeting systems could line up such a shot. But it took a natural touch to handle a one-hundred ton monster that way.

Then one of the Badgers rolled up ahead of the *Annihilator*, and Jason saw that some soldier had slashed red paint across the nose in a blood-red "Z." And Jason knew.

Zeta Battalion! In whatever machines they could salvage or scrounge, nothing kept them from the battle.

"We're stuck near Gateway Bridge and the spaceport is still a loss," said a female voice. The same one which had warned him earlier. "But we've got a thin line held against the rogues boiling up out of TempTown. Go, Captain! We have your back."

No matter the hand on the stick, an *Annihilator* was never going to set records at a top speed of thirty-odd kilometers per hour. Jason's *Gallowglas* might double that, though not at the moment as gray smoke seeped from every joint and the heat-stricken 'Mech could barely turn in place without its actuators locking up.

The lead Badger rolled to a stop and deployed a light star of Elemental infantry. The *Annihilator* never slowed. And the MechWarrior inside, whatever her rank, was not one to let a heartbeat be wasted.

"It might be a mistake!" she warned. Jason heard the plea in her voice, even over the static of transmission and however much she might prefer to hide it. Or not. Her *please great father let this be a mistake*. "Get to Wolf! Go, go, go!"

His first step was shaky, with the *Gallowglas's* heat-addled control circuitry having trouble. He swallowed dryly. Painful. And for a moment his vision swam again. If not for his cooling vest working to keep his body's core temperature down, he would likely have passed out somewhere between his third and fourth salvo, no doubt.

But he hadn't, and his commander might need him. The Dragoons certainly needed him somewhere. Citizens in Harlech—those who were left alive—needed them all.

His second step was stronger, and came with greater speed. He slammed his throttle against the forward stop, watching his indicators climb past twenty kilometers per hour. Then thirty, and forty.

Breathing became easier as he pushed up again near his maximum speed of sixty-five kph. By the end of the next block he had blinked his vision clear. Another block, he saw that the sweat was already starting to dry into a white scale on his forearms.

Another block. Then another. Always heading toward the city's center.

Heading there, and not wanting to look.

At least Jason had company. A lance of Kestrel attack VTOL's which had taken up station above and to his left. Then a pair of struggling Partisans. A lone *War Dog* limped along with Beta Regiment's insignia still visible on the left shoulder.

The wolf's head crest of the Dragoons had been burned away. Along with most of its armor.

A *Vulture*. A *Highlander IIC*.

Only two rogues made the mistake of crossing paths with the scattered Dragoons. A *Phoenix Hawk* and a *Caesar*, bursting out of concealment from within a large commercial office building. They shouldered their way through a wall of steel girders and concrete to challenge the *Vulture*. It was the last mistake of their lives as six Dragoon BattleMechs, as many tanks and the four attack VTOLs suddenly fell on them like a starving pack. Lasers slashed and stabbed, and cannon fire thundered across the cityscape in a new storm of destruction.

There was no call for mercy.

No thought of giving quarter.

Condition Feral was a code all Dragoons knew, though no one had ever thought to hear. Certainly not at the heart of the Dragoon home. Even Jason, an adopted orphan, was well drilled in its execution.

To meet all resistance with overwhelming and deadly force.

To treat as the enemy any military force *not* showing Dragoon codes or colors. Even "friendly" units from within the Allied Mercenary Command were to be given one warning, and one only, to stand down. Or they would be put down with extreme prejudice. Hard lessons learned on New Delos, on Hephaestus.

Simply: if it moved, and could even remotely be a threat, it died.

The *'Hawk* and the *Caesar* died. The Dragoons rolled over them as if they were little more than an annoyance as all able machines streamed in toward city center. Converging on the great hole in the skyline where six (six!) twenty-story buildings had once stood. A wound nothing could heal, and a battle that simply could not be won no matter how fast the Dragoons moved, how accurately they shot, or how bravely they stood their ground.

Hiring Hall. Jason did not even need to close his eyes to picture it as it had been. The well-kept grounds. A ten-story dome surrounded by the tallest buildings of Harlech. It was the entire reason for Outreach. Pride of Wolf's Dragoons, in a way. The center for most mercenary hiring throughout the entire Inner Sphere and once the brilliant jewel in Harlech's crown.

It was gone.

And as Jason worked his *Gallowglas* around a corner, breaking into the open, he saw as well that there was nothing more to be done here.

The Wolf Spider battalion—what was left of them—had cordoned off the area with lances stationed at the four cardinal points and patrols of two 'Mechs each walking a wide perimeter. They allowed no one to approach. Not even other Dragoon 'Mechs.

All they had left to watch over, however, was a graveyard.

Huge piles of rubble several stories high loomed over a terrible battlefield. The debris continued to smolder. Ash and dust lay in

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a thick cover over everything, including the killing fields where BattleMechs lay strewn about like fallen soldiers at a massacre, the accumulation of three days fighting.

Pieces and parts. Some near whole. Others blasted into scrap by an artillery strike, or even a fusion reactor letting loose in a small but powerful explosion. Those areas were more obvious, as the ground would be blacked and cleared for several dozen meters to any side, where a blast had swept everything clear.

Jason saw the *BattleMaster*, as well.

Collapsed over two other 'Mechs. Forward-most among many--so many!--recent kills which still burned or smoked or smoldered on the corpse-riddled grounds. The dun color. Rust red accents. The red and blue star painted on the outside shoulder, still visible, with the white "W" emblazoned over it. Waco's Rangers. Seeing Colonel Waco's BattleMech there, among the fallen honored, was hard. Even for Jason who knew the stories second and even third-hand.

But the worse was still not over. Not for the Dragoons.

That came with the 'Mech which waited alone on the battlefield; the last machine left standing. An old design and a true veteran of many wars. Blocky shoulders which housed its twin LRM launchers. The forward-thrust cockpit—now smashed and breached in a half dozen places at least.

The classic *Archer* profile.

Still painted with the blue and gold scheme *he* had made famous—or infamous—throughout the Inner Sphere.

For just that moment, Jason hoped. The *Archer* still stood, after all. The only machine left on its feet. *He* could be wounded. Unconscious. Many things, in fact. Then he saw it. The only body the Wolf Spiders had bothered to remove from *any* of the destroyed machines. Resting between the *Archer's* feet, covered in a flag bearing the Dragoons' crest. *His* crest.

And there was now a wound torn through Harlech, and Outreach, worse than the loss of the Hiring Hall. Knowingly or not someone, somewhere, had made a very, very terrible error.

Because it was true. And no mistake.

Jaime Wolf was dead.

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INTRODUCTION

One year.

In the grand scheme, a single year is less than a pebble in the bed of a stream on a single world in a single galaxy.

And yet the past twelve months have been so very much more. They are the pebble that started the avalanche that destroyed the city that unleashed a plague unlike any ever seen before, one more than capable of ridding this galaxy of the blight of humanity.

We have, of course, seen devastation not unlike this strike all too often before. And should we survive it this time, it will strike again.

Of that I have no doubt.

As I sit here in my office, I cannot help but think that the signs pointing to the coming of this devastation were clearly visible for all to see. Yet I know that feeling is merely emotion trumpeting over reason, a fanciful wish that we somehow could have avoided the suffering that plagues us. Hindsight is crystal clear, whereas foresight is at best murky, wrought with multiple interpretations.

No, logic dictates that we could not have prevented this storm from breaking upon us. Even if some of us had recognized the signs, it would not have helped. Those who obviously could not or would not listen to reason had set themselves on a collision course with fate. And fate, cruel as she is, could not suffer another such collision.

But what is the use of prattling on about what might have been? It is too late for the past. We must focus on the future, on mitigating the horrors visited upon all of humanity and finding a way out of the darkness thrust upon us.

That, at least, is something I can help to do.

As I and my colleagues sit here, behind our desks and workstations, watching and listening to and reading about the chaos and destruction sweeping through the so-called Human Sphere, we cannot help but be affected, cannot help but feel the pain suffered by so many innocents across the stars. Yet as difficult as that is to bear, we continue on. Some because they know no other life and some, like me, who believe we can make a difference and help to end this before it destroys us all.

Working for a news agency like INN provides access to an unending stream of information. Some of that information is accurate, some worthless. Most of it falls somewhere in between. Unfortunately, we cannot know just how accurate each piece of information is when we first see it. One piece that seems completely trustworthy may turn out to be a complete fabrication, while the bits dismissed as ludicrous may be the keys to the whole puzzle.

As the staff assigned to this relatively minor office began sorting through the constant information flow, we began to archive key reports and background information, as I am sure many others in our profession did. As the days and weeks passed, it became clear that even though the keys to deciphering what was truly happening were contained in that unending data stream, the sheer volume of information hid the truth of it.

That is why we launched this project.

The average person in the Inner Sphere or Periphery only knows that he or she is at war, but not why. Or possibly even against whom. At times, it seems as if the leaders of nations and militaries fighting this war don't know who the true enemy is or what their own goals are.

This project exists to give at least some answers to those vital questions.

If you are reading this, then you have as complete an accounting of the past twelve months as we can provide. We do not presume to tell you who your enemies are or why they are acting as they do; you must decide those things for yourself. Instead, we hope to give you the information you need to make those decisions.

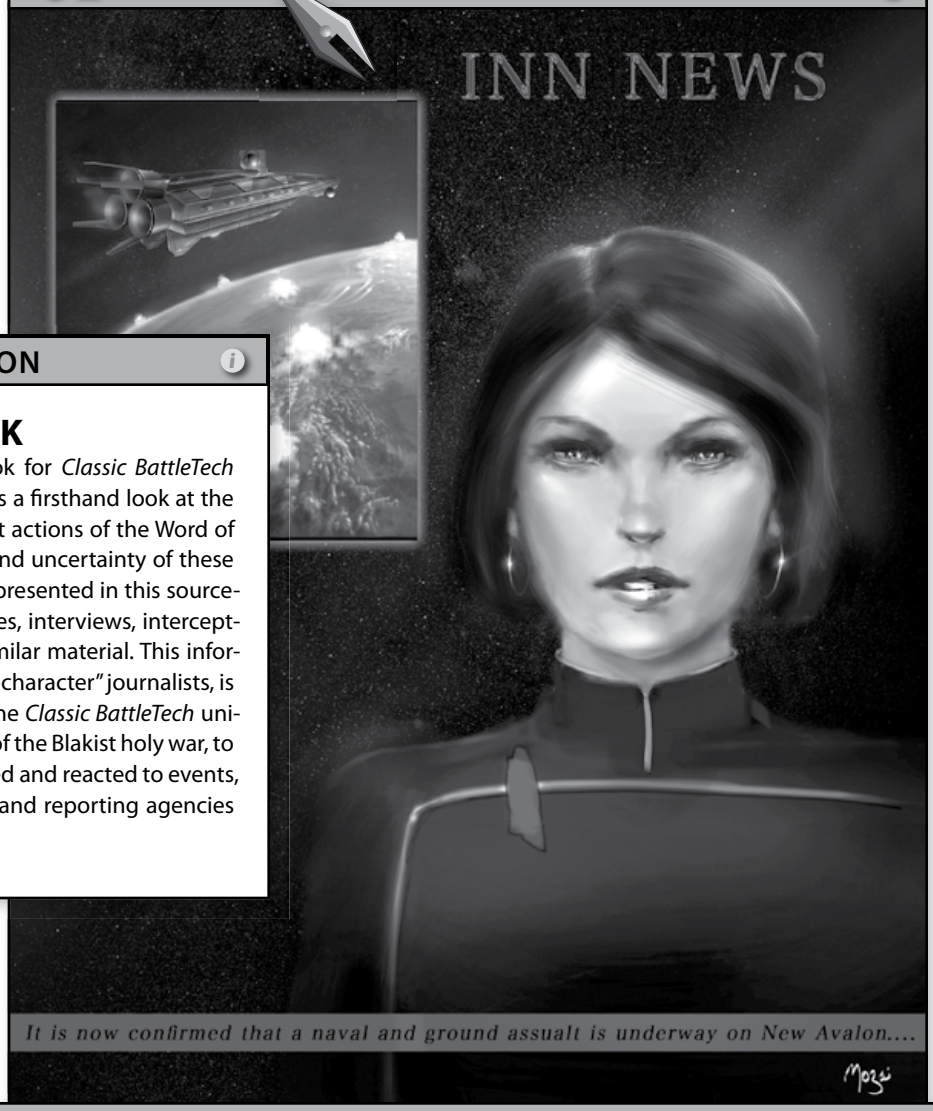
This compendium represents a distillation of thousands of hours of tri-vid and audio reports and countless pages of written material. We have chosen to include a representative selection that we believe is as impartial and objective as we can find, or is clearly biased but contains important kernels of truth *and* is balanced by similar offerings from differing viewpoints.

This darkness, this war, this Jihad, is clearly far from over. We can surmount the challenges and survive its horrors, but we must be able to see past the misinformation. Information is the ammunition we will use to fight this war, and hope is the armor that will protect us. Perhaps this compendium will help you to stockpile both.

The human spirit can be suppressed, but as long as one person fights back against the darkness, it cannot be destroyed. We are human. We cannot be oppressed if we choose not to be. This is who we are.

—Michael Bosworth, INN Special Correspondent, Orestes, Free Rasalhague Republic, 5 November 3068

INN NEWSBURST



INTRODUCTION

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Dawn of the Jihad is a sourcebook for *Classic BattleTech* that provides players and gamemasters a firsthand look at the events leading up to (and into) the first actions of the Word of Blake Jihad. To best reflect the chaos and uncertainty of these historic months, much of the material presented in this sourcebook comes in the form of news articles, interviews, intercepted communications transcripts and similar material. This information, in turn compiled by various "in-character" journalists, is divided among the major factions of the *Classic BattleTech* universe affected by the opening months of the Blakist holy war, to show how each major power interpreted and reacted to events, from the point of view of the citizens and reporting agencies who lived and died through them.

INTRODUCTION

Readers should note that, even though *Dawn of the Jihad* borrows from the same journalistic style as *Interstellar Players*, the reports included in this sourcebook cover events from the mainstream professional media rather than from the tabloids and rumor mills that produced *Interstellar Players*. Each entry therefore sums up the facts, propaganda, advice and warnings of each critical step in the early months of the Jihad, all with as much accuracy as characters living in the universe can attain. (This is not to say that every scrap of information provided is entirely true at any given point, merely that it is "as true as possible" considering local sources and circumstances.) Arranged in roughly chronological order, these reports demonstrate the scope of understanding experienced by the "mainstream" population of each faction during the Jihad.

Following the sourcebook section, *Chaos Unbound* provides players and gamemasters a guide for using the Jihad as the basis for campaigns set in the *BattleTech* universe, using a unique open-ended campaign system designed to work with the game rules for *Classic BattleTech* and the *Classic BattleTech RPG* game. Through the *Chaos Unbound* campaign, players can undergo the events of the Jihad as it happens, which will tie into follow-up campaign supplements as further Jihad sourcebooks are released.

In addition to the *Classic BattleTech Master Rules, Revised* (if playing *BattleTech*) or *Classic BattleTech RPG* (if roleplaying), players and gamemasters will find the following rules expansions helpful when using the *Chaos Unbound* material: *AeroTech 2, Revised*, *Classic BattleTech Companion*, *Combat Operations*, *Field Manual: Mercenaries, Revised* (and its various *Supplements*) and *Combat Equipment*.

AND IT CAME TO PASS

AND IT CAME TO PASS

WAR ENGULFS INNER SPHERE

This report is a draft we received from a sister news outlet on New Earth. Embedded in the article are comments from the writer's editor. Though the majority of these comments may demonstrate certain biases, both by the editor and the reporter, the bulk of the piece provides a solid overview of the events leading up to the Jihad as well as its first chaotic month.

We have also interspersed a number of related articles, hopefully giving you a better understanding of what was happening in each Inner Sphere nation at the time the Jihad struck.

—Michael Bosworth, INN Special Correspondent

DECADE OF TUMULT

While true peace and quiet have rarely prevailed throughout the Inner Sphere within the memory of anyone still living, or even within the past three centuries, humanity has had respites, if brief ones, between the wars that have engulfed us.

In fact, as the 3050s came to a close, it seemed a new era of peace might dawn in the Inner Sphere. The Clans had been defeated twice, once on Tukayyid and once on Coventry, and even though the Federated Commonwealth had torn itself apart in a brief spasm that undid most of the impressive territorial gains of the Fourth Succession War, the nations of the Inner Sphere had united—for the first time since the Amaris Coup—to destroy an entire Clan and to once and for all end the threat of the Clan invasion.

[*You gloss over ComStar's defeat of the Clans entirely. Play up that fact more, as well as ComStar's participation in the campaign to destroy the Smoke Jaguars and subsequent action in Clan Space. Also, you need to do a better job of emphasizing that the FedCom Civil War was finally the end of the FedCom and its reign of terror over the IS. –Ed*]

Unfortunately, the promise of peace and prosperity under a renewed Star League was soon betrayed, plunging the Inner Sphere and the Periphery into a series of pointless bush wars, all while the various leaders claimed to be uniting in the name of peace.

First Lord Betrays Star League

Throughout the Inner Sphere, people hailed the rebirth of the Star League as the act that would save humankind, or that would usher in a thousand years of peace (or even the Apocalypse, as a handful of religious groups and cults tried to make everyone believe). Sadly, as its first leader quickly proved, the Star League was little more than a shell. Sun-Tzu Liao used his position as First Lord to further his own interests and those of his Capellan Confederation. Even before the SLDF returned from its campaign to fight the Clans on their own homeworlds, he precipitated a war with another Star League member-state—the St. Ives Compact—using additional Star League units he had dragooned from other member-states as *de facto* occupation forces under the guise of peacekeepers.

Though he ultimately withdrew those units and replaced them with his own forces, he further misused his position as First Lord to influence the Magistracy of Canopus and the Taurian Concordat to enter an alliance with the Capellan Confederation—an alliance that provided him the troops he needed to conquer the St. Ives Compact.

The St. Ives conflict lasted two and a half years. On one side were House Liao and the nations of the Trinity Alliance, waging a war they called an "internal matter" and a "rightful police action to reunite a rogue Capellan prefecture with its motherland." On the other side was the tiny St. Ives Compact, supported only by whatever under-the-table assistance it could negotiate from its so-called allies. Ultimately, the Capellan juggernaut, no longer the joke it had been less than a decade earlier in comparison to St. Ives' meager defenses, triumphed. Or, more appropriately, the Compact's leader acquiesced rather than allow Sun-Tzu Liao to devastate her small realm.

STAR LEAGUE REBORN

(21 November 3058)

Tharkad [ALLIANCE PRESS] – Marking the end of the Whitting Conference, today witnessed the restoration of the Star League.

As she signed the Star League Constitution, Archon Katrina Steiner-Davion (wearing a stunning outfit in white brocade) proclaimed, "No matter how long I live, or whatever I do, providing the venue and framework that accomplished this great work will be the pinnacle of my career."

Precentor Martial Anastasias Focht hailed the reformation of the League as "the first step in the future of the Inner Sphere."

Captain-General Thomas Marik and Coordinator Theodore Kurita pledged to throw the full weight of their realms behind the endeavor.

Chancellor Sun-Tzu Liao declared, "[The First Star League's] destruction was our destruction, and its rebirth is our rebirth." Elected to the post of First Lord for a three-year term, Chancellor Liao swore, "This office is not, to me, a ceremonial one. It represents a sacred trust that I will guard to the best of my abilities."

FedCom Prince Victor Davion voiced the thoughts of many: "The recreation of the Star League puts an end to the internecine fighting that has plagued us for centuries. Now, united, of like mind and spirit, we will turn our attention to the Clans and ending the threat they pose to us all."

Davion then stunned the Inner Sphere by announcing his intention to travel to Luthien at the invitation of the Draconis Combine's Coordinator, adding, "From there I will greet the new year, with my friends and allies, and welcome a new era for humanity."

AND IT CAME TO PASS

CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY

(7 October 3062)

Atreus [GLOBE PRESS] – The horrifying events of May last year have finally been brought to a close. Chaired by Naomi Centrella, the special Star League tribunal found Kali Liao guilty of crimes against humanity for her part in the infamous "Black May" attacks. However, in passing judgment, the tribunal noted that psychological examinations proved Kali Liao clinically insane, and the death penalty has been commuted to life imprisonment. Chancellor Sun-Tzu Liao has been charged with confining his sister, and has chosen the world of Highspire as the locale for her incarceration.

Last year, a group of Kali Liao's fanatical Thuggee followers unleashed a wave of nerve gas attacks across the St. Ives Compact. More than fifty thousand perished, including Mandrinn Tormano Liao and Leftenant General Simone Davion. The nerve gas was allegedly recovered from an ancient Star League-era weapons storehouse on Wei by the local militia, and was employed against the Nightriders regiment of McCarron's Armored Cavalry. Several canisters fell into the hands of Kali Liao's followers, not all of which have been accounted for.

First Lord Theodore Kurita has directed SLDF Intelligence to deploy several Fury Teams to secure and destroy any remaining stocks of the Wei nerve gas, and to seek out more so-called "cemetery" sites where the original SLDF may have stored other weapons of mass destruction ages ago.

Of course, this war had far greater repercussions that continue to echo today. Sun-Tzu Liao did not merely conquer territory; he conquered a Star League member-nation, permanently altering its makeup and ridding it of a potentially adversarial vote in the Star League Council. At the same time, he pushed his own agenda within the League, one that would ultimately secure him a voting bloc made up of the nations of the Trinity Alliance.

[*Careful with your tone here. You twist the facts to suit the story, turning it decidedly anti-Capellan. Balance that tone more in your clean-up. –Ed*]

Destined Since Birth

The end of 3062 signaled the final death throes of the Federated Commonwealth after just over thirty years of fitful unity. Opponents of the alliance had appeared almost as soon as the initial treaty was signed in 3022. In fact, except for the short-lived Fourth Succession War, during and after which the incredible gains enjoyed by the nations of the Federated Commonwealth suppressed all but the most vocal internal dissent, that opposition steadily grew, burning brighter and brighter throughout the 3040s until the Clans invaded.

When that happened, all hell broke loose.

When the Clans struck the Lyran state, both halves of the Federated Commonwealth erupted—the Federated Suns because Prince Hanse Davion denuded it of its defenses and the Lyran Commonwealth because its military defenses crumbled, ceding huge regions of space to the invaders. Refugees from the Tamar Pact—the Lyran province directly in the invasion path—flooded the rest of the Commonwealth, and when troops from the Federated Suns began to take up station, some Lyran groups cried foul, complaining that Davion soldiers were "taking over [their] worlds" or that their own soldiers were dying while "Prince Davion's military [was] sitting idly by." Only the personal and frequent exhortations of Archon Melissa Steiner-Davion kept the opposition from gaining enough ground to immediately sunder the Federated Commonwealth.

Nevertheless, the damage was done. Prince Hanse Davion died as the war came to an end, and Archon Melissa Steiner-Davion was assassinated—through a conspiracy led by her own daughter, as it turns out—three years later. Bereft of the leaders that had kept the alliance together seemingly by sheer force of will, the Federated Commonwealth fractured in 3057 when the Free Worlds League and Capellan Confederation invaded the FedCom's Sarna March.

THE WEDDING IS OFF

(12 November 3062)

Tharkad [TBC] – It promised to be the wedding of the decade, an event to rival the famous (or infamous) ceremony on Terra in 3028. But now the prolonged betrothal of Isis Marik to Chancellor Sun-Tzu Liao is over.

Official press releases from Sian and Atreus have cited "irreconcilable differences" between the couple. Just what those differences might be remained a mystery until October of this year. Everybody expected Isis Marik to return to her father and the Free Worlds League, but instead she traveled with all haste into the Lyran Alliance, to Mogyrod.

Yes, Mogyrod! The same world Precentor Martial Victor Steiner-Davion is visiting as part of his so-called "Com Guard tour of inspection"!

Victor and Isis first met on Outreach in 3051, and clearly the dashing image of the "victorious warrior-prince" turned the head of the young Marik noblewoman. They met again at the first Whitting Conference in 3058, where Victor demonstrated cunning to rival his famous father, fooling the media into linking him with (of all people) Omi Kurita. Clearly, Chancellor Sun-Tzu finally discovered where his betrothed's true affections lie, and took the understandable step of ending his engagement.

Both the Precentor Martial and the onetime Marik heiress have refused to comment on their relationship.

AND IT CAME

CIVIL WAR ENDS

(24 April 3067)

New Avalon [NANS] – New Avalon has been liberated by Victor Steiner-Davion's allied forces. With the collapse of the loyalist defenders on Tharkad in early April, the bitter fighting that rocked the Federated Commonwealth and Lyran Alliance for five years is finally over.

Fighting for New Avalon began in earnest almost a year ago with the initial attack by Tancred Sandoval's battle group. The arrival of allied reinforcements under Ardan Sortek enabled the bridgehead to hold (despite intervention by supposedly neutral Com Guard forces) until Victor Steiner-Davion's troops finally landed to tip the balance against Archon Katherine.

Katherine Steiner-Davion has unconditionally surrendered on behalf of all loyalist forces.

Addressing the public for the first time since the cessation of hostilities, Victor Steiner-Davion stunned everyone by not resuming control of a reunited Federated Commonwealth.

"It was never my intention to reclaim the throne for myself. That I could have done seven years ago, after Katherine usurped the Federated Suns throne from my regent and sister, Yvonne. Now, with peace again taking a firm grip on our nations, I hope to retire and surrender forevermore any claim to rule the Lyran Alliance or the Federated Suns. These I abrogate with fullest confidence into the care of my brother, Peter Steiner-Davion, and my sister Yvonne Steiner-Davion. May they rule wisely, and with the greatest love for our people, as our parents would have desired."

ALLIANCE IN TURMOIL

(30 August 3067)

Tharkad [TBC] – Almost five months after the FedCom Civil War officially ended, the Lyran Alliance still finds itself engulfed in conflict. Fortunately, it has involved relatively little violence to date. The discord stems from the continuing low level of public approval that Peter Steiner-Davion has inspired among his people. In fact, his most recent elevation of Adam Steiner to General of the Armies seems to have fueled the fires.

Ever since Peter Steiner-Davion's installation as Archon, Margrave Caesar Steiner of Furillo has found himself receiving increased attention from many who claim to prefer a "pure" Steiner on the Tharkan throne. Though the margrave claims the attention is unwanted, this groundswell of support can be felt far and wide, though Adam Steiner's elevation has redirected some of this public sentiment away from Margrave Caesar and onto the new General of the Armies. Adam Steiner himself has also denied aspirations toward the Lyran throne; as he put it in a recent quote, "I've got quite enough headaches right now, thanks." Several other names have been proposed as "suitable replacements" for Archon Peter Steiner-Davion, including the children of Nondi Steiner, such as general Ivan Steiner, and relatives such as Roman Steiner.

Another source of instability stems from Skye, longtime source of dissent against the central government on Tharkad. Robert Kelswa-Steiner, Duke of Porrima and Skye—who publicly renounced the attacks on Hesperus II, Freedom and Skye by his own "renegade" Free Skye "General of the Armies" during the civil war—has since publicly shifted his agenda toward increased autonomy for Skye, an effort allegedly inspired by the Arc-Royal Accords, which acknowledged the limited sovereignty of the exiled Wolf Clan along the Alliance's Jade Falcon border region.

Though that split fueled the fires of nationalism and prejudice in the Federated Suns and the newly named Lyran Alliance, both nations were home to significant populations of citizens and soldiers hailing from the other, which led to continued unrest. Five years later, civil war engulfed both nations.

Thankfully, on most worlds, the war consisted of nothing more than unruly mobs sparring on and off for the duration while local police and militia tried in vain to keep the peace. True war did visit its wrath upon several hundred worlds, however, as military units that remained loyal to Archon Katherine Steiner-Davion resisted the allied forces commanded by her brother, Victor Steiner-Davion, whose goals were to remove her from power and see her punished for murdering their mother. While conventional forces fought most of those engagements, the BattleMech armies of both realms became deeply involved as well, raining death and destruction on scores of planets. Even nuclear, biological and chemical weapons once more found their way back into the arsenals of destruction.

After five years and millions of casualties, the war ground to a halt with bloody final stands on the capital worlds of both nations—battles that unseated the Archon from her power bases, but also ground the militaries and economies of the former Federated Commonwealth to a pulp. The war has officially been over for less than a year, but the ultimate costs have yet to be computed and will likely never truly be known. Indeed, we still hear reports of scattered fighting on remote worlds between citizens and soldiers claiming loyalty to one or other of the two sides.

At the very least, the so-called FedCom Civil War left its two combatant nations bereft of much of their senior military and political leadership and placed two relatively inexperienced individuals on their respective thrones—Archon Peter Steiner-Davion in the Lyran Alliance and Regent Duchess Yvonne Steiner-Davion in the Federated Suns. The conflict also left the militaries of both nations battered and understrength, and so unable to respond to the new warfare that has now engulfed the entire Inner Sphere. Had they not fought their civil war, the two halves of the Federated Commonwealth might well have been our saviors.

[*Your article is exceedingly generous to the Federated Commonwealth and anything but objective. You gloss over the wars perpetrated by its leaders, and implicitly condemn the FWL and Confederation for their*

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action to reclaim worlds lost in those prior wars. You do not even mention the war the Federated Suns waged against the Combine during the FedCom civil conflict, or the rebellious lords (Sandoval, Hasek and Kelswa-Steiner) that tried to use the civil war to their advantage—or, for that matter, the treason Victor Davion committed against ComStar and the Star League in order to illegally remove his sister from power. Instead, strangely, you choose to focus on the alleged crimes of Katrina Steiner-Davion to the exclusion of all others. Do you work for the Davionista propagandists, or INN? –Ed]

Resting Dragon Threatened

For its part, the Draconis Combine could have emerged from the past decade as a military powerhouse, having gained the most in materiel and territory from the fall of the Jaguar Clan. However, as with the FedCom states, a series of costly conflicts intervened. The first of these was the Combine's invasion of Clan Ghost Bear's occupation zone, an action wholly unauthorized and unsupported by Coordinator Theodore Kurita. Renegade officers of the Alshain Avengers, a Combine military organization originally native to a region of space conquered by the Clans more than a decade earlier, led an assault on their Ghost Bear-occupied homeworld of Alshain. While these officers fully expected to commit the entire Combine in a war with that Clan, their intelligence reports failed to tell them that Alshain had become the capital of the Bears' occupation zone and likewise that Clan's military hub.

The Alshain Avengers were destroyed, but that did not sate the Bears' taste for vengeance. The sleeping giant awoke with a fury unlike any the Bears had shown, even during the initial Clan invasion. Striking deep into the Combine, the Ghost Bears overwhelmed the unprepared Dragon and seemed poised to strike Black Luthien before they had satisfied their taste for Combine blood. At nearly the same time, a rogue invasion from the civil war-embroiled Federated Suns struck the Combine, threatening to break its back even as the Bears ripped it apart from inside.

With significant threats on both borders, the Combine faced the prospect of total annihilation as only a samurai could—head-on. With the bulk of its mustered soldiery already committed to facing the Ghost Bears, the nation implored its citizens to take up arms against the Davion invasion, hoping that would be enough to at least slow the incursion. Of course, honor demanded nothing less than retribution, turning the fighting along the Combine-Federated Suns border into the bloodiest seen for almost four decades.

Losses on both fronts were heinous, but the Ghost Bears soon faced a new threat from Clan Hell's Horses, leading them to abandon their assault into the Combine. That freed House Kurita to face the Federated Suns. Combine forces pushed the invading FedSuns units back across their borders and then pursued them into FedSuns space. Only the Coordinator's direct orders prevented his samurai from completing the destruction of their ancient enemies.

[*Again you gloss over the FedSuns' naked aggression, as well as Coordinator Kurita's unexplained support for Victor Steiner-Davion. That he paid for that support with the lives of his wife and daughter doesn't matter. The nature of the FedSuns/Combine war does matter, as do the political realities that prevented the Combine from finishing the job. Again we see the subversive nature of the Davions—if they can infect even the Kuritas, then who knows what happens next? I'm also seeing no acknowledgment of the Ghost Bears' efforts to integrate their captured population, creating their "Dominion" to replace the "occupation zones" the other Clans favor. Is that deliberate? –Ed*]

And All the Rest

In that same short span of time, the rest of the Inner Sphere and even the Periphery experienced serious upheavals unlike almost any others this century. No less important than the other wars, these minor conflicts and rebellions left those regions ill prepared for the war that continues to rage throughout human-occupied space.

In January of 3063, Julius O'Reilly, son of the Marian Hegemony's Caesar, led an unauthorized and successful invasion of the Illyrian Palatinate. This feat secured him fame and general support throughout the Hegemony, which he used to return to its capital and depose his father. Three years later, still commanding the respect and support of his nation, the new Caesar turned his sights on the Circinus Federation. Unfortunately for him, the pirate Federation had secured Word of Blake assistance. After a short and bloody war, the Circinians ultimately repulsed the Hegemony's invasion of their capital world and forced a cease-fire.

In May of 3064, Clan Jade Falcon surged across its occupation-zone border into the Lyran Alliance, looking to "blood" newer warriors while seizing territory from an adversary embroiled in a civil war. The Falcons made great strides into Lyran space, inflicting significant defeats on an adversary that could ill afford those losses. It took the Lyrans nearly half a year to organize a response, and another ten months of prosecuting a "system-hopping" campaign, to end the Jade Falcon incursion—decidedly in the invaders' favor.

September of 3066 brought with it more civil unrest and revolt, this time within the Taurian Concordat. After years of fighting for independence, the inhabitants of the New Colony Region, jointly controlled by the Concordat and the Magistracy of Canopus, finally succeeded in forming the Fronc Reaches. That was the last straw for Concordat Marshal Baron Cham Kithrong and his supporters. Having watched their nation send its sons and daughters to die in a war that benefited only the Chancellor of the Capellan Confederation in exchange for what amounted to baubles—access to some advanced technology and the promise of membership in the Star League—Kithrong and his allies took the only action they deemed honorable, inspired by the Fronc Reaches' achievement. Their years of vocal opposition to Taurian Protector Grover Shraplen led them to take control of six Taurian worlds, with the help of Kithrong's VI Corps. They then declared their intent to reunite with the Concordat only after Erik Martens-Calderon (the

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PROFITS SOARING IN DEFENSE SECTOR

(2 September 3067)

Irian [ATREAN BUSINESS JOURNAL] – For the sixteenth year in a row, profits and stocks have continued to climb in the defense industry. Meanwhile, unemployment rates have remained stable for the past three years. Demands for defensive assets remains high, especially now that the Steiner-Davion civil war is coming to an end, and both realms are scrambling to rebuild their militaries through local production and imported materiel. Analysts continue to predict brisk sales as companies in the League compete with each other over market shares.

More alarming are the increased pirate raids on manufacturing sites, convoys and supply dumps. Experts presume that this uptick in pirate activity is the direct result of our economy's continued strength and viability, and calls for a more League-wide response to this threat are growing more frequent. Analysts predict, however, that the recently reactivated debate over Resolution 288 will prevent such a League-wide response within the foreseeable future, and they have linked the first noticeable slump in stock growth to this event.

bastard son of Protector Jeffrey Calderon, slain five years earlier in a New Colony Region rebellion) was named Protector.

The Concordat attempted to end the secession of this Calderon Protectorate militarily, but found it could not overcome Kithrong's forces and prosecute an invasion of the Federated Suns at the same time. Conditioned by centuries-old anti-Davion paranoia, they interpreted as an invasion the unexpected arrival of the mercenary Fighting Urukhai, which had fled the Federated Suns after a civil war-related contract dispute and chose to pursue a contract on Taurus. After destroying the mercenary unit, the Concordat launched its own invasion of the Federated Suns. Though ultimately repulsed, the Concordat nevertheless continued to keep its military poised for a renewed excursion against its old adversary.

[*For the most part good, though I notice you're again taking it easy on the FedSuns. At least this time you're being a little more objective with the Lyrans. As to the Taurian-FedSuns war, you're stating as a fact that the Urukhai weren't the vanguard of a FedSuns invasion. If the FedSuns could attack the Draconis Combine at the height of their own civil war, don't you think Hasek-Davion could have had the same idea in mind, especially considering the strength of the mercenary army he'd amassed within his Capellan March? And you discount the wealth of sources that still place Taurian forces in the FedSuns. –Ed*]

OPENING SHOTS

With the Inner Sphere and most of the Periphery already engulfed in war or its immediate after-effects, humanity was looking for someone or something to end the strife and once again bring peace and prosperity. The devoutly cult-like Word of Blake, with Jerome Blake as their supreme prophet and questionable individuals like Conrad Toyama and Myndo Waterly as "saints," saw themselves as that savior. Indeed, they believed that the so-called prophesies of Blake had foretold their ascent to power throughout the Inner Sphere, and saw the Star League Conference of 3067 as the time and place of that occurrence.

When the Star League Conference broke up almost before it began, however, preventing an allegedly prophesied "Third Transfer" from coming to fruition, the Word of Blake lashed out. Whether they are bent on punishing those they blame for the Star League's collapse or uniting the Inner Sphere under their banner through total war has yet to be determined.

Prelude to Destiny

The Word of Blake is the ComStar splinter group that formed in the wake of the Clan invasion. Objecting to ComStar's reforms that de-emphasized the order's quasi-religious trappings in favor of a more secular approach—one that would freely share the technologies ComStar had jealously hoarded from the rest of the Inner Sphere since its formation in the days following General Kerensky's Exodus—those that could not or would not give up the cult of Blake split from the organization.

XIN SHENG: UNQUALIFIED SUCCESS

(20 November 3067)

Zi-jin Cheng, Sian [CBC] – Fellow Citizens! Our glorious rebirth continues under the perfect leadership of the most sacred and formidable Chancellor Sun-Tzu Liao, the Celestial Wisdom!

Prosperity and harmony keeps improving for our beloved brothers and sisters in the St. Ives Commonality. While the ravages of war inflicted upon them by their evil Davion oppressors are severe, the Capellan spirit is strong! The aid provided by the Celestial Wisdom has done much to repair that which the Davion war criminals have destroyed.

Likewise, the Capellan struggle against the lawlessness and terrorism perpetrated by the Davion warmongers in the Chaos March proceeds well. The tyrants continue to ship criminals and mercenary scum to the besieged Capellan worlds in an effort to destroy our resolve, but they are constantly thwarted by our determination to provide the protection and prosperity of Xin Sheng to all!

In related news, the war criminals of the so-called "Free Capella" terrorist organization have been evicted from their Davion holdings. Clearly, these scum of the earth are too vile and repulsive for even the Davion desecrators to tolerate. The terrorists maraud through space like the pirates they are, in search of the defenseless on whom they prey. The valiant defenders of the Confederation are in pursuit, and expect to capture the renegades soon. Citizens are reminded of their duty to report any information leading to the capture of the terrorists.

XIN SHENG! XIN SHENG! XIN SHENG!

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WORD OF BLAKE PROTECTORATE

(18 February 3066)

Terra [VOICE OF BLAKE] – The worlds of Caph, Keid, New Home, Bryant and Epsilon Eridani have requested military aid from the Word of Blake, citing the continuing instability of the Chaos March and the predations of nearby worlds.

Precentor William Blane, nominated spokesman for the Word of Blake's Ruling Conclave, announced that "this was the first step in demonstrating to every citizen and noble of the Inner Sphere that, unlike ComStar, the Word of Blake does indeed stand apart as a neutral party to whom all may come for succor."

For years, the Chaos March has provided steady employment to many mercenaries, and it has become increasingly obvious that certain members of the mercenary community oppose a peaceful resolution to the problems facing the region. Those with the most to lose have also been the most vocal opponents of Word of Blake attempts to bring humanitarian aid to the area. Obviously, the opposition of Wolf's Dragoons to the Word of Blake is driven by the loss of income that a downturn in mercenary hiring will bring to Harlech.

Worse than that, Jaime Wolf—now free from the restraints of his Clan masters—is clearly planning to establish his own private kingdom by absorbing neighboring worlds. Indeed, this would already have happened were it not for the valiant efforts of his grandson, Alpin Wolf. Regretfully, young Alpin fell in battle attempting to save the Inner Sphere and the Dragoons themselves from his grandfather's ambition.

A surprising percentage of ComStar's manpower chose to follow Precentor William Blane into exile in the Free Worlds League, a nation whose leader had once been part of the mystical ComStar Order. They swiftly formed their own version of the organization they had left, calling themselves the Word of Blake. Made up of true believers, the indifferent and those that simply objected to ComStar's reforms, the Word of Blake settled into what outsiders saw as an uneasy coalition of factions, each with a different take on Jerome Blake and his works.

Initially, the schism was relatively peaceful, if strained. ComStar allowed any that wanted to leave its ranks to join the Word of Blake, though the denuding of the Com Guards led to some tense standoffs later on as troops attempted to leave with their equipment. Quite a few entire units left the Com Guards, giving the Word of Blake an impressive military arm.

The two organizations lived in relative peace for several years, but that calm exterior belied a secret war behind the scenes as ComStar and the Word of Blake fought for control of the HPG networks as well as for personnel and resources. Additionally, the Blakists battled each other as rival factions fought for predominance within the organization. Those internal squabbles ended as the Blakists "cleaned house" in preparation for a bold and daring action.

In the wake of the Capellan-Free Worlds League invasion of the FedCom's Sarna March, and as Clan Jade Falcon streamed across the Lyran border, the Word of Blake launched an invasion of Terra. The first such attempt in almost three centuries, this invasion ended almost before it began. Having infiltrated agents and military forces onto humanity's birthworld, the Blakists quickly and decisively defeated Terra's ComStar defenders. This victory not only gave them control of humanity's birthplace, a moral victory for the devout followers of Blake, but also access to the most advanced technologies and industry in the Inner Sphere, allowing them to increase their military to a size far greater than any could have imagined.

Once again, the Blakists sat dormant rather than continuing with their aggression, lulling the Inner Sphere into a sense of security before launching another attack—this time aimed at the systems surrounding Terra. Obviously looking to rebuild the Terran Hegemony, the Blakists began to expand their sphere of influence into the so-called Chaos March. Opposed by a mercenary alliance headed by Wolf's Dragoons, the campaign proved slow and costly.

Before the Blakists could complete their plans, Fate intervened.

[*You ignore the threats ComStar faced when the Blakists launched their unprovoked sneak attack on Terra, as well as the crimes they committed in order to infiltrate troops onto that world. You also marginalize ComStar's overall efforts to neutralize the Blakist threat, while over-inflating the Dragoons and their ilk. –Ed*]

DRAGOONS FORM AMC

(7 March 3066)

Outreach [MERCNET] – Commander Jaime Wolf announced today that Wolf's Dragoons, supported by several other prominent mercenary commands, will form a new alliance dubbed the Allied Mercenary Command (AMC). In Commander Wolf's own words, the AMC "will make its services available to any and all local parties who require [them] in the name of maintaining freedom and stability in these uncertain times."

Just weeks after the announcement that Caph, Keid, New Home, Bryant and Epsilon Eridani have joined what many have dubbed the "Word of Blake Protectorate," this proclamation is bound to be seen as a controversial move despite Commander Wolf's assertion that "this is not a declaration of war." Commander Wolf concluded his announcement by saying, "Neither we Dragoons nor other AMC member units will act to seize and hold territory. All operations we undertake will consist of defensive actions only, and only on behalf of those neighbors who contract for our services. We act in defense, for our neighbors and our own sovereignty, in the face of uncertainty."

Among the forces operating under the AMC banner are Lindon's Battalion and the famed Northwind Highlanders. Other mercenary commands remain noncommittal, though Colonel Wayne Waco has vehemently denounced the Dragoons' actions.

AND IT CAME TO PASS

OPTIMISM AND DREAD

(1 November 3067)

Stuttgart, Terra [TNN] – Only four weeks separate us from the start of the Fourth Whitting Conference. This time, so shortly after the horrible civil war that ravaged the nations of Houses Steiner and Davion, the topic of the conference will not be war. No Clans require destruction, and the Houses are once again at relative peace with each other. This time, the topic can be peace.

The Second Star League (much like the first, some say) was created to wage a war, a war long since over. Sadly, humanity's tendency to corrupt has rarely failed to turn a defensive weapon into a tool of conquest. Twice already, an elected First Lord used his office to further his own gains. The Steiner-Davions are little better when it comes to placing the needs of the people before their own. Waging a power struggle based on lies, their once proud nations now lie in ruins.

These reminders serve to ensure that you are all aware of our neighbors. They have proved, with the spent lives of thousands who followed them, that they represent a disruptive and destabilizing force, likely to continue to use the Star League as a tool for even greater abuses of power.

Fortunately, there is hope. Now, at last, the Word of Blake stands a chance to enter the Star league Council. The stabilizing force that has brought peace to many nearby worlds, as well as our own, can now be expected to do the same on a grander scale. Together with the influences of Captain-General Thomas Marik, we can for the first time expect the Star League to serve as a tool of peace and prosperity, rather than one of warfare and conquest.

Fall of the Star League

In November of 3067, the leaders of the Inner Sphere gathered in the Tharkad system in preparation for the Fourth Star League Conference. When they met, however, it was clear to those who made the trek that the reborn experiment would not last much longer. Indeed, two of the leaders of the Trinity Alliance nations—Capellan Chancellor Sun-Tzu Liao and Canopian Magestrix Emma Centrella—did not even show up. Instead, Chancellor Liao sent a recorded message via courier, denouncing the Star League as nothing more than a hollow alliance of convenience that had already outlasted its usefulness.

As if to back up Liao's claims, the leaders of the Lyran Alliance and the Federated Suns declared their intention to pull their nations out of the Star League, citing the need to focus their people's energies on rebuilding after the devastating FedCom Civil War. Even the hasty incorporation of the Star League's two provisional members—the Word of Blake and the Taurian Concordat—could not overrule the vote of no confidence effectively passed against the League by the three leaders whose realms encompass roughly half the Inner Sphere.

Despite intense debate and desperate pleas by Star League supporters, events soon left no doubt in anyone's mind that the Star League was doomed. In a final vote that failed to carry the two-thirds majority to sustain the alliance, the Star League was disbanded. Yet even as the delegates left Tharkad and returned to their JumpShips, the repercussions of their decision took a horrific form.

[*Again you fail to mention ComStar's efforts to maintain interstellar peace via the Star League. You also completely ignore the treasonous Nova Cats and their utter repudiation of their promises to defend the Inner Sphere against "all enemies, foreign and domestic." –Ed*]

Words of God, Swords of Providence

"Traitors to peace and prosperity, you will pay for your transgressions unless you immediately reconvene the Star League Council, as was foretold by the Blessed Blake."

Blakist WarShips transmitted that message before they moved into orbit around Tharkad and New Avalon, seemingly from nowhere, preceding their orbital strikes against Tharkad City and Avalon City. Presumably meant to cow the leaders of the Lyran Alliance and the Federated Suns into accepting Blakist control of the Star League, or even their own nations, those strikes instead galvanized public reaction across the Inner Sphere solidly against the Word of Blake and its goals.

News of the Tharkad attack was the first to achieve widespread coverage, and was certainly more than enough to drive public denunciations of the Blakists and their methods. Details are sketchy even now, a month after the tragic first strikes, but it appears the Word of Blake ships used a combination of directed energy weapons, conventional missiles and one or more nuclear warheads to annihilate the Tharkad planetary capital. Ever since the Blakist fleet appeared, no direct communication with Tharkad has been possible. Military and civilian expeditions describe a complete Blakist blockade of the system. Unconfirmed reports also indicate that no survivors have made it off the Lyran capital world and that the Blakists continue to rain additional attacks on the planet.

In the New Avalon system, the Blakists likewise struck the Federated Suns' capital with orbital bombardment, though without resorting to nuclear weapons, and contending with a stronger local defense that included a brief naval engagement between FedSuns WarShips and their Blakist counterparts. The Word of Blake followed up those strikes with a ground assault intended to crush the Davion homeworld's last remaining defenses. Still rebuilding from the yearlong civil war battle fought on New Avalon, critical pieces of infrastructure across the planet failed. Reports from the beleaguered world are sketchy at best, but it appears New Avalon's citizens are fighting alongside what remains of their defensive garrison to combat the Blakist invasion even as the Armed Forces of the Federated Suns fights to break the WarShip blockade.

At nearly the same time, the Allied Mercenary Command led by Wolf's Dragoons struck out on its own to try to end the Blakist

AND IT CAME TO PASS

HASEK: CAPELLAN MARCH THREATENED

(7 November 3067)

New Syrtis [FSNS] – Addressing the press, Duke George Hasek commented on the recent absorption of Acamar, Genoa and Arboris into the Capellan March, as well as the blockade of Tikonov:

"Welcome, and thank you for coming. For too long now, we have stood by and watched as Sun-Tzu Liao attacked, conquered and subjugated world after world in the Sarna March. He claims he's doing this to stop lawlessness and chaos in the region, conveniently neglecting to mention that this lawlessness did not start until he invaded with his terrorists and armed bandits.

"Officially, we stand by the wayside because we respect the right of self-determination. But is it self-determination when Capellan 'Mech regiments invade? Do we really do them a favor by letting these worlds stand free, but without the protection they need from the Capellan Confederation? Of course not!

"And where do you think these invading regiments will look next when they run out of Sarna March worlds to overrun? Here, to the Capellan March, where they have looked ever since our two realms first came into existence!

"Rather than let the Capellans grow strong while we do nothing, we must continue to resist their aggression. We must take the fight to them and defeat them, rather than stand by the sidelines until all the Sarna March worlds become Capellan and Liao 'Mechs drop onto New Syrtis!

"I extend an invitation to any and all worlds seeking protection from Capellan invaders. You have an alternative. We will stand together against Liao aggression!"

threat. Having put down a Word of Blake-supported uprising on Outreach that killed the legendary Dragoons commander, Jaime Wolf, the mercenaries called together what forces they could and immediately set out for the Terran system, intending to crush the Word of Blake on their own planet. Supported by the Dragoons' WarShip squadron, the invasion fleet entered the Terran system just days after the strikes on Tharkad and New Avalon. Despite the massive force assembled, the invasion fleet has not been heard from since.

[*I've seen credible reports that say the Dragoon assault force on Terra was wiped out to the man. And now there are reports that the rest of the Dragoons have finally been destroyed on Outreach. –Ed*]

Dawn of the Jihad

Barely more than a month has passed since the opening strikes of this terrible war, and in that time the Blakist response has been overwhelming. Interstellar fighting unmatched since the early Succession Wars has engulfed the Inner Sphere. News of attacks across the stars is pouring in, as are reports of terror attacks such as the use of chemical weapons on Styk and even a massive nuclear retaliation against Outreach.

Why is the Word of Blake bringing war and death to the Inner Sphere on a scale unlike anything seen in centuries? No one knows. Whatever the motive, the "Blessed Blake" has brought a holy war—a *jihad*—down upon us all. Our only hope is that the Blakists cannot sustain this much longer, because we know we no longer have the myth of Aleksandr Kerensky to save us from the unthinkable.

NEWS DOWNLOADER v3.7

DATE & TITLE	*SERVICE*	*STATUS*
(01-SEP-67) "HIGHLANDER DEATHS: ACCIDENT OR CONSPIRACY?"	[MERCNET]	COMPLETED
(30-SEP-67) "AMC FORCES ATTACK KEID, HUNDREDS DEAD"	[VOICE OF TRUTH]	DOWNLOADING
(13-OCT-67) "BARANOV STILL MISSING, PRESUMED DEAD"	[MERCNET]	ACCESSING

A SERVICE OF IRIAN NEWS INTERSTELLAR

FILTHY MONEY

FILTHY MONEY

WAR STRIKES MERCENARIES!

MERCENARIES TARGETED BY COMRADES IN OPENING WAVES

(5 April 3068)

Galatea [DBC] —The past several months have seen some spectacular victories and defeats for numerous mercenary units across the known universe. But unlike days past, where mercenary forces typically fought against the military might of a Great House or some other major power, today mercenaries are fighting one another with only one goal in mind—total destruction.

To call this uncommon is an understatement. Throughout modern human history, the soldier of fortune has occupied a necessary, if often misunderstood and disliked, role. In general adhering to a strict code of honor, the mercenary supplements a nation's armed forces with the same level of loyalty as that nation's own troops, or fights as a proxy in a war that regular soldiers cannot fight, or provides security to private individuals who need it.

The common man, however, has a far different view of the mercenary soldier. Average people see a mercenary as loyal only to the paycheck, someone who will gladly break his word if it means more money. Sadly, a very few mercenaries throughout history have indeed betrayed the principles and ideals of their calling, and thereby given rise to this ugly stereotype.

Then this most recent crisis struck, dragging the entire Inner Sphere into yet another self-destructive war. Except this one bears little resemblance to the massive wars of succession and rebellion fought since humanity's journey to the stars.

Many hoped the end of the FedCom Civil War would usher in a new era of respect for the mercenary. Already a significant force in interstellar politics, especially after so many mercenary units played such a pivotal role in that conflict, a number of high-profile units banded together to blunt the expansion of the Word of Blake in the Chaos March. Given the Word of Blake's response to that alliance, many believe the mercenaries of the Allied Mercenary Command effectively contributed to the start of this new war.

In September of 3067, following the deaths of several ranking members, the Northwind Highlanders abruptly terminated all their contracts with the Draconis Combine and returned to their homeworld, ostensibly to grieve. Taken alone, this event—though unusual—was not significant, but many believe it may have been the first in a series of unfortunate occurrences. In October, a second and more dramatic incident erupted not far away on Outreach, the home of the Mercenary Review and Bonding Commission as well as Wolf's Dragoons. As ever, many transient mercenaries and mercenary units were on the world, awaiting employment. A group of these supposedly unemployed units, many now known or believed to have been under direct or indirect contract with the Word of Blake, launched an unprovoked surprise assault on the Dragoons and any units that came to their aid, devastating the city of Harlech and causing incalculable damage and loss of life before falling prey to the Dragoons' fury.

With the December attacks on Tharkad and New Avalon, many now consider the Outreach assault as the first move in the Word of Blake's "holy war" against much of the Inner Sphere, a war in which mercenaries are playing a much larger role than anyone could ever have imagined. Within months of the first Outreach attack, a series of deadly maneuvers saw the Word of Blake return to scour the planet with WarShips and strategic weapons after a Dragoons task force, dispatched to strike at Terra, went missing and was proclaimed destroyed over Mars.

Those tragedies were just the beginning. The Word of Blake has apparently directed its assault against all of humanity, supposedly to punish humankind for the dissolution of the second Star League. Many mercenaries now fight on the Blakist side, whether because the Blakists bought their services or because they are simply taking advantage of the chaos of the war. Worse still, some units, like the Northwind Highlanders—which in the past vocally opposed the Blakists—have gone silent, refusing to take part in counterstrikes against Blake's followers.

Though many mercenaries *are* fighting against the Blakists, the damage by those often believed to have precipitated this conflict has already been done. Many who once praised mercenary commands for defending them now call for their destruction. Takashi Kurita's infamous "Death to Mercenaries" order has found renewed echoes, not just in the Combine but elsewhere across the Inner Sphere. As chaos spreads and nations self-destruct amid the fires consuming their capitals, the tragedy deepens.

How or when this war will end, or how many will survive, no one knows. It is all too clear, however, that there will be no winners. Worse still, it seems the society of professional warriors who honorably stood guard over the Inner Sphere for centuries has become the first casualty of this conflict.

With DBC news on Galatea, I'm Angelica Rabin.

THE GATHERING STORM

Even before the first shells landed on Outreach, before the fighting in the streets of Harlech, or even the bombing of Tharkad, the mercenary profession—at its heartland in the Chaos March—had already begun to feel the turbulence of the coming storm. From the Allied Mercenary Command's failed bid to prevent a March world's defection to the Free Worlds banner, to the tragic loss of four Northwind Highlander elders in apparent accidents, the shockwaves of multiple crises reverberated throughout the industry. Even taken separately, these warning signs pointed to a danger far closer than any could imagine.

—Michael Bosworth, INN Special Correspondent

HALL JOINS FREE WORLDS LEAGUE

[*Tamblyn*]: I'm Amy Tamblyn here with Lieutenant Maribel DeYoung of Baranov's Guard, the defenders of Hall. How are you tonight, Lieutenant?
[*DeYoung*]: Good, thank you, Amy.
[*Tamblyn*]: So, can you give us any information on the recent fighting near South Harney?
[*DeYoung*]: I'd be glad to. The people of Hall deserve to know what's going on near their homes. I'm happy to report that the AMC forces that invaded our world have been driven back into the Margaard Highlands, away from the capital city and its surrounding villages. We've broken the mercenaries' back and expect they'll be pulling back to their DropShips and leaving soon.
[*Tamblyn*]: How has the death of Emperor Baranov affected your unit's morale?
[*DeYoung*]: The Emperor is not dead. He suffered bodily injury during a freak ammo explosion.
[*Tamblyn*]: Then can we talk to him?
[*DeYoung*]: No, I'm afraid not.
[*Tamblyn*]: Where is he being treated?
[*DeYoung*]: At a base camp not far from here.
[*Tamblyn*]: What is the extent of his—
[*DeYoung*]: Amy, when the Emperor is available for comment, we'll let you know. Now can we change the subject?
[*Tamblyn*]: Sure, Lieutenant. Um, what about the reports of attacks on some of the mercenaries' dependents?
[*DeYoung*]: The claims by the Third Disinherited about shooting their transports and civilian DropShips? False. The Fourth Oriente Hussars had no such orders and I can personally vouch for their commander. The guncam footage being bandied about by the press has been doctored to support false claims.
[*Tamblyn*]: Really? We've not heard...
[*DeYoung*]: I can put you in contact with the Hall Intelligence Division. They'll verify that for you.
[*Tamblyn*]: Ok, we'll do that. So what are your plans now?

WHERE THE MONEY TRAIL ENDS

(14 October 3067)

Harlech, Outreach [INN] – Following a money trail is difficult, doubly so if someone wants it hidden. Tied up with a fanatical group like the Word of Blake, it becomes an almost impossible task. However, working with leads unearthed by Sandra Raines revealed a starting point for my investigation.

My searches led to Demeter, home of Vicore Interstellar. Vicore was not the focus of my research, but the companies involved in distributing Vicore's product were. Under normal scrutiny, these businesses held up. However, when I looked deeper, the façade of legitimacy quickly crumbled.

Two operations I found suspect—Grantham Distributing and Xanadu Import and Exports—proved to be mere front companies. Neither provided a physical address, only a post office box. Looking at the Ministry of Commerce turned up the two companies' registered tax IDs. Both shared the same number, and had been registered by yet another company, Jamaison Interstellar.

After obtaining financial transaction records for Grantham, Xanadu and Jamaison, I traced the money trail to a ComStar holding account. From there, the funds passed through three other accounts, held in the names of owners of each of the three companies in question. The funds went to two destinations. The first, located on Outreach, is Western Receiving and Shipping, whose registered owner is a John Wayco. The second destination was Gibson Transports, Ltd., located on Gibson in the Free Worlds League.

My investigation hit a brick wall when I tried to look deeper into the Gibson-based company's registered owner, but a hunch is a hunch. Is the Word of Blake involved in behind-the-scenes arms dealing on Outreach? And if so, why?

For INN here on Outreach, I'm Emilio Sanchez.

NORTHWIND HIGHLANDERS RETURNING HOME

(8 September 3067)

Northwind [MERCNET] — For the third time this year, tragedy struck on Northwind with the untimely demise of Clan Elder Patrick Duffy. With the unexpected deaths of Simon McDonald in July, and Henry Gordon and Fiona McBride just three weeks ago, the Highlanders have lost their four most senior Clan Elders.

Invoking escape clauses in their contracts, the First Kearny and MacLeod's Regiment have terminated their service with the Draconis Combine and are headed home. Similarly, the Northwind Hussars

MONEY

HALL JOINS FREE WORLDS LEAGUE - CONT.

[*DeYoung*]: I'll be addressing the planetary Senate tomorrow about some things, then I expect to make a major announcement that will protect Hall further from AMC predation.
[*Tamblyn*]: You heard it here, folks. Any hints, Lieutenant?
(*DeYoung smiles*)
[*Tamblyn*]: (*giggles*) Well, we tried. So will the mercenaries be allowed to leave Hall now?
[*DeYoung*]: Maybe. It depends on whether they release Force Commander Bobum from their custody. Otherwise, I'm sure the Hussars will pursue the AMC units to free their commander.
[*Tamblyn*]: So you won't vouch for their safe retreat?
[*DeYoung*]: Absolutely not. You've seen the carnage the AMC inflicted on the farms and villages in South Harney.
[*Tamblyn*]: Yes, we have.
[*DeYoung*]: Then you know we must either capture them and bring them to justice, or eliminate the problem.
[*Tamblyn*]: Eliminate?
[*DeYoung*]: No more questions. All will be explained tomorrow at the Senate building. This interview is over.

—From the *Hall Evening News*, Harney Broadcasting and Publishing Co., 10 October 3067

FILTHY MONEY

HIGHLANDER ACCIDENT

(1 September 3067)

Tara, Northwind [NORTHWIND NEWS NETWORK] – All of Northwind mourns this week along with the Northwind Highlanders, who recently learned that missing clan leader Patrick Duffy was killed in the deadly gale that struck the coastal town of Arden earlier last week. Duffy's body was found washed ashore six kilometers from the wreck of the *Misty Bay*, a ten-meter caravel that Duffy owned and used frequently on his visits to his family's winter estate nearby.

The coroner's office officially listed the cause of death as drowning, but sources inside the Arden police department indicate that the investigation is still open, leading many to believe Duffy was murdered. Local law enforcement has refused to comment on the case.

Duffy was an influential clan leader for more than thirty years, helping the Highlanders transition during the move from Confederation space to Northwind. His policies were instrumental in restoring the Fortress and its surrounding infrastructure in the post-Capellan era, creating thousands of new jobs across the region and revitalizing the stagnant planetary economy. He was a co-creator of the landmark Wayne-Duffy Bill, which abolished the old feudal tax structure and created the current flat-tax system.

Elder Duffy's death comes at a critical time for the Highlanders, with the recent deaths of three other prominent members of the clan council, two in the tragic Tara Suborbital Port accident only two weeks ago and a third in a climbing accident in July. Investigations into both incidents are ongoing.

Patrick Duffy is survived by his daughter, Rebecca, and three grandchildren: Marwynn, Richard and Lorelei. Public services will be held at noon this Friday at St. Patrick's Cathedral in Tara, with a private service at an undisclosed location. The body will be cremated according to family tradition.

Donations may be made to the Duffy Cancer Foundation in Tara.

serving the Star League and Stirling's Fusiliers (operating as part of the Allied Mercenary Command in the Chaos March) will join the Second Kearny Highlanders already on Northwind. Once there, the Highlanders will select successors to the mantles of the fallen Elders.

Friction has flared up recently between the Clan Elders and the Highlanders' senior officers, especially over the decision to join the Allied Mercenary Command created by Wolf's Dragoons. With so many of the Elders now dead, the Highlanders have an opportunity to shift the political balance in their council by pressing for new members who will be more sympathetic to their views.

One man who believes he knows what's going on is Major Cullen Craig. Now serving with Swann's Cavaliers, Craig was once a battalion commander in Stirling's Fusiliers. "It's all the doing of that Capellan lapdog, Jaffray! He wormed his way into the Highlanders, and now he's eliminating everyone who could stop him taking the Highlanders back into bondage. Mark my words! Once a Death Commando, always a Death Commando."

With several regiments withdrawing from their stations, the MRBC projects that choice contracts will be in the offering to any reputable command with a B rating or higher.

DEATH OF A LEGEND

The storm of war finally struck in the urban sprawl of Harlech City, undisputed capital of the mercenary profession, on 15 October 3067. On that fateful day, a long-standing feud finally reached its tragic conclusion, and a chain reaction of events began whose repercussions would stretch across the Inner Sphere and beyond.

FIGHTING IN THE STREETS

(16 October 3067)

Outreach [INN] – Yesterday, explosions and sonic booms broke the early morning calm above Harlech City as aerospace fighters reportedly belonging to Smithson's Chinese Bandits made a high-speed run over the Harlech Interplanetary DropPort. A simple training flight suddenly became dangerously real when the mercenary craft strafed the DropPort, damaging or destroying as many as two wings of grounded Dragoons fighters, according to unconfirmed reports.

Their control of the sky temporarily uncontested, the Bandits' fighters overflew the Dragoons Housing Center, releasing a deadly rain of cluster and inferno bombs on the barracks housing the warriors and families of nearly every Dragoons force currently on-planet. The damage added to the devastating effects of several massive car bombs that reportedly went off in that same area as Dragoon forces gathered in response to an unspecified security call. Casualty figures remain unknown, but with the Shostakovich Building still in flames, it is feared that many of the Home Guard's MechWarriors and their families have perished.

In what was clearly a carefully coordinated move, a motley collection of rogue mercenary forces headed by elements of Waco's Rangers and Smithson's Chinese Bandits came boiling out of TempTown, overrunning Harlech Penitentiary and the 'Mech holding pens. Meanwhile, the Tiger Sharks—a mercenary battalion returning from night exercises on the practice fields—overpowered their escorts after bypassing their training inhibitors, and made a drive for Harlech Interplanetary DropPort. As chaos reigned in the streets and civilians sought to flee what had suddenly became a battlefield, the 51st Dark Panzer Jaegers joined with the renegades, driving up Herrera Street toward the Hiring Hall.

Though badly shaken by these cowardly attacks, the surviving elements of the Home Guard reacted swiftly. Even severely outnumbered, they managed to buy enough time for survivors

FIGHTING IN THE STREETS -CONT.

of Beta and Epsilon regiments to get to their weapons, while elements of both regiments stationed on the continent of Remus have reportedly been called in to support a counteroffensive led by Jaime Wolf. These forces will augment those of the Home Guard, Zeta Battalion, and the Wolf Spiders, which have already gathered at Commander Wolf's order, as well as allied forces such as Battle Magic, which is still engaged with renegade forces near the DropPort.

The past twenty-four hours have seen entire swathes of Harlech devastated in vicious street-to-street fighting. Both sides have suffered heavy casualties, and the civilian body count is feared even higher. Commander Jaime Wolf has stabilized the Dragoons' position on the north bank of the Garrett River, but renegade mercenary forces (presumably under the command of Colonel Wayne Waco) have made several probing air and 'Mech attacks in the direction of Wolf Hall and the Hiring Hall.

The battle for control of the skies over Harlech remains a stalemate. The Dragoons' superior numbers are undercut by their need to travel to and from distant airfields or orbit, as well as an effort to avoid endangering more lives on the ground by engaging enemy air forces over the city proper. The renegades are operating from the local Harlech DropPort, some using captured Dragoons fighters spared in their initial attacks.

The Mercenary Review and Bonding Commission has officially branded Waco's Rangers, Smithson's Chinese Bandits, the Tiger Sharks and the 51st Dark Panzer Jaegers as renegade commands.

HARLECH CITY UNDER SIEGE!

(20 October 3067)

Harlech, Outreach [INN] – On October 15 at 3:30 AM, forces commanded by Colonel Wayne Waco, formerly of the Waco Rangers, launched an assault on Harlech City. This reporter had the unfortunate opportunity to witness firsthand the brutal holocaust unleashed on the capital of Outreach.

In a pre-dawn attack, a massive explosion destroyed the Home Guard compound, resulting in the deaths of hundreds of Guard personnel, many of whom had reportedly been mustered there in response to an unspecified security alert. Meanwhile, renegade fighters bombed Dragoons assets undergoing routine maintenance at Harlech DropPort, and followed up these strikes with additional attacks on the Guard compounds. Following these initial assaults, a rogue force roughly four BattleMech regiments strong emerged from TempTown and converged on Harlech proper. Supported by armor and infantry, these forces cut a swath of destruction across the city.

The Dragoons command and control center and the Mercenary Hiring Hall have both been attacked, the Hall itself completely destroyed. Estimates of the dead, both civilian and mercenary, continue to rise at both sites, with no immediate end in site. Harlech was set ablaze in several areas, with many of the renegade mercenaries gunning down civilians as they fled.

MONEY

Only the timely intervention of the Dragoons' Zeta Battalion stopped the rampant killing. The Wolf Spiders and Zeta Battalion fought the attackers and briefly secured the DropPort. Commander Jaime Wolf, coordinating operations from multiple command centers—including the cockpit of his famous *Archer*—launched a counter-assault in conjunction with elements of Beta and Epsilon regiments recalled from Remus, to finally contain the renegade threat.

Converging from three directions, the Dragoons caught most of Waco's forces in a classic encirclement. Each side fought fiercely, with quarter neither asked nor given. In a climatic battle, Waco led a company of 'Mechs against Wolf's lance in the shadow of the destroyed Hiring Hall. In the end, Commander Wolf and his lance destroyed a full company of enemy 'Mechs, fighting the renegades to the death. Wolf himself apparently finished the battle on his own, bringing down Waco's command even while dying from mortal wounds. Wolf's *Archer*, battle-ravaged and surrounded by a field of destroyed 'Mechs, was still on its feet when allied forces finally made it to the scene, the ruins of Colonel Waco's *BattleMaster*—and Waco himself—sprawled before it.

Commander Wolf's death seemed to galvanize the Dragoons, whose counteroffensive gained the strength and character of a controlled berserker fury—a bloody, no-mercy policy that Dragoons officials identified as "Condition Feral." In less than a day, the Dragoons swept Harlech clean of the last renegade forces in a brutal action reminiscent of a Clan Trial of Annihilation. No further renegade activity has been reported since then, and even the looting one might expect after such devastation has been minimal in the past 48 hours.

When asked, Dragoons commanders refused comment about further reprisals. Thousands of lives lost, a city devastated and the Dragoons decimated—the events of the past few days are still sinking in. It is a sad moment in time, for the Dragoons and their civilians.

For INN here on Outreach, I'm Emilio Sanchez.

COUNTERSTRIKE

Few realized at the time that the Dragoons' righteous fury would provoke a disaster unprecedented since the rise of Amaris and the fall of the original Star League. Though events soon to come on Tharkad would briefly overshadow them, many—both within and outside the mercenary profession—may come to see these actions as the true start of the Blakists' holy war on humankind.

DRAGOONS BREAK CONTRACT

(23 November 3067)

Outreach [MERCNET] – A month ago, General Maeve Wolf informed Coordinator Theodore Kurita that she was exercising an emergency escape clause in Alpha Regiment's contract, though

A LEGEND FALLS

A Legend Falls

Jaime Wolf

Jan. 24, 2980

Oct. 18, 3067

[*Cameron*]: "Spider One, this is Gray One. We're two blocks from the Hiring Hall compound. Have you received anything from Wolf Actual?"

[*Clavell*]: "Negative, Cameron. Last report was Waco and his boys charging into Complex Alpha, where Actual and a Home Guard lance were located."

[*Shadd*]: "Complex Alpha? That is the guest housing for visiting dignitaries and their staff."

[*Cameron*]: "Any other Home Guard units around? I'm getting no signal, magres is too cluttered."

[*Spider Two*]: "All bands quiet; nothing registering."

[*Spider Three*]: "Spider Three here. Currently at Jacoby Way and Rain Street. I show three of Waco's people here."

[*Clavell*]: "Status, Pollack?"

[*Spider Three*]: "One *Crusader*'s missing its head, *Stealth* is prone and cold, and I can't even ID this last guy—there're parts everywhere. The Smithton Street Grill got flattened, too."

[*Spider Four*]: "Bastards."

[*Clavell*]: "Quiet, Ahmed."

[*Cameron*]: "Approaching the Hall's main gate…holy hell."

[*Clavell*]: "What do you see, Gray One?"

[*Cameron*]: "Can't describe it, Johnny. 'Mech parts everywhere. Like fire came from heaven and dropped them where they stood."

[*Gray Two*]: "Sir, the archway—I see something…"

[*Gray Three*]: "I'll cover you, Two."

[*Cameron*]: "Shadd, ride up with Two and see what's beyond that archway. I'm showing a faint reactor signal."

[*Clavell*]: "Gray One, status? Come on, Brian, clue me in! I'm only four blocks back. Can you wait?"

[*Cameron*]: "*Neg*, Spider One."

[*Shadd*]: "Growler Point, detach and spread out."

[*Cameron*]: "Four, do you have a count yet for this area?"

[*Gray Four*]: "Seven Waco 'Mechs, two Home Guard so far... Looks like Perry and Gieber bought it here."

[*Spider Three*]: "Damn. There goes my ten C-bills."

[*Clavell*]: "Liam, shut the chatter. Angle up Roberts Avenue and watch for booby traps."

[*Shadd*]: "Sir, we have located Actual."

[*Cameron*]: "Report."

[*Shadd*]: "Sir… you better come up and see for yourself."

[*Clavell*]: "Dammit, man, spill! What the hell's going on?"

[*Shadd*]: "Actual's 'Mech is operational, Spider One. His foot is entangled in the wreckage of Waco's *BattleMaster*. It is not going anywhere."

[*Clavell*]: "That badly damaged? Is Actual's radio out?"

[*Cameron*]: "I don't think so, Johnny. Shadd? Can you get a man up there to check the Archer's cockpit?"

[*Shadd*]: "Point Two! Ascertain pilot condition in the *Archer*! Open the cockpit if you have to."

[*Silence for several minutes*]

[*Clavell*]: "Gray One, Spider Command has reached the Hall."

[*Growler Two*]: "Sir, it appears the pilot is unresponsive."

[*Shadd*]: "Unresponsive?"

[*Cameron*]: "Life signs, Trooper?"

[*Growler Two*]: "He is dead, sir. There are wounds in his thigh and torso, and a large amount of blood on the floor. My guess is he died about thirty minutes ago."

[*Cameron*]: "Gray One to all Dragoons. Wolf Actual is down. I say again, Wolf Actual is down. Go to Condition Feral. Say again, set Condition Feral."

[*Shadd*]: "Growler Point! Fan out and check these other 'Mechs for survivors! Take out any hostiles."

[*Cameron*]: "Spider One, Zeta's reporting heavy fighting near Gateway Bridge. Redirect there to assist. Gray Command, dismount and sweep the area for any non-combatants, move them to the secure bunkers."

[*Clavell*]: "Roger that, Gray One." [*pause*] "Brian, you know we need to notify Maeve."

[*Cameron*]: [*pause*] "All in good time, Johnny. Let's finish cleaning up our own house first."

[*Clavell*]: "Roger that. Spiders! Move out to nav point Tango. Let's get us some payback!"

—Excerpted Wolf's Dragoons transmissions, Outreach, 18 October 3067

FILTHY MONEY

HARLECH CITY UNDER SIEGE, SUPPLEMENTAL REPORT

(18 November 3067)

Galatea City, Galatea [INN] – At the urging of acting Dragoons commander, Brian Cameron, I returned to Galatea soon after the initial wave of attacks ended. Upon my arrival, reporters and military officers besieged me with questions about the holocaust on Outreach. I did my best to answer them all, and played the recordings I'd made of those horrific events—and of the death of Jaime Wolf—to the stunned disbelief and open weeping of many. As I relived the events in those recordings, I wept along with them.

En route home, I received a supplemental report from the Dragoons' Colonel Jamison on Outreach. The casualties are staggering. Estimates of civilian dead are roughly a quarter of a million, with three to four times as many wounded. Harlech City's infrastructure, power and water services are badly damaged, and there have been reports of bodies burned in the streets to prevent the outbreak of disease.

The Dragoons suffered egregious losses. Epsilon Regiment is effectively destroyed, its survivors folded into Beta, which itself suffered an estimated thirty-five percent casualty rate. The Home Guard ground forces have ceased to exist, and Zeta and Wolf Spider battalions have suffered thirty-five and fifty percent casualties respectively. Of the AMC units involved, the Battle Magic mercenary command died to the man in the heavy fighting.

Of the estimated four BattleMech regiments and an almost equal number of armor and infantry forces commanded by Wayne Waco, none of the rogue mercenaries that fought against the Dragoons and their allies survived, including the 51st Dark Panzer Jaegers, Smithson's Chinese Bandits and the Tiger Sharks.

The report also stated that General Maeve Wolf and Alpha Regiment are due on Outreach sometime in December, while the Second Dismal Disinherited and Gamma Brigade, recalled from other postings, are now on-planet aiding in recovery operations.

For INN here on Galatea, I'm Emilio Sanchez.

the mercenaries' Delta Regiment remains in position on the Ghost Bear border world of Keisen. Three days ago, General Wolf similarly informed Chancellor Sun-Tzu Liao of her intent to pull Colonel Irwin Tyrell's Gamma Regiment from Tikonov.

Ominously, the Dragoons have previously broken contracts on only two occasions: just prior to the Clan invasion and during the Dragoons Civil War. The Dragoons are concentrating their forces, and may even call on other AMC members, perhaps to strike in retribution for the death of Jaime Wolf and the destruction visited on Harlech.

Speculation is fierce over who was responsible for the Harlech attack. The simple answer is to blame Colonel Wayne Waco. Colonel Waco's famous feud with Wolf's Dragoons dates back to 3008, when his only son died fighting Zeta Battalion on New Aragon. The colonel also held the Dragoons responsible for the near-total annihilation of Waco's Rangers on Coventry, though no evidence exists to support Waco's claims that Colonel Brubaker abandoned his troops to the Jade Falcons. But even though the late Colonel Waco had a motive, it seems improbable that he could have funded the operation alone.

Even removing Colonel Waco, the list of suspects remains long. Hard-line elements in the Draconis Combine remember the Dragoons' role in humiliating the DCMS during the Fourth Succession War. The mercenaries' involvement in the 3014-15 Marik Civil War also made enemies. One should not dismiss either ComStar or the Word of Blake, given that both organizations have clashed overtly and covertly with the Dragoons. Finally, there is the incredible possibility that the one or more of the Clans funded the operation.

Whoever the guilty party is, the Dragoons are gearing up to strike back.

NORTHWIND BLOCKADE

(23 December 3067)

Galatea [MERCNET] – As of December 15, Word of Blake naval forces have blockaded the Northwind system. An unconfirmed number of WarShips (one of which has been identified as the *WBS Hidden Meaning*) supported by assault DropShips and aerospace assets has interdicted both of the system's primary jump points, and at least one WarShip is said to be in close proximity to the planet Northwind to intercept any vessels that might arrive via non-standard points.

While the Word of Blake is allowing JumpShip traffic to recharge, vessels can expect to be boarded and searched, possibly even seized. DropShips may not travel in-system and heavy jamming has rendered conventional communications with Northwind impossible. ComStar reports that traffic from the planet's A-class station has dropped to a bare minimum, supporting the theory that control of the local HPG has fallen to the Word of Blake and that communications are being filtered before transmission. The status of the Highlander JumpShip fleet remains unknown.

All of the Northwind Highlander regiments recently returned to their homeworld following the untimely deaths of several Clan Elders. So far, no one has managed to establish the mercenaries' status, but merchant traffic passing through the system reports no sign of assault troops approaching the world. With no overt indications of ongoing conflict, some speculate that the Word of Blake and the Northwind Highlanders have reached, or are working toward, some kind of accommodation. Word of Blake representatives have declined to comment on the events unfolding at Northwind.

FILTHY MONEY

DEBACLE OVER MARS

>>WolfNet Transmission 671208: Status TF Vengeance<<
>>Decrypt Cypher 4-A-rr-2<<

Colonel Shadd:

I have worked to gather this scattered intel as quickly as I can to inform you of the disaster that occurred only hours ago in the Terran system.

Apparently the *Athena* and *Beowulf* jumped in near the Mars orbital track and were immediately set upon by a massive naval force located nearby. Though the DropShips carrying the Dismal Disinherited and Zeta Battalion made it to the surface of Mars, the vessels carrying Beta Regiment, Lindon's Battalion and several Home Guard aerospace units were destroyed before they even hit the upper atmosphere.

From the transmissions I've managed to gather through multiple HPG bursts from the *Beowulf*, the task force was almost immediately overwhelmed by enemy fighters, DropShips and apparently at least six different WarShips—including at least one ancient *Naga*—though this is difficult to verify because of some extraordinarily bizarre ECM that corrupted quite a bit of the packet data.

Attached to this report is the last audio sequence transmitted before we lost all contact. I thought it best if you heard it rather than trying to relay it.

Major Benjiro Dixon, AMC, Keid

>>file opened<<

"….get over to that *Merlin* and destroy it! *Osiris*! Take the remains of Savage Cluster and escort the *Grant's Tomb* down—I do not want a repeat of Beta!"

"…*Shiva*s and *Thunderbird*s on your nine o'clock, angle three-five! Missile away! Evasive action!"

"…incoming fire!" [*explosion*] "…lost decks three through eight! Rolling to compensate!"

"…*hena*, we've taken heavy damage to our K-F core, we're going in to cover Zeta."

"…enemy converging on *Athena*! Full broadsi…she's gone dark, the *Athena*'s out of contro…"

"…speed ahead, break that *Naga*'s spine!..."

"…like damn demons from Hades…"

"…severe damage, auxiliary backup online. Open HPG net, message is: *Beowulf* to all Dragoon forces. Task Force Vengeance under massive attack. *Athena* lost, taking heavy damage, trying to disengage from the—"

>>File ends<<

MARS: WHAT HAPPENED?

(15 December 3067)

Galatea City, Galatea [INN] – I just received a special report from a source on Outreach of a disaster occurring in the Terran system. Apparently, Dragoons forces supported by a number of Allied Mercenary Command members allegedly launched a reprisal attack against Word of Blake bases on Mars, after connecting the recent fighting on Outreach to the work of Blakist agents in league with the late Colonel Wayne Waco. Reports from other sources offer little information. Requests for verification from Blake representatives have so far proved fruitless.

Here are the facts I have. Two Dragoons WarShips, the *Beowulf* (*Congress*-class frigate) and the *Athena* (*Sovetskii Soyuz*-class heavy cruiser) protected a task force consisting of the Dragoons' Beta Regiment and Zeta Battalion. The First Dismal Disinherited and Lindon's Battalion joined up from Liberty en route to Mars.

Allegedly, the reprisal attack—meant to signal the Blakists that the Dragoons also can strike their enemies close to home—went horribly wrong. Dragoons command on Outreach stated that they do not know what happened. They received the following HPG transmission from the *Beowulf*: "Beowulf *to all Dragoons forces. Task Force Vengeance under massive attack.* Athena *lost, taking heavy damage, trying to disengage from the—*"

Experts here on Galatea speculated that the Blakists used previously unknown naval assets—possibly reactivated from mothballs in the Terran system or elsewhere—or a reactivated Reagan Space Defense System. Other theories posit nuclear mines and missiles launched from hidden installations, while a naval warfare expert suggests that the Blakists used suicide fighters and DropShips loaded with explosives to ram the defenseless AMC JumpShips after taking out their WarShips.

Rumors continue to run rampant, with many speculating that a major war is on the horizon for the Chaos March. Already, reports are coming in of refugees fleeing those worlds not already under Blakist control. More to come as information is available.

Reporting for INN here on Galatea, I'm Emilio Sanchez.

FALL OF OUTREACH

The fall of Outreach was Wolf's Dragoons' finest hour and their lowest ebb. After a bloody, seven-day campaign in space and on the planet, launched after the Dragoons' ill-fated attack on Mars, Word of Blake forces—including their turncoat mercenary allies—faced a near-defeat at the hands of the fanatical defending Dragoons. In desperation, and without regard for human life, the Blakist fleet commanders played a gruesome game of scorched earth, unleashing a nuclear hell against Outreach on a scale not seen since the days of the First Succession War.

FIRE IN THE VOID

[*Newman*]: "…camera on and patch it NOW." [*A dark-haired man, slightly out of breath, turns to face the camera*] "This is Wayne Newman, Harlech News Network. I'm here on the *Mercutio*, the polar-orbit Dragoons station above Outreach, where station sensors have detected a large unidentified flotilla in a high-speed approach toward the planet."

[*Camera switches to tri-holo view; lower corner states "LIVE* MERCUTIO *BATTLEFEED"*]

[*Newman*]: "Sensors can make out a *Black Lion*, an *Aegis*, two *Essex* and two *Lola III* WarShips bearing down on an attack vector…"

[*Voice off-camera mumbles urgently.*]

[*Newman*]: "I'm being told now that half of that force is coming this way; the other half is vectoring in on the *Horatio*. We've lost all contact with the *Darius*, one of the Dragoons' *Lola III*-class WarShips, which was located near the pirate point from which these unknown ships apparently arrived. We're being told to move to our berths and—" [*siren wails in background*] "—there's the call for battle stations. However, we're going to stay right here and transmit these images to you."

[*Close-up of oncoming force,* Black Lion *leading, as it deploys a screening force. View pulls back to reveal several swarms of Dragoons fighters on intercept course. Missile flashes between the two groups are barely visible.*]

[*Newman*]: "It looks as if the Dragoons response will blunt the attack. The *Nelson* is on a high-G burn around the night side of Outreach even now…"

[*Flashes are seen from the* Lion*'s prow and the station shudders. The holo-feed momentarily turns to snow. Fighters clash in a series of high-speed runs as the* Aegis *and an* Essex *open up on the few incoming Dragoons DropShips. The camera snaps back to the reporter, who has a hand to his ear.*]

[*Newman*]: "It's being confirmed now…the fighters have Word of Blake symbols on them… the WarShips are not broadcasting transponders…"

[*Station quakes at another blast. Tendrils of smoke appear around the reporter, who glances backward frantically.*]

[*Newman*]: "Oh, my—Rob, grab the equipment, head for the lifeboats—there's a fire...." [*sirens wail*]

[*The camera shakes as the room spins. The view whirls to show a Dragoons officer, who snarls and shoves past, vanishing. Visible down the corridor is a flash, and then a hurricane-like whooshing sound as debris and the camera are blown out into space. The last transmitted shot shows the station venting air through a large gash in the lower decks, people and equipment hurtling into orbit. A blinding flash near the aft end appears before a large wooden desk smashes into the camera frame, turning the feed to snow.*]

—Final transmission from Harlech News Network reporters on Dragoons station *Mercutio*, 20 December 3067

FILTHY MONEY

MERCENARY TREACHERY

(2 January 3068)

Outreach [INN] – It seems that for every mercenary command of sterling character (such as Wolf's Dragoons, the Kell Hounds or the Twelfth Vegan Rangers), there is one for whom money is the only thing that matters. The Word of Blake highlighted this with deadly clarity when they bought Waco's Rangers, Smithson's Chinese Bandits, the Tiger Sharks and the 51st Dark Panzer Jaegers and unleashed them on Harlech. Now to this roll of dishonor must be added the Broadsword Legion. Hired by Wolf's Dragoons in their moment of need, the Legion turned on their employers as the Dragoons battled to defend their homes from the onslaught of the Blakists' Sixth and Tenth Divisions.

At the height of this second battle of Outreach, just as it appeared the defenders were gaining the upper hand, the Broadsword Legion launched a furious assault on the rear of the Dragoons' Wolf Spiders Battalion. Pinned between the Legion and the Blakist Diplomacy of Force III-Alpha, the Wolf Spiders (proud holders of the Black Widow Battalion legacy) were almost annihilated before they could rally. That costly act of treachery further weakened the Dragoons. In an apparent effort to finish off the famed mercenaries once and for all, the Blakists reportedly launched devastating strategic attacks against the planet from orbit.

Across the Inner Sphere, the same question is being asked: Who will next turn their coat? Which mercenary command will turn on its employers and do the evil bidding of the Word of Blake? This fear has already led to tragedy on Epsilon Indi, where the Com Guards Second Division launched an unprovoked attack on the Tooth of Ymir. Reportedly, relations between the Com Guards and the mercenaries had been strained ever since the mercenary unit arrived on-world.

Faced with overwhelming odds, Colonel Shadwell wisely ordered the battered Tooth to surrender. Following an exhaustive investigation, Precentor Regis Grandi has reluctantly been forced to concede that no tangible proof exists linking the Tooth with the Word of Blake. The Tooth of Ymir, now under the minimum strength stipulated by their contract, is reportedly headed for Arc-Royal to rebuild. In the meantime, many mercenary commanders are left nervously wondering how long it will be before their equally nervous employers turn on them.

OUTREACH BOMBARDED!

(31 December 3067)

The following is an unedited version of a report by Shandra Esteban, one of our MercNet reporters on Outreach:

Remus, Outreach [MERCNET] – I have lived on Outreach for four years now. I've been with each of the Dragoons regiments. I've been to many of the Home Guard bases. I've spoken with those who traveled here because of the freedom, or because it was a true mercenary's Mecca, a place to recuperate, a place to trade, a place for business.

FILTHY MONEY

All that is over now.

But I do know the damned Word of Blake has won. They crushed us! We were winning, and for that those damn bastards dropped nukes on us, on our bases, on our *homes*. They couldn't win an honest battle, so they killed *everyone*! Not since the Succession Wars has anyone done anything this horrible. I don't care about the Fifth FedCom! The bastards used megaton devices on the Keep, damn them! There's nothing left!

Objectivity be damned! Curse the Word of Blake! No mercy for the merciless! We must destroy them, or they will destroy us!

OUTREACH: A SURVIVOR'S ACCOUNT

(31 January 3068)

Galatea City, Galatea [INN] – Millions died last month when Outreach suffered catastrophic damage by nuclear and orbital bombardment perpetrated by Word of Blake naval and ground forces. In an interview I conducted with Lieutenant Alvin Salazar, a Dragoons survivor, I learned the horrors of the attack firsthand, along with the final days of Outreach's defenses against the Blakist assault.

When I left Salazar, he seemed upbeat and confident after the defeat of Wayne Waco's mercenaries in Harlech. The man I met with a few hours ago did not even resemble the one I last saw in late October. His eyes were sunken and his face gaunt, classic signs of mild radiation sickness. Salazar also suffered from extreme exhaustion and battle fatigue. I offered him a chance to rest before we talked, but he refused.

Salazar described in detail how Gamma Regiment's Colonel Irwin Tyrell, newly arrived from Tikonov, assumed command of the Outreach defenses and organized them for a possible Blakist counterattack, ordering off-world all units that did not belong to the AMC or that refused to defend the planet. This left the Second Dismal Disinherited, the Wolf Spiders, Gamma Brigade and the Broadsword Legion to protect Outreach, supported by a scattering of smaller commands and lone wolf warriors.

General Maeve Wolf and Alpha Regiment were due any day, but the Blakists arrived first on December 20, launching a blitzkrieg attack against the orbital defense stations and the two defending *Lola III* WarShips, using nuclear and naval-class weapons to quickly secure space superiority.

The Blakist ground force landed on Outreach with an estimated two full divisions and immediately attacked sites in and around Harlech. Gamma Brigade and the Dismal Disinherited stopped them cold, while the Wolf Spider Battalion and the Broadsword Legion attacked in the rear. The attack went off as planned, until the Legion turned on the Wolf Spiders and nearly destroyed them. The Broadswords then joined up with the Blakist forces, but their attack stalled in the face of a determined Dragoons defense.

Alpha Brigade finally arrived when the *Alexander*, General Maeve Wolf's *Aegis*-class cruiser, appeared in-system and briefly penetrated the Blakist blockade. As General Wolf's forces landed to break the planetside stalemate, the *Alexander* fought a brief engagement with the Blakist fleet, destroying a number of assault DropShips and damaging two WarShips before retreating.

Apparently sensing imminent defeat, the Blakist fleet commander ordered an orbital bombardment in and around Harlech after nearly a week of fighting. Simultaneously, the Blakists sterilized the entire Remus continent using strategic nuclear weapons. On December 28, this bloody tactic paid off. General Wolf ordered a general retreat, though portions of Gamma Regiment reportedly stayed behind to wage a guerrilla campaign against the Blakist occupation. Covering this retreat, at the cost of its life, was the badly damaged *Alexander*.

The surviving Dragoons warriors and families will make their way to Arc-Royal, where the Kell Hounds and Clan Wolf-in-Exile have offered refuge and aid. In the coming days, this reporter will join them, to bring you more information as it becomes available.

Reporting for INN here on Galatea, I'm Emilio Sanchez.

MRBC ADVISORY: UPDATES TO ROGUE/WANTED LIST

(31 March 3068)

Galatea City [MERCNET] – The following units are listed as Wanted/Rogue.

Regarding rewards for information leading to the capture of these units, or members of these units, or concerning bounties for the capture or killing of these units, or members of these units, please request a Rewards and Bounties Fact Sheet free of charge from your nearest MercNet outlet, or follow the link at the end of this article.

Broadsword Legion

Initially employed by the AMC, the Broadsword Legion, a collection of defectors from the ComStar Com Guards, turned on their employers during the recent fighting on Outreach and are thought to be under contract to the Word of Blake. Still operating on Outreach as part of Blakist occupation forces, they are heavily damaged.

Wanted dead or alive for: crimes against humanity, war crimes, severe breach of faith

Last known whereabouts: Outreach

Bronson's Horde

While employed by the Marian Hegemony, Bronson's Horde defected to the Circinus Federation and turned against their employers. They are currently working for the Word of Blake, and mounting numbers of claims of criminal activity perpetrated by the Horde have been reported.

Wanted dead or alive for: war crimes, acts of fraud/piracy, attacks on civilian targets

Last known whereabouts: Epsilon Eridani

FILTHY MONEY

LEGACY OF DISTRUST

In the aftermath of Outreach, the Northwind blockade and the sudden surge in turncoat mercenaries across the Inner Sphere, almost overnight the standards and honor of the professional soldier were called into question by their employers and their potential opponents. A new wave of anti-merc paranoia swept the Inner Sphere, forcing leaders to rethink their strategic plans with an eye toward potential treachery. Mercenary hires dropped even more than the loss of the Outreach offices could account for. In one fell swoop, centuries of progress perished in the fires of the new face of war.

"DIVINE RETRIBUTION!"

(6 January 3068)

Terra [VOICE OF TRUTH] – Wolf's Dragoons' propaganda division wants everyone to believe their spin on events. But their biased reports cannot hide the truth! As the Blessed Blake said, "There are two sides to every story." Judge for yourself which is true, and learn why the Dragoons and their haven on Outreach were a threat to all humankind.

The mercenary business is in decline. It has been for decades. Anti-mercenary sentiment growing all over the Inner Sphere—not just in the Free Worlds League and the Draconis Combine—stems from decades of mercenary excesses. Accounts of mercenaries going rogue are legion, and the suffering inflicted by these hired pirates on the people is substantial. Indeed, the formation of the Star League and the Citizens Honored—the franchising of several mercenary units within the Capellan Confederation—would have spelled the end of the independent mercenary unit, had Wolf's Dragoons not made such strenuous efforts to save their questionable business.

The Allied Mercenary Command is nothing more than a tool to propagate the wars and death that ravage the so-called Chaos March. Many mercenary units employed by the Capellan and Free Worlds governments failed to complete their objectives during Operation Guerrero, leaving entire worlds defenseless and in turmoil. Ever since, that troubled region has been a fertile market for these same self-serving mercenaries. The stability and peace brought by the Word of Blake to these beleaguered worlds therefore posed a threat to the Dragoons and all those lucre-loving warriors who fear the loss of yet another source of income. They do not care that their enrichment requires the pain and suffering of the very people they vow to protect.

The Dragoons have long made billions through the mercenary trade, and they do not wish this income to dry up. They have let their world, given to them by the Federated Suns, become a breeding ground for mercenary commands large and small, all of questionable caliber. This practice backfired on them in October of last year when a veritable civil war broke out on Outreach between the established elite and the "have-nots" of the trade. The Dragoons, eager to shift blame away from themselves for this disaster, placed it on us and struck out against the Terran system in retribution.

MORGAN KELL SPEAKS

(7 January 3068)

Arc-Royal [INN] – Escaping the destruction on Tharkad, Grand Duke Morgan Kell has returned to Arc-Royal. Today Duke Kell issued the following statement:

"These are dark days for the Inner Sphere.

"For centuries humankind has fought wars, and always mercenaries have played their part. But what is a mercenary? To the public, a mercenary is a warrior—sometimes romanticized, often reviled—who fights for money. To a military commander, a mercenary is an asset to be used, just like any other weapon. To a politician, a mercenary is a necessary evil, an expense that must be accepted to achieve a desired goal.

"The one thing everyone expects from a mercenary is integrity.

"Not loyalty. Not high morals, not even bravery. Integrity.

"Some consider the mercenary trade to be the second-oldest profession (or perhaps the third, after politics), but integrity is the foundation on which the whole edifice is built. The Mercenary Review and Bonding Commission was created to guarantee that integrity, from mercenaries and those who hire them.

"The deaths of my good friend, Jaime Wolf, and of so many Dragoons can be laid at the door of renegades who chose to sell their integrity, the one thing most important to a mercenary.

"I say now to all mercenary commands, this madness must stop. No more! No matter the fee, no matter the coin, selling our souls—our honor—is a transaction we cannot afford!"

Naturally, the Word of Blake seeks to keep safe all those who rely on us for protection. The rogue attack by AMC elements cost thousands of innocent lives, and could not go unpunished. We have dismantled the mercenary haven that Outreach once was, along with all mercenary assets that opposed the Will of Blake. It should come as no surprise that the Dragoons, through their propaganda outlet and front organization, the MRBC, immediately attempted to smear our victory by claiming our forces committed atrocities. Do not be fooled! These allegations are a feeble attempt to tarnish the public image of an organization that seeks only stability and peace for the entire Inner Sphere.

Are all mercenary units evil? Of course not! But thoughtful people will not rely on the reports of the MRBC, which has long demonstrated its corruption and bias in favor of the Dragoons and their money-grubbing allies. Do not rely on their reports concerning which units are rogue and which are trustworthy. Examine their listing of rogue units. How many are employed by the Word of Blake, whom they call their enemy?

The mercenary trade is changing. The Inner Sphere will be a better place without Wolf's Dragoons influencing the business for the worse.

FILTHY MONEY

MERCENARIES UNDER FIRE

(20 January 3068)

Galatea City [MERCNET] – In the wake of the destruction of Outreach and the elimination of so many mercenary commands congregated there, many now question to what extent they can trust the various merc units in their employ, and the accuracy of MRBC reliability ratings.

A main reason for this appears to be the independent behavior of many mercenary units. First is the Allied Mercenary Command, a coalition led by Wolf's Dragoons, including such units as the Dismal Disinherited and Lindon's Battalion. The AMC has executed several missions under its own authority, most recently the actions on Hall and the recent attack on Mars. The Mars attack was a retaliatory strike after a large number of mercenary units on Outreach suddenly assaulted numerous Dragoons positions, razed Harlech and destroyed the Hiring Hall towers.

Another unpredicted defection occurred when the Word of Blake retaliated in turn for the attack on Mars by razing Outreach. The Broadsword Legion, a group of Com Guard defectors, turned on their Dragoons employers, inflicting serious damage to the Wolf Spider Battalion before joining up with Word of Blake ground forces.

In light of these shocking events, many have come to view the Northwind Highlanders' seclusion on Northwind months ago with suspicion. Exercising the emergency escape clauses in their contracts with the Draconis Combine, McLeod's Regiment and the First Kearny Highlanders left their stations in September of 3067, with a promise to return soon. This action infuriated many in the DCMS and worried several neighboring states, especially since attempts to contact the Highlanders, or anyone on Northwind, have failed ever since Word of Blake forces arrived in the Northwind system. While many fear the Blakists have assaulted Northwind as they did Outreach—given that the Northwind Highlanders are prominent founding members of the AMC—so far no evidence of such an attack exists. To some, this lack of evidence suggests complicity between the Highlanders and the Blakists.

More troublesome is the Combine's response to the departure of the two Highlanders and one Dragoons regiment. With more than half its major contracted mercenaries departing to deal with their own problems, many in the DCMS are openly questioning the reliability of those units still employed. They are particularly critical of Narhal's Raiders, a unit known to be pro-Federated Suns. The incursions into Combine space during the FedCom Civil War have rekindled old hatreds, and the gradually increasing hostility from locals on Fellanin II may cause predictions of the Raiders' impending defection to the Federated Suns to become a self-fulfilling prophecy. This public sentiment against mercenaries seems to be propagating across the Combine. Things are looking especially grim on worlds such as Kiesen, present base for the Dragon's Breath and Wolf's Dragoons' Delta Regiment, and on Hachiman and Wapakoneta, respective bases for Camacho's Caballeros and the Crater Cobras mercenary commands.

Meanwhile, public opinion is also turning against mercenary units in the Free Worlds League. The defection of several units in the wake of Operation Guerrero, as well as the League's military growth and success, have prompted many to argue against "draining national resources" to hire mercenaries that are no longer necessary.

With the severe scaling down of Explorer Corps operations and the gradual decline in mercenary employment by major states such as the Capellan Confederation, Free Worlds League and Outworlds Alliance, the mercenary profession is at its lowest ebb in centuries. The recent razing of the mercenary capital and the sharp decline in perceptions of professional soldiers' reliability and honor paints a bleak picture for the future of the industry.

RUNNING THE BLOCKADE

(23 March 3068)

Outreach System [INN] – I am reporting to you from Clan Wolf-in-Exile's flagship, *Werewolf*. We are outbound, heading away from Outreach after successfully extracting two companies of survivors from Wolf's Dragoons' Gamma Regiment, plus a few allied soldiers, and a large number of civilians and warriors held for months in bases on Romulus.

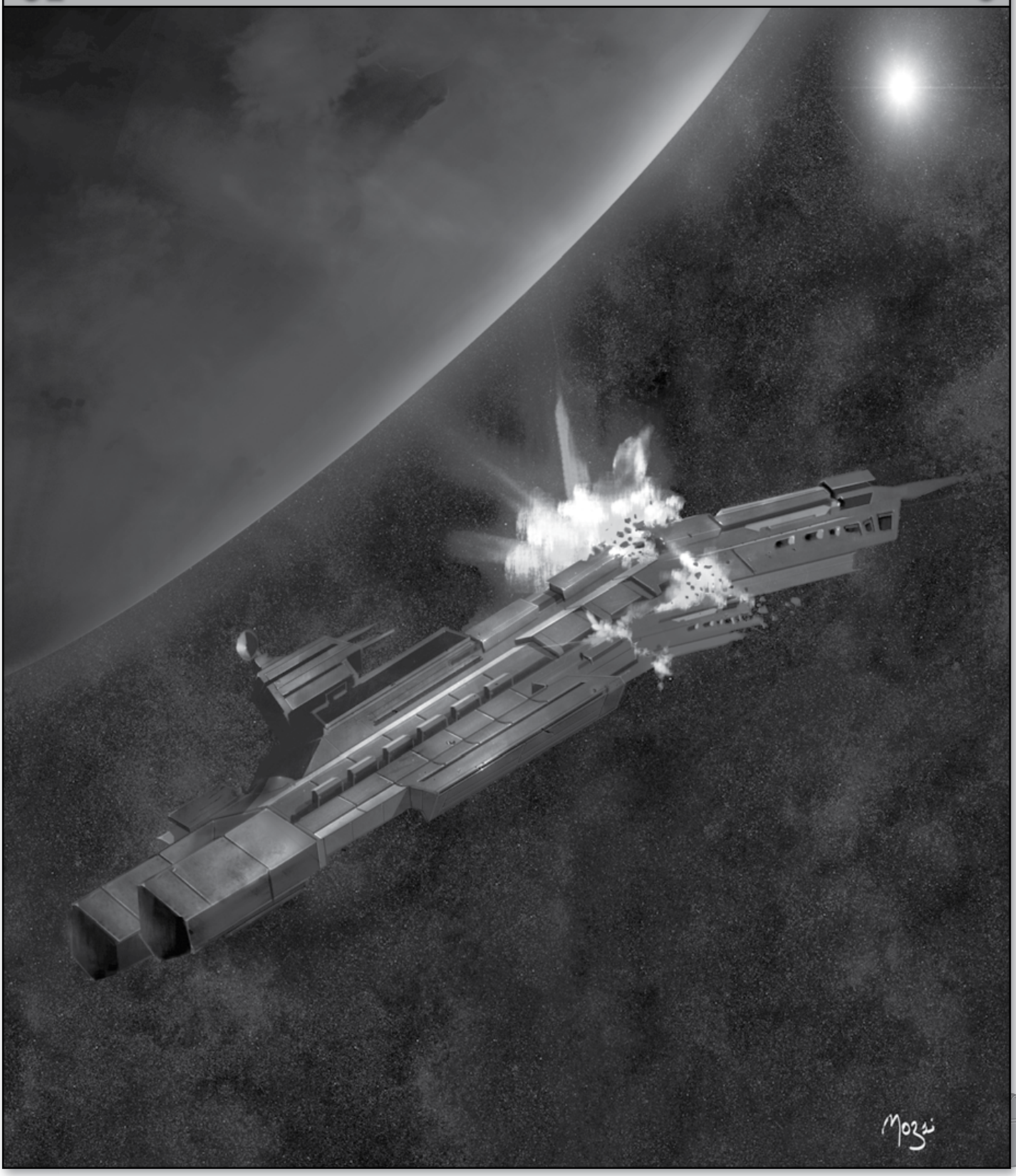
This rescue mission became reality in part through intelligence obtained by the Seventh Kommandos, aided by an independent covert ops team, which indicated that less than a battalion of Dragoons remained on Outreach. Guerrilla operations proved ineffective, and the surviving Dragoons requested extraction. Khan Phelan Kell and General Wolf agreed to send a joint task force to Outreach to retrieve these personnel. Kell assigned the First Wolf Striker Grenadier Cluster, commanded by Star Colonel Chas Kerensky, to operate with Alpha Regiment, while General Wolf commanded the task force. Bidding for the honor to attack was set aside in the face of the holocaust engulfing the Inner Sphere.

We departed Arc-Royal on February 1 and arrived eight weeks later on March 20, at a pirate point one day out from Outreach. Fortunately, our close proximity shortened flight time and allowed us to slip past the Blakist blockade without suffering major losses.

Our forces grounded and made contact with Blakist units an hour after landing. The First Wolf Striker held the center while Alpha pushed back the wings, establishing a defensive zone. Meanwhile, the *Werewolf* and her fighters held back the Blakist blockade, clearing the skies and tying up an unidentified *Essex*-class destroyer and a *Black Lion*. Gamma's survivors and allies arrived for extraction while a final sweep along Romulus' western district located the civilian confinement camps described by the Seventh Kommandos. Twenty-four hours later, with holds crammed full of survivors and precious little materiel, we lifted aboard a squadron of shuttles and DropShips, to rejoin the *Werewolf*. With any luck, these people—who saw the horrors of the Jihad first and worst—will finally know peace far from the combat zone.

Reporting for INN, outbound from Outreach, I'm Emilio Sanchez.

BURNING FIST



BURNING FIST

For the people of the Lyran Alliance, 3067 may well go down in history as the Year of Endings, the year when everything they had worked, lived and died for came crashing down in fire and chaos.

In that year, the FedCom Civil War ended, marking the last act of a drama two generations in the making. In that year the reign of Katherine Steiner-Davion came to a close, and with it a shadow war against personal and political freedoms that few were aware had been waged. And in that year the Second Star League ended, killing a noble, hard-fought effort to end the threat of wars between the Inner Sphere and the Clans—perhaps forever.

In 3067, the last lingering shreds of Lyran innocence died. That year, we went on the attack, with no one to blame for the outcomes but ourselves. That year, the greed for which so many others know us so well became our collective noose. That year, we came close to losing everything that made us a people, a nation, a *force*—right down to our very souls.

Indeed, for the people of the Lyran state—once a mighty Commonwealth until civil war and failed ambitions reduced it to a parody of its former self, comically dubbed an Alliance—3067 may go down in history as not merely the Year of Endings, but as the beginning of the end of civilization. For us, 3067 was the Year of *Götterdämmerung*. Never before—save possibly during our nation's infancy and the Age of War—have the Lyran people stood so close to the abyss as we do today.

And it would be only too easy to step off the precipice.

On the day the Jihad came to Tharkad, it seemed as though the entire universe stood still. With a flash of light and a cloud of fire, an unseasonably mild December day became a horror that left tens of thousands dead in minutes. The shockwaves of that attack rippled beyond the capital world, shaking up the entire universe and rattling the Lyran political and military leadership to its foundations. The Alliance became a rudderless ship, lost at sea in a tempest, its crew clinging for dear life to the handrails. United in our shock, we could only remember that we were still Lyrans, that we had been hurt as a people, and that what came to Tharkad could just as easily have come to any other Alliance world.

Before long, exactly that happened.

Donegal, Skye, Coventry, Hesperus II, Alarion, Solaris VII—the list of major worlds on which the Jihad has already rained its "righteous fire" is impressive. After a mere twelve months of fighting, few among us have not lost friends or family, or do not know someone else who has, to this new war or the sideline battles it has spawned.

Many of those same survivors often ask if somehow all of this could have been prevented. If our leaders had retained the Second Star League, would the Word of Blake have come to us as allies, presenting the long-lost *Invincible* as a gift rather than an instrument of mass destruction? Would a few more years in an alliance with ancient enemies—at the expense of our precious national resources in the wake of a destructive civil war—have been worth seeing Blake's "divine light" guarding our planets with the ferocity of the zealot?

Or could we have taken the switch on the tracks sooner? If only we had not formed the Second Star League to begin with, would we now face the wrath of those who placed so much value

ON THE RED CARPET

(27 November 3067)

Tharkad City, Tharkad [SBC] – I'm Juanita Rivera, here at the Whitting Conference, presenting the "Who's Who" of the Inner Sphere as they show up for this grand event.

Arriving first is Christian Månsdottir, current First Lord, wearing a custom-tailored suit by Tiana Showers. At his side is the artist Emily Parker, in a stunning gown by Kobayashi that changes colors as she moves. Oh, the other ladies will have a tough time matching this stunning look.

Coming up next is none other than Coordinator Theodore Kurita, wearing the majestic mantle of the Combine's highest office over his traditional military dress. Accompanying him, his son and heir-apparent, Hohiro Kurita, looks almost identical in his own crisp dress whites, fitting attire for the standing Commanding General of the SLDF.

I'd try to get closer, but Yvonne Steiner-Davion and Tancred Sandoval have just shown up. The Duke of Robinson has also opted to wear military dress for this event; his choice complements the First Princess' FuRrOr red satin dress nicely, making for a very attractive couple on the carpet as they wave to the crowds.

And here we have ComStar's First Precentor Gavin Dow, preceding Precentor Martial Victor Steiner-Davion and Duchess Isis Marik by more than a few steps. The duchess' green Trellheime dress shows off what Chancellor Liao foolishly passed up, though Victor looks a tad unbecoming in his ComStar hooded cape.

Following them is Protector Grover Shraplen of the Taurian Concordat, a hopeful new member for this year's events, dressed in a conservative yet timeless navy blue jacket and sash. He is unaccompanied, but keeps looking over his shoulder.

Now we have a lull as a businessman approaches. Oh my! It's the Word of Blake's Cameron St. Jamais, wearing something that looks like it came off the rack at MeijerMart. Have Terran fashions really fallen so low? Oh, wait, trailing a little behind we see Precentor William Blane of Gibson, dressed in the splendid robes of his Order, working the crowd with a winning smile.

Ah, and here comes Captain-General Thomas Marik and his wife, Sherryl Halas, in a matching ensemble of royal purple and gold trim from Pierre Calderon.

What's this? Peter Steiner? But the host should appear last! Where are the rest of the delegates? Have the Capellans and Canopians actually snubbed this year's Star League Conference?

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on their ascension into it? If only the Federated Commonwealth had not dissolved, would the weakening of bonds have occurred that precipitated the Star League's collapse? If only the Clans had never come, would we have needed a new Star League, or even had a Word of Blake splinter group to worry about? The questions will go on forever, suggesting alternatives that could have saved us "if only." In the end, we will still be here, struggling to survive the outcome of our choices as a nation.

And we must survive them. There is no other alternative.

—Bertram R. Habeas, Acting Editor-in-Chief, (former) Chekswa School of Literature, 20 October 3068

THARKAD BURNS

Maybe it was a lack of commitment among the individuals involved. Could the vote to dissolve the Star League have gone another way—averting the holocaust to come—if someone more forceful than Christian Månsdottir had held the office of First Lord? Could the stern wisdom of Theodore Kurita, the passionate pleas of Victor Steiner-Davion or even the dignified words of Thomas Marik have convinced the others to stay the course for one more term despite the venom of Sun-Tzu Liao and his Capellan representative, and the apathy of the rulers of the former FedCom? If they had known what was coming, would they have cast their votes any differently? Perhaps. But how long can an alliance of convenience stand when

DEATH FROM ABOVE

[*Yellow Dream*]: "Roger, Control, moving to alternate glide path. Any idea where those WarShips came from?"

[*Aurora Wing Leader*]: "You'll know as soon as we do, *Yellow Dream*. Just concentrate on your orbital path and let us handle that old battle rig."

[*Yellow Dream*]: "Battle rig? [*Censored*], Flyboy! You aren't kidding! That's a *Tharkad*-class as sure as I'm standing here! Whoa, wait! I have a visual of the nameplate from here... Odin's eye, you have to be kidding me! That can't really be the *Invincible*, can it? And in Star League colors? You gotta be [*censored*] me!"

[*Aurora Leader*]: "Say again, *Dream*?"

[*Yellow Dream*]: "I just got a close-up scan, Flyboy, and I'm telling you, if she ain't the real thing, then these guys whipped up one hell of a replica… Hey, wait up. Those escorts are Blake ships! I'm staring right at the freakin' broadsword painted on that *McKenna*'s nose! You mean… Where the hell did they get the *Invincible*?"

[*Aurora Leader*]: "Calm down, *Dream*. Just calm down. Now, last time. Alter to Bravo-four and clear the lines… Command, Aurora Flight confirms lead vessel is *Tharkad*-class with Blake capital escort assets. Vessels not responding to tight-beam hails. Please advise."

[*Alliance Naval Command*]: "Stand by, Aurora Flight. Attention, Word of Blake vessels, this is Alliance Naval Command. You are in violation of Tharkad airspace regulations. Please acknowledge this hail and veer off now, or we will be forced to consider your actions hostile and take appropriate defensive action."

[*Yellow Dream*]: "Screw this, Flyboy! I'm sitting here staring down the damn guns of a monstrosity brought back from the dead, and you're telling me to shut the hell up? What the—? Now the damn thing's got me lit up with targeting computers!"

[*Aurora Leader*]: "Say again, *Dream*?"

[*Yellow Dream*]: "You heard me, damn it! That *McKenna*'s taking a combat stance—I've flown the space lanes long enough to recognize a goddamn combat posture! Oh, hell…."

[*Alliance Naval Command*]: "Damn it, Blake *McKenna*! Please disengage your targeting systems and stand down now! …*Dream*, this is Alliance Naval Command. Give those ships a wide berth. Change your vector by three-five degrees starboard, by—"

[*Yellow Dream*]: [*panicked*] "Control! That bugger's scanning me like a Canopian whore. I'm lighting out of here…" [*Heard in background*] "Redirect burn to outbound ninety-mark-zero; I ain't staying here to be some Blakie's sim target!"

[*Alliance Naval Command*]: "Stay with me, *Dream*. She's toying with you. It's a bluff. There's no way the Word of Blake is coming here to start a war."

[*Yellow Dream*]: "R-roger, control. Continuing on course. I'm just not liking being so damn close to that monster, Lyran *or* Blake."

[*Aurora Leader*]: "Aurora Flight, this is Aurora Lead. Enough's enough; they're not backing down. Let's light these *Arschloch*s up. Go to active targeting now. On my mark, I want a full warning spread across that *McKenna*'s bow…"

[*Aurora Two*]: "Wait, Aurora Lead! I'm getting a signal here…"

[*Aurora Two*]: "Jesus Christ almighty!"

[*Yellow Dream*]: [*shout from the background*] "*Scheisse*! She just opened up! That *Tharkad* just—"

[*Control*]: "What's that, *Drea*— Oh my Go—"

[*Aurora Leader*]: "Confirming orbital fire on Tharkad. What the hell—!"

[*Yellow Dream*]: "—ired on the planet! By Buddha's hairless head! She *JUST FREAKING FIRED ON THARKAD*!"

[*Aurora Leader*]: "—mmand! Requesting full support! There's no way we can take these things—"

[*Alliance Naval Command*]: "ABORT! ABORT! ALL TRAFF—"

[*hisssssssssssssssss*]

[*Yellow Dream*]: [*several voices in the background*] "Fighters launching!… she's opening up… Contact! Contact! DropShip burning on atta…kad City! Look at that fire…registering a massive thermal spike on Thark… oming! Fire all anti-missile spre—" [*loud explosion, squeal, silence*]

—Intercepted space traffic transmissions over Tharkad, 5 December 3067

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its own members see it as a sham? Of course, not everyone saw the new Star League as a sham. Within a few terrible days, we learned how far some would go to protect their dreams of the future.

STAR LEAGUE DISBANDS!

(30 November 3067)

Tharkad [DBC] —Duke Anatoly Serfass of Alarion gave the following statement to the pressroom:

"Ladies and gentlemen of the press. I bring shocking news. The second Star League has disbanded today, at this, the fourth—and final—Whitting Conference. Proclaiming their unwillingness to continue as a member of the League, the Capellan delegation was the first to withdraw all political and military support for the alliance. In light of ongoing domestic crises in their respective realms, the Federated Suns and the Lyran Alliance both found support for the Star League at this time to be financially, politically and militarily prohibitive.

"The withdrawal of these three states from the League came amid protests from representatives of the Draconis Combine, Free Worlds League, Rasalhague Republic, ComStar, the Word of Blake and the Taurian Concordat, all of whom pressed for a vote of no confidence in the Star League. The Word of Blake and the Concordat were inducted into the League to participate in this vote, hoping to counterbalance the Capellan, FedSuns and Lyran decisions to vote against the Star League. The resulting 6-to-3 vote in favor of the League's continuance did not carry the required three-fourths majority to sustain the alliance, much less force its withdrawing members to continue their support for it. You will recall, of course, that the withdrawing realms represent the combined populations of more than half the Inner Sphere.

"The standing First Lord, Christian Månsdottir, acknowledged the vote and formally dissolved the second Star League on the grounds of insufficient support from her member-states.

"Ladies and gentlemen, with a heavy heart I say that we all stand witness to the end of an era. I can only pray that humanity truly has no more need for the Star League."

RIGHTEOUS FIRE

Continuing our coverage of the tragic events unfolding on Tharkad, SBC recently received this short vid-clip from an affiliated transport passing through the system. Before we air this, we remind viewers at home that parental discretion is advised. The following material may be unsuitable for some viewers.

<<<Transmission Begins>>>

[*SBC field reporter Frank Ferranno appears before the Estates General building in the Triad. Behind him, a chanting and jeering mob has gathered, rallied by the muffled words of a speaker in noble attire.*]

[*Ferranno*]: "Are we on? How's my hair? Go? Hello, this is Frank Ferranno, live from the Triad, where just five days ago the Whitting Conference came to a sudden end as the gathered leaders voted to disband the alliance that helped defeat the Clans once and for all. Reports are sketchy, but we've been told that the Word of Blake representative, Cameron St. Jamais, issued a thinly veiled ultimatum to the departing leaders to change their minds and re-form the League 'or else.' The threat apparently fell on deaf ears—"

[*Behind Ferranno, the crowd roars in response to something the speaker says.*]

[*Ferranno*]: "Since then, tensions on Tharkad have remained high. As you can see behind me, in the midst of this chaos, members of the Lyran nobility have been meeting to protest the Archon's call to the Estates General for a vote on another anti-'Social General' bill, which many feel is a smokescreen to deter criticism of his role in the new Star League's demise. The crowd is growing volatile and the Royal Guard is—"

<<<Transmission Interrupted>>>

Infidels! For the cowardly actions of your so-called leaders in dissolving the Star League and denying the Third Transfer, you shall all feel the divine wrath of the Blessed Blake! May others witness this as a symbol of our righteousness, so that all may know Blake's purifying light!

<<<Interruption Ends>>>

[*Ferranno*]: "What the hell was tha—?"

[*Flashes of light cause the crowd to yell in surprise. A few moments later, thunderous explosions somewhere beyond the field of vision accompany a violent shudder. Ferranno spins around and nearly tumbles, trying to see, as the camera shakes violently and loses focus.*]

[*Ferranno*]: "What the hell was *that*? The earth is shaking, and there's been some kind of… some kind of explosion to the north—"

[*Another flash, followed moments later by another rumble and distant explosions. The crowd is in a panic, with hysterical screaming and people running everywhere.*]

[*Ferranno*]: "It—It's like artillery or something, I think. Someone's saying there've been explosions to the north, but we—"

[*Another flash, brighter and far closer than the first, nearly washes out the entire scene for a moment. Ferranno throws his arm across his face, shielding his eyes from the off-camera light blast.*]

[*Ferranno*]: "Mother of God! Behind you!"

[*The camera starts to turn, but the picture is lost in tumbling images and static as a loud boom and a chorus of screams overloads the mike. The camera crashes to the ground, hiding the city from sight, as a thin-stalked mushroom cloud rises above the valley. The view ripples, then goes black.*]

<<<Transmission Ends>>>

Still no word on the number of dead in Tharkad City tonight, or of the fate of the Archon and the Estates General, who were in session at the time. SBC News will continue our coverage of the disaster on Tharkad after this break. Our prayers and hopes go out to the people of Tharkad this evening.

—From *SBC News Extra*, Solaris Broadcasting Company, Solaris, 10 December 3067

BURNING FIST

HORROR UNLEASHED

Tharkad Broadcasting Company aired the following live-feed news broadcast on the morning of 5 December 3067:

[*TBC Anchor*]: "…We go live to Derek Majors, onboard the *Invisible Truth*."

<<uplink connected>>

[*Camera snap-fades up*]

[*Majors*]: [*hesitates for a few seconds*] "Thanks, Mark. Hello everyone, I'm Derek Majors, reporting to you live from the ready room outside the bridge here on the ComStar WarShip *Invisible Truth*, known to many in the Alliance as the vessel that spearheaded the attack on Clan Smoke Jaguar's fortress world of Huntress. We are currently outbound from the recent Star League Conference, where the historic Second League disbanded less than a week ago. We will be riding along with the Precentor Martial as he escorts the Princess Regent back to New Avalon. Precentor Martial Davion is planning a tour of ComStar facilities near the Free Worlds League and has graciously allowed us access to parts of his itinerary, in hopes of strengthening the relationship between the secular Order and the Great Houses.

"Currently, we've been told that a mystery of sorts has developed in orbit around Tharkad. Approximately ninety minutes ago, a small force of WarShips was detected on a fast inbound vector to the planet. These vessels, apparently Word of Blake in origin, had been holding station at an in-system point several hours out from Tharkad, in accordance with local orbital control protocols established for all vessels brought in by the gathering council lords prior to the conference. In a surprise turn of events, however, the vessels were detected a short time ago on a fast approach toward the planet. Sensors confirmed that the central vessel is the LCS *Invincible*, the ancient *Tharkad*-class battlecruiser thought lost centuries ago after her defense of Hesperus II. Incredibly, this amazing ship—a symbol of Lyran pride and victory over one of the most heroic naval actions in post-Star League history—is now being escorted to Tharkad by a group of Word of Blake WarShips. How they obtained her is anybody's guess, as well as why the Blakists have chosen to mask her identity on IFFs and radar by running in such a tight formation. It seems they plan to keep us guessing a while longer, having refused all hails since sensors first spotted them on their orbital approach.

"We're not sure of the Blakists' intentions, though some have suggested they may have been attempting a rare 'slingshot' maneuver, an effort to use Tharkad's gravity to boost their acceleration toward the nearest jump point, for which they failed to attain the proper angles and are now decelerating in the hopes of making a second attempt. As a precaution, we're told that orbital flight controllers are diverting all traffic away from the Blakist formation and military vessels are on standby alert, with at least one fighter squadron scrambled in an effort to warn off the approaching

SUCCOR

To: Illya Yanilos
Director of Operations
Olympia Regional Medical Center
Olympia, Tharkad
6 December 3067

Dear Illya,

The devastation of Tharkad City is numbing. I won't diminish it with numbers; you can read the attached reports as well as I. Nor will I trivialize it with hollow comparisons. "Not as bad as..."; "Worse than..."; "Much the same as..." What meaning can such phrases have in the face of suffering? As though a mother grieving her lost child would be comforted to hear another had lost two children or a third had lost none.

I'm sorry, Illya, that last was not directed at you. A foolish reporter asked me to "characterize the situation." He stood in our triage tent, the moans of the suffering all around him, and leaned across a sobbing woman who had lost nearly a quarter of her flesh in a spray of molten glass to shove his recorder in my face. Merciful Allah gave me the strength not to throttle him, but I doubt many news services will carry my response.

Perhaps of use to you—and this is in the reports—in determining the composition and distribution of the second wave of relief (a third and fourth wave would not be too much, if you can find the resources): There was one nuclear explosion, a massive detonation in the industrial district. (A military officer—I could not tell of what service, as he was covered with dirt and blood from digging through the rubble for survivors—said this was inconsistent with the barrage of conventional weapons that had deluged the city and the surrounding countryside.) If you could dispatch radiation teams directly to the heavily populated region west and north of the industrial district, where the prevailing winds have carried most of the fallout, it would save what's left of the Tharkad City Emergency Response Administration precious hours and effort sorting resources at this end.

Beyond the pragmatic, and perhaps all the more significant because it is not coldly empirical: The spirit of the people of Tharkad City is unbowed. Though the bombardment from above has stopped, no one believes it is over. Yet even with the knowledge that the ordeal will continue, the innocent civilians who have borne the brunt of this vicious onslaught do not despair. Rather, the knowledge that they must endure the coming trial has imbued the common man with the determination to persevere.

Where there is tragedy, there is hope. Send what aid you can, dear Illya, and we, as Allah gives us strength, will carry on.

All my love,

Fatima Yanilos
Disaster Response Team Leader
Olympia Regional Medical Center Emergency Services

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ships. Most are simply as awestruck as we are, to see the famed *Invincible*—or at least a craft of the same class and bearing the same name—in service again…

"Wait—I'm getting a signal from my producer… My God! Chuck, turn the camera to the viewscreen!"

[*Camera rotates to a large vidscreen showing the blue-white arc of Tharkad's sunlit side. A huge, dark and blocky shape hovers in the center of the scene, flanked by three others.*]

[*Majors*]: "This is a live feed of what the *Truth* is seeing on the bridge. The central ship you see, that giant shape there, is the *Invincible*, with her escorts fanning out to her fore and aft…. My—hey, zoom in on the nose, Chuck, if you can…."

[*Camera zooms in, the picture deteriorating as the image enlarges.*]

[*Majors*]: [*continuing in a rush as the image struggles to refocus*]: "I apologize for the graininess; we haven't been able to complete our network patch-ins. Apparently, there have—Wait! There it is again…."

[*The image of the* Invincible*'s bow shows several winking lights. Agitated voices can be heard in background. The camera snaps back to Majors, his face ashen as he listens intently to an earphone.*]

[*Majors*]: "*No!* This can't be happening! They can't be doing this! Tharkad's been bombed…Uh, ladies and gentlemen, apparently a large explosion has been spot—Wait, that can't be right. Are you sure? Oh, no! Tharkad City has been hit by a powerful blast, apparently centered near the Palace. We are hearing reports of heavy radiation at or near the blast area...."

[*Camera quickly swings back to the vidscreen, now showing several explosions surrounding the WarShips.*]

[*Majors*]: "*Gott in Himmel*! The Archon! He's still th—"

<<uplink disconnected>>

CHAOS AND CONFUSION

The following are real-time civilian communication logs from in and around the West Alistair Pines District in Tharkad City, 5 December 3067:

[09:30] David? This is Phaedra. Call me as soon as you get this.

[09:30] Tommy? This is Mommy. Call me as soon as you get this.

[09:30] Louisa? This is Phae. Call me soonest.

[09:31] Mom? Has something happened with the phones? I can't get up with anyone. Call me.

[09:31] Dad? Pick up. This is Phae. Nobody's answering their phones. Call me.

[09:32] This is a Civil Authority Override of commercial broadcasting. A Class One Traffic Advisory is now in effect. In compliance with the Civil Defense Emergency Evacuation Plan, all inbound lanes of Interstates Four, Seven, Sixteen and Twenty-three are hereby designated outbound. Say again: All lanes of all interstate highways are cleared for evacuation only. No inbound traffic on any interstate highways. All inbound traffic must turn around. Tune to Civil Emergency Channel for further instructions. Inbound emergency personnel use established alternate routes. Repeat: This is a Civil Authority Override–

[09:32] Attention! Avalanche drill procedures in effect immediately. All students, leave all materials and personal belongings at your station. All teachers, bring only your attendance rosters. All classes line up in hallways. Follow floor marshals to lowest level. Avoid all windows and exterior doors. Keep to designated secure areas.

[09:33] Phoenix four-niner-seven, this is Tharkad City Air Control. Wave away; repeat: wave away. Field is closed. Unsafe. Reverse course immediately; maintain altitude. Beaumont three-three-six-four, this is Tharkad City Air Control. Wave away; repeat: wave away. Field is unsafe for landing. Switch heading three-zero-four; altitude one-four thousand meters. You are cleared for Olympia field. Avatar six-four-one, this is Tharkad City—

[09:34] David? There's smoke over the city. I can see it over the hills. Call me.

[09:34] Mom? I can't get David or Tommy. Can you see the city? What's happening? Call me.

[09:35] This is your automated recall. All off-duty Trauma Center personnel are to report to the Trauma Center immediately. There is a Class Four emergency. All Trauma Center personnel are to report to the Trauma Center immediately. This is your automated recall. All—

[09:36] Attention, shoppers. There is no cause for alarm. Civil Defense has declared a state of emergency. Please proceed to the nearest emergency shelter entrance, marked by the flashing red lights. We apologize for the inconvenience. Once you are safely in the shelter, customer service personnel at each shelter entrance will distribute coupons good for twenty percent off your total shopping experience today. One coupon per family. Please proceed quickly to the nearest emergency shelter entrance. There is no cause for alarm.

[09:36] David? Everything's shaking. The smoke—Pick up the phone, dammit! What's happening?!

THE ARCHON DEAD?

(6 December 3067)

We interrupt this broadcast for this emergency report from SBC's affiliate on Gallery.

According to sources on Tharkad, Archon Peter Steiner has been killed. Initial reports claim that Capellan forces, having snubbed the Whitting Conference, attacked Tharkad in concert with Word of Blake WarShips, hoping to kill the leaders of the Inner Sphere. It is not certain whether any of the other delegates survived, but a shuttle believed to be carrying the Archon and his brother, ComStar Precentor Martial Victor Steiner-Davion, was disabled by Capellan fighters and then destroyed by a full salvo from a Blakist battlecruiser.

We at SBC all grieve for the realm's loss. From what we have been able to piece together, nuclear and orbital weapons were used on Tharkad, leveling Tharkad City and most of the surrounding countryside. This type of action is not atypical of the tyrannical

BURNING FIST

"SUMMIT OF LIGHT"

<<TBC broadcast file report 30671231>>

[*Majors*]: "I'm here on the grounds of the former Precentor Martial Anastasius Focht's winter home, located in the Free Rasalhague Republic on the planet Orestes. We arrived in-system only a day ago and were met by the Combine delegation, which had arrived only a few hours before us. With Precentor Martial Victor Steiner-Davion, his sister—and FedSuns regent—Yvonne Steiner-Davion, Duke Tancred Sandoval of the Draconis March, and now the Coordinator of the Draconis Combine and his heir, nearly all the leaders who gathered for the fateful Whitting Conference last month are now gathering for a new summit.

"It is New Year's Eve here on Orestes, but as we speak, the mood is anything but festive. In the house behind me, one can only imagine the weight of the conversation, as the rulers of half the Inner Sphere discuss recent developments on Tharkad and beyond."

[*Camera moves to the left and zooms in on a mansion half-hidden behind large cypress trees and a Partisan AA tank. Majors continues in voice-over.*]

[*Majors*]: "Communications with several worlds in the Chaos March have been lost. Of greater concern, in addition to the continued loss of contact with the Lyran capital and our leadership, are the scattered reports of civil unrest on Luthien."

[*Camera pans back to Majors.*]

[*Majors*]: "So the question on everyone's mind is, are these events isolated incidents? Or part of a grand conspiracy to neutralize the Great Houses? Is the Captain-General involved in some way? We know he met with Victor and the others on the *Invisible Truth* behind closed doors just before they left the Tharkad system, but he did not accompany them here to Orestes. While they deliberate, we wait. Hopefully they can make sense of the rumors and reports and help the citizens of the Inner Sphere sleep better at night with their actions and decisions.

"This is Derek Majors, reporting from Orestes for TBC News, 31 December, 3067."

<<Xsys:peak:transmitAA:dest.TBC:Muphrid:transmitAA:dest.TBC:Skye:completion:full.decrypt>>

Liaos, who used chemical attacks on innocent civilians in the St. Ives Compact during their war against that realm.

Authorities are requesting that everyone remain calm and that local law enforcement detain individuals of Confederation origin for their safety. Lyran armed forces are on red alert throughout the realm, and will be making every effort to ensure the safety of the nation and to explore possible responses to this attack on our sovereignty.

For SBC News, Gallery, this is Bill Fundy. Now back to your program already in progress.

THE GREATER WAR

From the moment the first shells landed on the Triad, the Lyran Alliance was thrown into chaos. In less than a day, all semblance of political and military authority seemed to evaporate. But the apparent loss of our Archon was only the beginning. Soon the bombing of Tharkad City would prove to be just the first boulder of the coming avalanche.

SKYE ASSAULTED!

(6 February 3068)

New Glasgow, Skye [SKYE NEWSNET] —There is not a soul alive who hasn't heard about the bombing of Tharkad. Our own proud and ancient city has now suffered a similar indignity.

Two days ago, a vessel positively identified by the LAS *Katrina Steiner* as the FWLS *Percival*, an *Eagle*-class WarShip, jumped in to the Skye-Luna L5 LaGrange point with a small taskforce of DropShips and fighters. Refusing to answer hails, the DropShips

RACING TO THE SOURCE

<<file.30680112.text.encryptionkey.rho.iota.alpha>>

To: Denise Heinrich, producer / TBC:Donegal

Date: 12 January 3068

Denise,

I'm two weeks out from the Orestes Summit and I've finally figured out that the *Invisible Truth* is on her way to the Terran Corridor on what is commonly called in military circles a "recon in force." Apparently, the summit participants decided they need more information in order to coordinate responses from the Alliance, the Suns and the Combine. This vessel will be coordinating intelligence from the Terran Corridor and I hope to bring you more information regarding affairs in the Chaos March and maybe even from the Confederation, since our sources there have gone silent. The FedSuns' Regent is still currently aboard, so we'll be making a slight detour in the next few days in order to hand her off to a waiting Federated Suns transport.

While I still don't know our ultimate destination, I have managed to determine that we'll be passing near the Nusakan system, so I'll send our report uplinks to the TBC affiliate there. My next report will be filed in four days, after the transfer; ComStar has ordered a general communications blackout after this last batch is sent.

On a personal note, have you heard from my wife yet? I know limited communications have been established with Tharkad and I'm hoping she got a message out.

Danke!

Derek Majors

<<Xsys:peak:transmitB:dest.TBC:Nusakan:incomplete:intercept.full.decrypt.rompriority.omega.omega.beta>>

BURNING FIST

"WE WILL FIGHT ON!"

<<<signal uplink:established>>>

"This is Colin Thurston of TBC Fourteen. To all citizens of Tharkad! Arise!

"The past month has been hell for all of us ever since the devastating strike that took our capital and nearly killed our Archon. In the past few weeks we have endured nuclear holocaust, poison clouds and fiery infernos. We have lost many of our beloved leaders, our Estates General and our spaceports. We are alone. But we are not forgotten! We know what these monsters have done. We know what they continue to do—poison our food, burn our cities, kill our husbands, our wives, our children.

"But there *is* hope. That hope is *you*. As long as the Lyran spirit lives in the hearts of her people, Tharkad *will* survive!

"Even now, collection points are being established planet-wide to receive food, medicine and clothing for those in need. Rally points are also being set up for those with medical, technical, military and emergency response skills. For the love of the Alliance, we ask that all citizens who can assist in any way report to these rally points. More information can be found on the global network at '***LAT.relief.emergency.fourteen***'.

"Even now more Blakist DropShips are burning toward our home soil. Even now they still attempt to crush our pride, our heritage and our spirit. But we will not surrender! Tharkad will not fall! We will fight on!

"As long as TBC can remain on the network, we will continue to provide you updates and information on this vicious attack on our capital. For now, this is Colin Thurston, TBC Fourteen. For the Archon!"

<<<signal uplink:terminated>>>

—Pirate transmission issued by TBC affiliates among the Tharkan Resistance, circa 7 January 3068

detached and burned toward Skye under the *Percival*'s escort. The raiders were intercepted minutes from planetfall by aerospace fighters and DropShips drawn from several of Skye's defending regiments, led by Kommandant Joseph Zemetica of the First Skye Jaegers Air Wing. Using the Leaguers' deceleration vector against them, Zemetica coasted inert until the *Percival* and most of her flotilla had passed before engaging at point-blank range with a number of troop carriers and fighters. Reportedly, an *Excalibur*-class DropShip, two *Triumph*s and a *Union*-class vessel were among the League casualties before the *Percival* and her attendant vessels could respond, all but decimating our valiant defenders.

Thwarted, the Mariks turned to desperation tactics. The *Percival* took up station above our world and launched a devastating orbital bombardment against New Glasgow and the positions of the Fourth Skye Rangers, one of the largest defending formations on the planet. The assault inflicted massive damage, leveling the New Rouken Glen Park, the CI-119 APC plant due south of that, and most of the suburbs in between.

League forces then set down due north of New Glasgow and engaged the remnants of the Fourth before being boxed in between the Skye Guards and the First Skye Jaegers. The attackers' red and green 'Mechs, believed to belong to the Second Sirian Lancers, engaged Skye forces in the foothills southeast of New Glasgow for

"HOSTILE INTERCEPT"

<<system recording: tempfile.30680220>>

[*Majors*]: "Right now I'm standing in the officers' ready room on the *Truth*…"

[*Muffled explosion in background*]

[*Majors*]: "…and we are currently under attack. I'm told a hostile WarShip opened fire on the *Truth* when we emerged from hyperspace only moments ago. I am now going to enter the bridge to see if we can learn any more about our situation."

[*A sealed pressure door opens as camera approaches*]

[*Majors*]: "Admiral! Precentor Martial! Can you tell us what's going on?"

[*Admiral Alain Beresick and Precentor Martial Victor Steiner Davion turn toward the camera*]

[*Beresick*]: "Majors! GET THE HELL OFF MY BRI—"

[*A loud explosion is heard; the lights dim slightly. Multiple voices shout out.*]

[*Crewmen*]: "Sir! Forward PPC batteries destroyed!" "…I've lost signal with Central Life Support…" "…Severe damage reported in aft starboard thruster group…"

[*A hand covers the camera lens*]

[*Victor Steiner-Davion*]: "Look, Majors, I'm going to level with you. We're in bad sha—"

[*Muffled explosion heard*]

[*Crewman*]: "Alternate generator online…."

[*Beresick*]: "Victor? Strap him and yourself into that couch. NOW! Tell Precentor Garibaldi that his marines better be ready. Have them report outside Nose Bay Three."

[*Shuffling noises, sound of snaps being engaged*]

[*Crewman*]: "Sir! Enemy vessel has lost maneuvering thrusters on her port side!"

[*Hand slips, revealing part of viewport and a large gray-black shape ahead*]

[*Beresick*]: "Give us 1.5 Gs, vector oh-oh-two, prepare for collision."

[*Crewmen*]: "One point five G, oh-oh-two. Distance to target, twenty and closing." "…Enemy vessel attempting to evade…"

[*Beresick*] "All hands! Brace for impact!"

[*Alarm klaxons. Tremendous explosion. Loud banging. Shattering glass. High pitched squeal.*]

<<tempsave:terminated at source>>

—From confiscated footage taken by TBC reporter Derek Majors, filmed 20 February 3068

BURNING FIST

RETRACTION

This is Edgar Phoebus Jr. for SBC News.

SBC News prides itself on reporting the truth and we investigate all of our stories to the fullest. However, last week a report about the initial attacks on Tharkad was sent out under the SBC name that was not the work of SBC. While SBC did not authorize this report it was sent out over out network and we take responsibility for the misinformation that was transmitted.

Tharkad was bombarded by WarShips belonging to the Word of Blake. While the Capellan and Canopian delegates were not there, there also is no proof of their collaboration. As you have no doubt heard in earlier reports, the Archon and his siblings were not killed in the attack but managed to escape harm. The Archon's precise whereabouts remain unknown but we suspect he is still on Tharkad, his brother Victor escaping with his ComStar troops.

We regret the inconvenience this may have caused and we will work hard to ferret out the source of this unscrup—

<<<Transmission Interrupted>>>

Attention Lyrans! We know you. We know you have no wish to disrupt the highest standard of living in the Inner Sphere that you currently enjoy. Compliance with the Master's plans will leave your realm unscathed. Resistance will leave you crippled to a point that will make living in the Periphery look enticing. Do not interfere with the Master! He has the power to unleash all your enemies upon you!

<<<Interruption Ends>>>

—it! What the fu—we're back on air? I'm sorry, ladies and gentlemen; we're having technical difficulties. We will now switch you to a classic episode of *The Steinhearts* until we can ensure a secure broadcast.

—From *SBC News Extra*, Solaris Broadcasting Company, Solaris, 1 March 3068

the better part of a day before the arrival today of the Seventeenth and Twenty-second Skye Rangers—coupled with a sortie by the *Katrina Steiner* that reportedly damaged the *Percival*—forced the enemy into a general retreat.

Even as the Marik forces withdraw, Duke Robert Kelswa-Steiner has assured the people that Skye will not fall the way Tharkad did. Issuing an official declaration of war against the Free Worlds League on his authority as Provincial Lord, Kelswa-Steiner has called on all true sons and daughters of Skye to join in repelling the Marik threat.

"Skye will not go quietly into the darkness of night, but will instead cast her shadow into the hearts of her enemies," a determined Duke Robert told reporters today in a mid-morning press conference. "Today, we have driven these invaders from our world. Tomorrow—when the time is right—we will take the fight right back to the Captain-General's door."

LONG ODDS FOR DUKE ROBERT

[*Jenny*]: "…And that's why I'd go two to one for the Blue Fists. Next caller… go ahead, Tim from Montenegro."

["*Tim*"]: "Hi, long-time listener, first-time caller."

[*Altsoba*]: "Thanks, Tim. What's your question?"

["*Tim*"]: "Yeah, I was wondering what odds would you guys put on Duke Robert being able to win?"

[*Altsoba*]: "Heheh… well we wouldn't put *anything* up for beating the Free Worlds League, but we are working on some numbers for his survival as a military leader."

[*Jenny*]: "Now, Alt, the duke has a *few* things going for him. First, he has the momentum. He started his attacks after the assault by the Sirian Lancers, so he can pick his targets until the League starts hitting back. He also has a technological edge with Lyran 'Mechs, and don't forget an edge in leadership."

[*Altsoba*]: "What? We're talking about Lyrans! "Social Generals," anyone?"

[*Jenny*]: "Well, that's a bit overstated. The Archon passed over many political appointees for officers with battlefield success, and at all levels the Lyrans have more seasoning and experience."

[*Altsoba*]: "Of course, Robert has to face the fact that he's hopelessly outnumbered. Nor does he have the logistics chain. I'm going nine to two that he surrenders in the first three months. Jenny?"

[*Jenny*]: "Five to two he pulls off six months before winning a cease-fire, Alt."

—Excerpted from *The Altsoba and Jenny Show*, Solaris Broadcasting Company, Solaris VII, 11 March 3068

WAVE TWO?

[*Josh Greene, a field reporter for* Lyran Issues*, stands before a backdrop of urban destruction. Rescue workers and firefighters can be seen behind, searching the rubble and tending to wounded men and women, many in tattered and soiled business attire.*]

[*Greene*]: "… Reports of damage inflicted by the Blakist WarShip—tentatively identified as the *Blake's Redemption*, a *Vincent*-class corvette—continue to come in as we speak, Janice. I'm standing here at the site of what *used* to be the Donegal Stock Exchange. You can see behind me as Marsdenville firefighters, paramedics and police continue to search the rubble for survivors.

"We have also confirmed that orbital fire collapsed the Nashan Pharmaceuticals site downtown, making it the second of Nashan Diversified's four main complexes here on Donegal to be struck by the Blakist attacks, which began barely thirty-six hours ago. Still no word on the fate of Nashan CEO Duchess Margaret Doons, who was believed to be in her Willington's Eyrie headquarters when the bombing started.

"Likewise, the Mauser & Gray complex near Horrelsburg was struck by naval autocannon fire. Casualty estimates have been low for that attack so far, as the site apparently began evacuating when the first bombardments started.

"According to—"

BURNING FIST

VOICE FROM THE DARKNESS

Mom–-

Forgive the unorthodox routing, but if I'd sent this through channels you never would have seen it. I don't know what the official story on Coventry is, but the short form is: We're still here.

Damnedest thing. Don't know who hit us. Had to be Blakists or FWL, maybe both. But we never saw one insignia, never heard one call sign that gave a clue. They weren't Clan—they fought in lances, not Stars—but that's the only thing we can say for sure.

WarShip bombardment and hot-dropped 'Mechs. They meant to roll right over us. We made it a bumpy ride.

Kids at the Academy fought like hell, but you'd expect that. Held on and held out and more of them than should have made it through.

But Mom, the militia. I've complained about being here, what? Three months working on refit and retrain for the CPM? I knew they had potential. But I didn't expect them to deliver.

What did that ass Walker call the CPM? Sunday soldiers? Well, it's been a month of Sundays ever since the hostiles hit. Discipline under fire you wouldn't believe. When they took hits, and they took a hell of a beating, they regrouped on the fly and never lost cohesion. Fought like—Well, we're still here and the other guys aren't.

They'll be back. But we're ready.

Tell Gloria and the kids I'm fine. I'll see you all when this is over.

—Letter sent by Hauptmann Larry Schuester (on temporary detached duty from the 24th Lyran Guard), Coventry, 18 March 3068

[*An explosion erupts behind Greene. People scatter and the camera spins, losing focus. The image whirls, then comes to a sudden stop as the camera falls. Suddenly all is snow.*]

[*Janice Kreitzer*]: "Josh? Josh? Can you hear me? … I'm being informed that our reporter and crew are fine, but that their equipment is no longer functional. Josh will be back with us later today.

"Meanwhile, it has been reported that naval weapons fire damaged the main Lockheed/CBM manufacturing facility. There are no estimates on casualties yet, but a spokesperson for the First Donegal Jaegers indicated that the area was completely destroyed, and the city of Sethensgard apparently suffered substantial damage as well. Casualties there could climb into the thousands.

"The Jaegers' initial attack against the *Redemption* failed to penetrate its fighter screen, though reportedly the *Redemption*'s defenses were substantially weakened in the attempt. Since then, the regiment has tried to make use of any fighters available at the Lockheed complex for a second assault. With the damage done to those facilities, however, Jaegers commander Colonel Amy Smith admits that dislodging the Blakist vessel will be difficult. Colonel Smith is recommending that everyone seek shelter away from major population areas or other potential Blakist targets.

"Combined with the nuclear attacks that occurred a hundred kilometers off the shores of Marsdenville earlier today, the devastation planet-wide is enormous. We continue to receive reports of heavy damage to the capital city of Marsdenville. While it appears that the Blakist vessel targeted specific sites, such as the Donegal Stock Exchange, their weapons fire has caused a lot of collateral damage. There are reports of fires in almost every part of the city, and—"

[*Kreitzer holds a hand up to her ear, listening.*]

[*Kreitzer*]: "We've just been informed that the Ohav Shalom complex has been hit by capital class missiles. We also no longer have any contact with any of our reporters on the Tin Cans.

"At this time, ladies and gentlemen, HPG reports from our affiliates on Coventry and Hesperus II have confirmed Word of Blake attacks there as well. Though this affiliate remains undamaged for the time being, the fact remains that nobody knows where the next bombs or shells will fall. We will continue to cover these horrific events as they unfold, and pray for a miracle."

—Excerpt from *Lyran Issues*, a DBC holovid news magazine based on Donegal, 17 March 3068

AN APPEAL FOR UNITY

The following priority relay HPG transmission to all Alliance worlds originated from Maria's Elegy on Hesperus II on 17 March 3068:

My friends, we are facing our darkest hour.

On one side, enemies we have known only for decades seek to carve deeper into our heartland. On another, those who were our countrymen, however briefly, maneuver for advantage. Old foes who have vied with us for centuries stir across our border and make rogue raids against our worlds. And a new enemy that clothes itself in righteousness strikes from cover of darkness.

Fourteen weeks ago, Tharkad City, our capital and a beacon of peace and civilization for all the nations of the Inner Sphere, was destroyed in a nuclear holocaust. Whether by accident or design, the spark that ignited that fire was struck by terrorists who

"DRAGOONS BREAK CONTRACT!" [VOICE OF THE DRAGON] COMPLETED

(28-OCT-67)
"BLACKWELL VP TO HONOR 'MERCENARY HEROES'" [INN] DOWNLOADING

(1-DEC-67)
"MYSTERY SHIPS SPOTTED IN THARKAD SYSTEM" [SBC] ACCESSING

A SERVICE OF IRIAN NEWS INTERSTELLAR

BURNING FIST

cloak their crimes in robes of sanctity, who brought the symbols of our finest hours out of shadowy closets to rain death and destruction in what they doubtless consider poetic justice.

What, then, are we to do when our nation, our heritage, is surrounded by war and anarchy?

We have lost our capital city. But we have not lost our heart. We have not lost that which makes us Lyran. Our nobility, our focus, our determination to go on. The provincial capitals remain strong. Skye, lightly wounded, is bloodied but unbowed. Alarion, Bolan, Coventry and Donegal—all hit—remain secure. We are, as a people, equally secure in our resolve to stand fast.

Though we face the darkness, we are the light.

Together, united in loyalty to each other and to our liege, we as Lyrans are proof against any trial, test or treachery that may come against us. We are the Lyran Alliance, an alliance of the Lyran people, and we will endure.

(signed)
Duke Daniel Brewer of Hesperus II
CEO Defiance Industries
17 March 3068

SKYE-LEAGUE WAR FORCES ARCHON'S HAND

(20 March 3068)

Europa, Melissia [DBC] – Margrave and General of the Armies Adam Steiner released a statement today decrying the "rogue activities" of Duke Kelswa-Steiner, whom he blames entirely for the recent incursion into the Free Worlds League (locally dubbed Operation Überschatten). The attacks, which struck worlds rimward of Bolan Province, were sanctioned by Duke Kelswa-Steiner, who did not receive prior approval from the Archon for his action.

Margrave Steiner, concerned that his kinsman lacks enough troops to safeguard the Skye and Bolan Province borders "while pursuing his own private war," has announced the redeployment of several LAAF units, stressing that these troops will move only to defend the realm and not take part in Skye's "adventurism." Steiner further indicated that this strategic relocation was made possible by the Arc-Royal Accords, and has expressed his confidence that the Exiled Wolf Clan can safeguard the Arc-Royal Theater without the assistance of the Lyran units being redeployed.

General Thamon Hammerskjold has gone on record protesting the Margrave's decision, which will send multiple units from the Melissia and Arc-Royal theaters either to the Free Worlds League border or to the interior to free up units in Coventry and Donegal provinces from traveling to the front, or to break the Blakist blockades on Coventry, Donegal and Hesperus II.

With these decisions, Margrave Steiner has taken decisive action to confront the many threats that face our nation. Indeed, the Lyran state owes much to its General of the Armies, who seems to have acted before the Archon even announced his official position on the Bolan/Skye invasion. We can rest easy with such competent hands at the helm of our nation's military.

THE FREE WORLDS LEAGUE: UNHOLY ALLIANCE OR UNWITTING PATSIES?

[*Louis Ahinga (Editor, Skye Free Press)*]: "How they can continue to feign complete ignorance—?"

[*Wesley Smith (Editor, Donegal Observer)*]: "*They* may not be feigning anything. We've all seen copies of the Captain-General's news advisory after Tharkad—"

[*Annie Reed (Editor, Coventry Clarion)*]: "Civic Advisory!"

[*Smith*]: "Absurd as it sounded, it carried the force of law. Nothing has been done to rescind it. If they—and by 'they' I mean the Free Worlds League news media and regional governments—believe that any information not vetted by the Captain-General or the Ministry of Information is in fact *dis*information, they have no choice but to disregard any reports coming directly from us. Particularly since it seems evident their Ministry of Information is heavily compromised by the Word of Blake—"

[*Reed*]: "In other words, Marik is not only aiding and abetting the Blakists, he's requiring his news media to do the same!"

[*Smith*]: "He is only aiding and abetting if he knows the truth. He may be as misled as the rest of his government. Or governments."

[*Ahinga*]: "If any of them are in fact misled."

[*Smith*]: "Oh, yes. There's probably huge disagreement over what should be done, which you'd expect from such a coalition. But none of them allegedly question that the 'root problem' is *our* nation's coming apart for no apparent reason and launching 'unprovoked' attacks against them? Sorry, a conspiracy among aggregate demi-nations simply would not have that uniformity. There's got to be dissent."

[*Reed*]: "They're uniform enough in their opportunism and greed. The League knows we're pressed by the Clans; it knows we're still rebuilding from the war; it knows we've been attacked by the Blakists. The League sees us bloodied and thinks us weak."

[*Ahinga*]: "When one of their own dictators got gunned down, they pretended to blame us as a pretext for invasion."

[*Smith*]: "Now—"

[*Reed*]: "Our punitive response was wrong only because it was not swift or decisive enough. The Leaguers are taking advantage of our restraint, calling it an invasion as a pretext for a massive world-grab. There's no evidence of confusion. They're Word of Blake up to their damn eyeballs and there will be no lasting peace until they've been blasted back to their 'blessed maker.'"

—From *Weekend Update* (Lyran Interstellar News), 7 March 3068

BURNING FIST

ALLIANCE UNDER SIEGE—DAY 115
(30 March 3068)

Bolan [SBC] – Duke Robert Kelswa-Steiner announced in a brief press conference today the start of the second wave of attacks against the Free Worlds League. Four more worlds of the treacherous League became targets in what Duke Robert calls "a lesson in retribution to our ignorant neighbors along our border." The statement and brief Q&A session came after the formal memorial service for the assassinated Caesar Steiner that concluded earlier today in Tsalagi Park.

Citing the unprovoked attack against Skye taken by Sirian Lancer units from the Free Worlds League this past February, Duke Robert confirmed that the current assault, joined by leaders from the Alliance's Bolan Province, is intended as a show of might against the new enemy of peace. "Because the League took advantage of the horror visited on Tharkad City by attacking Skye and her people, as well as assassinating Caesar Steiner on Bolan, the Lyran people must stand up and show these Free Worlders the true price of treachery. Today we launch our second wave of attacks on the border worlds of the League, to rescue citizens held hostage by their terrorist government and protect them from their ignorant leaders and barbaric generals. Even as I address you, Lyran forces are burning toward Colfax, Sheridan, Thermopolis and Pingree, to save those worlds' innocent civilians from the murderous intent of the Captain-General and his Word of Blake allies."

During the brief question-and-answer session, the duke once again reassured everyone that he had total authority to carry out this assault, citing the announcement from Bolan Province's members of the Estates General that effectively declared war on the League on the first of March. That announcement followed less than a month after Skye's own declaration of war. He also admitted that he had not been in contact with Tharkad since the system was attacked with a nuclear weapon, but stated he was within his rights as the duke of Skye to safeguard his citizens and those of his liege "regardless of our Archon's status."

Information also released today from the Skye Ministry of War showed the occupation and surrender of Togwotee and Cascade—both targets of the first wave of Operation Überschatten back in the second week of March. Ministry officials mentioned the numerous victory celebrations by the local populations, additional evidence to prove that Duke Robert's actions were correct.

When asked about the recent fighting on Coventry, Donegal and Hesperus II, the duke stated only that fighting was ongoing and that "the Alliance has gained the upper hand against the Word of Blake and its League patsies." Loss of any of these systems would be a hard blow to the increased military production of the Lyran Alliance's three super-industrial provinces.

Duke Robert was also asked if Operation Überschatten would last longer than the second wave. He responded, "As long as League worlds cry out for Alliance protection, we will help liberate them."

Before the duke left the podium, he called on all Alliance citizens to remember the lives lost in the attacks on Tharkad and Skye. "To paraphrase a Terran leader of long ago, December the fifth, 3067 will be 'a day that will live in Infamy.'"

THE ARCHON HAS FAILED US!

Tharkad in ruins! Donegal, Coventry and Hesperus bombarded and blockaded by Word of Blake forces! Skye, Wyatt, Phecda, Alchiba, Milton, Loric, Ford, Giausar, Timbiqui and Poulsbo, all invaded by the Free Worlds League!

My friends, the utter incompetence of Peter Steiner-Davion can no longer be hidden; it is made manifest by our horrific losses, and threatens the total destruction of our proud Lyran state! We are assailed from all sides, and it will only be a matter of time before the opportunistic Jade Falcons again descend on us in our weakness. The Dracs would be over the border as well to do some more "peacekeeping," if they could only figure out who runs their show.

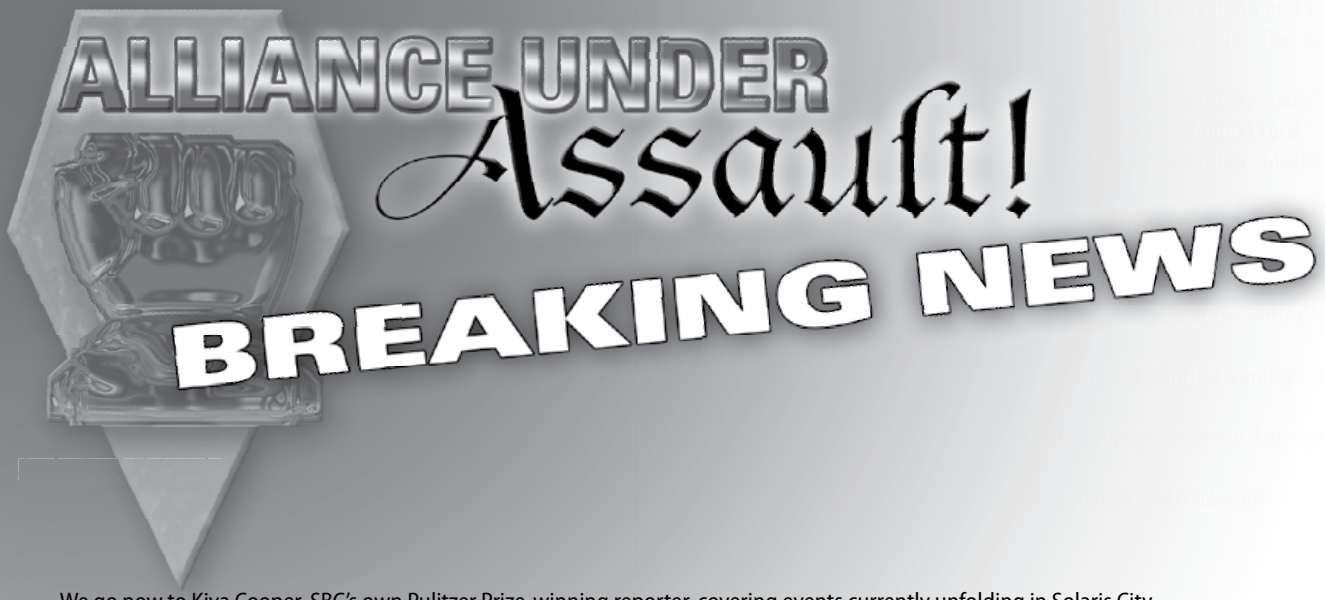
How much longer must we tolerate the inept reign of Peter the Worthless? He has accomplished nothing, and has only aggravated the problems we face daily. Now that such grave threats loom before us, we must act with strength and determination, not indecision and confusion!

Clearly, far more capable individuals exist to lead us than the fledgling Peter, who lacks any meaningful military experience. A mediocre MechWarrior, he is an even more incompetent leader. And though we mourn the loss of a man of such stature and ability as Caesar Steiner, it is good to see that the Steiner blood runs true and strong today in Adam Steiner. He achieved impressive feats in the Jade Vulture Incursion of 3064, and his more recent actions demonstrate his vision. Clearly the right man to serve as General of the Armies, he would also make an Archon far superior to Peter Steiner-Davion.

The noble Steiner blood runs thin indeed in our Archon. Time for some true and more capable blood to replace him!

—Pamphlet issued by Brotherhood Press, Cincinnatus Publishing, 6 May 3068

SOLARIS ATTACKED!



We go now to Kiva Cooper, SBC's own Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter, covering events currently unfolding in Solaris City.

[*Kiva appears before the camera, apparently reporting from a rooftop. Behind her is the vast urban expanse of Solaris City's International Zone, with the massive metallic bubbles of DropShips in Solaris Spaceport plainly visible. Thin ribbons of smoke rise from several unseen fires, curling up into the gray sky.*]

[Kiva]: "Are you getting this, Jamie? This is Kiva Cooper, reporting live from the rooftop of the SBC Broadcasting Center in the International Zone as unknown forces continue their attack on Solaris VII. We've seen bone-white BattleMechs of vintage and recent manufacture, dropping in and around the city outskirts, and from here we can see movement in the spaceport as security forces clash with the unidentified attackers."

[*Camera zooms in, catching a glimpse of roughly a company of Lyran 'Mechs using the spaceport buildings and grounded DropShips as cover. Weapons fire from a branch of the complex, the "Concourse E" label clearly visible, shows the approach of more than a dozen white 'Mechs, led by an* Awesome. *The white 'Mechs tear into the buildings as well, obliterating that section of the spaceport in a hail of PPC and laser fire.*]

[*Kiva*]: "The security forces are overwhelmed. There are too many attackers, a full battalion or more sweeping the spaceport alone. The city is in chaos. Over to the west, we can see 'Mechs in Starlight and Zelazni colors fighting each other in the streets, the cause of their recent clash unknown. The Pop TV building just collapsed under Mandole Mgwane's *Jinggau*."

[*Camera swings around and briefly highlights two 'Mechs dueling in the street, sweeping over a demolished building and scurrying bystanders running for cover, and eventually settling on a lone dark blue Banshee squaring off against two lighter white BattleMechs.*]

[*Kiva*]: "We do see some resistance from the stables here. There, on Paris Street, it looks like a *Banshee* from a minor stable is dueling with two of the invaders. Get a close-up of the invader *BattleMaster*, Jamie. Wait, that triple-diamond insignia! That's Paul Diamond, a contender who left to join the Word of Blake. Is this a Blakist attack? The *Banshee* pilot has put the Blake *Wolverine* between him and Diamond. Wait, there's a man running out on foot, with some sort of satchel. Oh my!"

[*Camera attempts to focus on a satchel-armed man who rushes at the* Banshee*, only to vanish in a flash of light meters away from the 'Mech when the pack explodes prematurely.*]

[*Kiva*]: "Off in the distance, we can see other parts of the city in flames. Columns of smoke are visible from various parts of Kobe, the Black Hills. Reports tell of Lyran defenders dying in all parts of the city, refusing to abandon even the non-Steiner sectors. Even now we're hearing of fighting as far out as the Reach—"

[*A tremendous explosion shakes the camera and Kiva instinctively ducks. Camera swings around, catching glimpses of fires all along the skyline. A roar of fighter engines momentarily washes out all sound.*]

[*Kiva*]: "Over there! It's the Star League Dome!"

[*The camera pans northward to the massive dome of the almost-completed Star League Stadium on the banks of the Solaris River. Flames engulf the ruined dome, blackening the Davion sword-and-sun logo as a secondary blast rips through the structure.*]

[*Kiva*]: "My God, who are these people?"

—From *SBC News Special Report*, Solaris Broadcasting, 16 June 3068

BROKEN SWORDS

BROKEN SWORDS

To all members of the Orestes AFFS military attaché office:

We received this yesterday. This confirms much of the information we have been hearing for the past several months and lays to rest some of the worst of the rumors. I will post more information as soon as I receive it. In the meantime, I am authorizing dissemination of this document to the FSNS affiliate here on Orestes, pursuant to Item 8 of this message.

—Colonel Persephone Conrad, AFFS Commander

SECURE/SENSITIVE/HIGHEST PRIORITY
182321TOCT3068
FROM: HQ AFFS/MARSHAL OF THE ARMIES
TO: ALL AFFS COMBATANT COMMANDERS & LIAISONS
INFO: HQ AFFS/HIGH COMMAND & STAFF
SUBJECT: STATE OF THE AFFS
ROUTING: [CENSORED] AND HAND DELIVERY ONLY; DISSEMINATE AS NEEDED

1. THE EVENTS OF THE PAST YEAR HAVE LEFT TRADITIONAL INTERNAL LINES OF COMMUNICATION UNRELIABLE AND GIVEN RISE TO GENERAL PANIC THAT IS PREVENTING THE AFFS FROM EFFECTIVELY RESPONDING TO THE CRISIS. THIS COMMUNICATION WILL ANSWER THE QUESTIONS THAT COMMANDERS ARE UNDOUBTEDLY FACING THROUGHOUT THE FEDERATED SUNS.

2. THE STATE COMMAND AUTHORITY (SCA) IS FUNCTIONING. THE PRINCESS REGENT IS ALIVE AND SAFE AND IS DIRECTING THE MARSHAL OF THE ARMIES AND THE HIGH COMMAND AS THEY COORDINATE THE DEFENSE OF THE FEDERATED SUNS. HPG COMMUNICATIONS WITH NEW AVALON ARE NOT RELIABLE AT THIS TIME AND THE PRESENCE OF WORD OF BLAKE SPACE COMBAT ASSETS IN THE SYSTEM MAY RESULT IN THE INTERDICTION OF TRADITIONAL COURIERS. [CENSORED] COMMUNICATIONS WITH NEW AVALON ARE STILL FULLY OPERATIONAL. AT THIS TIME FULL COMMUNICATIONS ARE STILL POSSIBLE WITH REGIONAL COMMAND CENTERS.

3. THE FEDERATED SUNS IS AT WAR WITH THE WORD OF BLAKE.

4. NEW AVALON HAS BEEN ATTACKED BY WORD OF BLAKE SPACE AND GROUND FORCES. THOSE FORCES HAVE USED ORBITAL BOMBARDMENT AND PRECISION AEROSPACE STRIKES AGAINST NUMEROUS TARGETS BUT TO DATE HAVE NOT USED NUCLEAR, BIOLOGICAL OR CHEMICAL (NBC) WEAPONS. TWO WAVES OF GROUND FORCES HAVE LANDED BUT HAVE NOT GAINED MORE THAN LOCAL GROUND SUPERIORITY. CURRENT AFFS AND OTHER MILITARY FORCES IN-SYSTEM ARE DEEMED ADEQUATE TO DEAL WITH THE WORD OF BLAKE THREAT TO NEW AVALON. DO NOT SEND COMBAT FORCES TO NEW AVALON UNLESS DIRECTED BY THE SCA.

5. THE WORD OF BLAKE HAS STRUCK OTHER NATIONAL CAPITALS AS WELL AS SOME CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE WORLDS WITH NBC WEAPONS AS WELL AS WITH ORBITAL STRIKES. THARKAD, LUTHIEN, DIERON, TUKAYYID, SIAN AND OUTREACH HAVE ALL BEEN SO ATTACKED. THE WORD OF BLAKE HAS ALSO STRUCK NUMEROUS OTHER WORLDS WITH GROUND FORCES. MOST OF THESE GROUND STRIKES WERE DESIGNED TO DISRUPT COMMAND AND CONTROL (C2) AND LOGISTICS FUNCTIONS. SIGNIFICANT WORD OF BLAKE SPACE AND GROUND FORCES ARE LIKELY STILL OPERATING IN THE FEDERATED SUNS. THESE FORCES MAY DISGUISE THEMSELVES TO INCITE INTERNAL UNREST OR PRECIPITATE CONFLICTS WITH OTHER POWERS. COMMANDERS ARE URGED TO EXERCISE EXTREME CAUTION IN RESPONDING TO ATTACKS WITHOUT CONFIRMED INTELLIGENCE.

6. AT THIS TIME THE CAPELLAN CONFEDERATION AND THE DRACONIS COMBINE ARE IN A DE FACTO STATE OF WAR WITH THE FEDERATED SUNS. ALL AFFS FORCES ARE ORDERED TO DISCONTINUE OFFENSIVE OPERATIONS AGAINST THE CONFEDERATION AND THE COMBINE AND THEIR ALLIED FORCES. COMMANDERS MAY STILL EXECUTE ANY COMBAT OPERATIONS DEEMED NECESSARY FOR FORCE PROTECTION AND NATIONAL DEFENSE.

7. THE CAPELLAN CHANCELLOR IS MISSING AND PRESUMED DEAD FOLLOWING THE STRIKE ON SIAN. COMMANDERS SHOULD NOTE THAT POPULAR SENTIMENT IN THE CONFEDERATION BLAMES THE FEDERATED SUNS FOR THAT STRIKE AND THAT THE CCAF IS UNDERTAKING A FORCEFUL ASSAULT ON A BROAD FRONT IN RETALIATION. IN THE ABSENCE OF CONFLICTING ORDERS, CAPELLAN MARCH MILITARY FORCES SHOULD TAKE ALL STEPS NECESSARY TO MAINTAIN THE NATIONAL DEFENSE.

8. COMMANDERS SHOULD DISSEMINATE THIS INFORMATION TO ALL ASSIGNED AND ATTACHED AFFS, MERCENARY AND CIVILIAN PERSONNEL WITH [CENSORED] CLEARANCE. COMMANDERS SHOULD DISSEMINATE SELECTED DETAILS OF THIS MESSAGE TO OTHER PERSONNEL AND ENTITIES AT THEIR DISCRETION.

SIGNED//MARSHAL OF THE ARMIES JACKSON DAVION

BROKEN SWORDS

SUNSET OVER THE SWORD

The opening months of the Word of Blake Jihad struck the Federated Suns with no less ferocity than that shown the Lyran Alliance. With both nations still recovering from a costly civil war, the Blakist assaults inflicted as keen a wound under the sun-and-sword banner as under the mailed Steiner fist.

—Michael Bosworth, INN Special Correspondent

WHO IS IN CHARGE?

Leadership of the Federated Suns in Question

(25 January 3068)

Addicks [FSNS] – Just over two months have passed since the Word of Blake assaults on New Avalon and Tharkad, and the question of who is in charge of the Federated Suns remains unanswered.

Princess Regent Yvonne Steiner-Davion was in attendance at the Tharkad Star League Council meeting, along with the minister of the Draconis March, Duke Tancred Sandoval. Also in attendance were numerous other Inner Sphere leaders, including the Princess Regent's surviving brothers, Lyran Archon Peter Steiner-Davion and ComStar Precentor Martial Victor Steiner-Davion. All of them reportedly escaped the Tharkad system for Tukayyid, only to be set upon once more by the Word of Blake, whose WarShips allegedly destroyed all ComStar forces in the system before continuing their pursuit of the Princess Regent and her entourage.

Her last transmission came three weeks ago. No one has heard from her since.

Many believe she is dead, while some claim she is returning to New Avalon under a communications blackout. In either case, the net result is the same: the Federated Suns is without its leader in a time of crisis unlike any in the past.

Various regional civilian and military leaders point to New Avalon, where Jackson Davion—the commander of the AFFS and the Prince's Champion—the Privy Council and the High Command are leading our nation from the Fox's Den. But while that command bunker may have survived the Word of Blake's bombardments, the Blakists have cut New Avalon off from the rest of the Inner Sphere. HPG communications have not been possible since the initial as-

THARKAD ATTACKED!

Nuclear Weapons Used to Level Capital City

(2 February 3068)

Argyle [FSNS] – Information about the Word of Blake assault on Tharkad two months ago has been scarce. Rumors of everything from the planet's complete obliteration by some doomsday device to the scouring of the Lyran capital by thermonuclear weapons, to the conquering of Tharkad by an unstoppable Word of Blake invasion force have circulated throughout the Inner Sphere for weeks. Until now, however, those were just rumors. Thanks to the courageous actions of a few JumpShip captains who braved a continued blockade of the Tharkad system, we can finally confirm what happened there almost ten weeks ago.

On December fifth, days after the dissolution of the Star League, a fleet of Blakist WarShips along with their supporting DropShips and fighters sped into orbit over Tharkad, apparently led by an ancient Lyran battlecruiser salvaged and refurbished by the Blakists. These vessels, apparently part of the Word of Blake's Whitting Conference entourage, opened fire on Tharkad, targeting the capital city and other significant population centers just as they did on New Avalon. However, unlike New Avalon, the Blakists struck Tharkad City with a nuclear attack.

The precise nature of this attack remains unknown. Various sources indicate the Word of Blake fleet used anywhere from a single atomic warhead to a dozen thermonuclear devices to destroy Tharkad City. Regardless of the number of weapons used, the result is clear: Tharkad City is little more than a crater and radioactive clouds are circling the world, raining deadly fallout on the lucky few who survived the strikes.

THE BASTARDS WILL PAY!

(11 December 3067)

Freisland [FREISLAND PRIDE] – The Freisland planetary governor just released a statement confirming that the Word of Blake has attacked New Avalon! Civilian casualties are unknown, but a Word of Blake WarShip fleet bombarded New Avalon and landed troops, insisting that the Federated Suns rejoin the Star League!

Clearly, this is all a ruse. The Blakists have been Capellan allies as long as these ComStar schismatics have existed. Obviously, they agreed to lend WarShips to aid Sun-Tzu's nefarious plans. Or perhaps they were forced. Certainly the Word of Blake's intentions so far appear to have been peaceful. They've brought stability to several Chaos March worlds, and they've never borne the Suns any ill will. But regardless of the reason, their complicity in landing Capellan troops on New Avalon makes them guilty by association. We'll make them pay for their treachery!

The Regent and Jackson Davion should have listened to Duke Hasek more. He's warned us of the threat posed by the Crapellans all along. Obviously, he was right. This strike against New Avalon can only be the prelude to a full-scale invasion, hoping to catch our nation disorganized and unable to repel the Green Horde so shortly after our civil war.

Well, the Crapellans have finally gone too far! We need to get our act together and finish what we started in 3028! We've ignored them for too long. If they want a fight, we should shove one right down their throats until they choke on it!

BROKEN SWORDS

sault and couriers have only gotten a handful of messages into and out of the besieged world. Military commanders claim the chain of command has not been compromised, but so far have been unable to provide any reliable evidence to back up those assertions.

So whom does that leave? Duke George Hasek.

Speaking from his command center on New Syrtis, he broadcast this statement via HPG to the entire Federated Suns just five days ago:

"Fellow citizens, together we are facing the single greatest threat to freedom since the treachery of Amaris. Today our enemies not only surround us, but have struck at the heart of our nation. They will not succeed! Until my cousin can return to New Avalon, I will work directly with military commanders and governmental leaders to ensure the security of the Federated Suns. Our enemies will not break our will! We will stand against them no matter what form they take, and we will end their reign of terror!"

Duke Hasek is, of course, next in the line of succession and one of the only senior members of the government and military not stranded on New Avalon. Whether he can successfully direct the defense of the Federated Suns from New Syrtis is a question that has yet to be answered. Unnamed senior AFFS officers here on Addicks speak of confusion in the military, as well as of numerous field commanders striking out on punitive campaigns of their own.

In short, the Federated Suns is a nation in chaos, the end of which is not in sight.

MARSHAL OF THE ARMIES SPEAKS

Reassures Nation in Face of War

(17 March 3068)

Markesan [FSNS] – Prince's Champion and Marshal of the Armies Jackson Davion spoke to the assembled press corps here on Markesan earlier today, addressing the concerns and fears of the citizens of the Federated Suns and answering the questions that tens of billions have been asking since word of the Blakist assaults on New Avalon and Tharkad spread in December of last year.

Davion began his thirty-minute briefing with the following statement. "Every citizen of the Federated Suns needs to know that our capital may be under siege, but our nation continues to stand strong against the crimes committed against us. We will not stand idly by as the Word of Blake massacres our citizens and commits unconscionable acts of genocide against our allies."

He then delved into the details of what has happened over the past three months. Much of what he said verified statements made by Duke George Hasek three weeks ago, but he did go into some depth about the New Avalon siege and the Word of Blake's other known movements in and outside of the Federated Suns.

The Word of Blake's siege of New Avalon remains in place. Their initial strikes left much of Avalon City and eleven other major urban centers in ruins, while their follow-up invasion force has attempted to take and hold the capital city and several nearby military bases and industrial centers. The First Davion Guards, the Second NAIS Cadre and a host of reserve and militia regiments have thus far prevented the Blakists from achieving their goals. Marshal Davion

"BROTHERS, UNITE!"

My Dear Augustus,

I hope my letter will find you and yours in good health. It was a pleasure to receive your gift, very thoughtful. It was good seeing that ancient *Dervish* move under its own power again. Send my regards to your contacts that managed to procure those hip actuators.

I have to say I find these latest rumblings distasteful. New Avalon has been under siege by Word of Blake and possibly Capellan forces for more than three months now. Recent word suggests the Blakists or the Capellans received reinforcements. This state of affairs is horrifying. Of course we can't expect our young Regent to be any good to us. But I must say I'm terribly disappointed by Jackson Davion. Why does it take so long to liberate the capital of the most powerful nation in the Inner Sphere?

With great concern, loyally yours,
Constance

Salutations Constance,

You are most welcome, and I am pleased that my small gift has brought you that much joy. I am well in body, but my mind is burdened by concerns similar to yours.

Two matters increase my worries. The first is Duke Hasek's increasingly anti-Capellan stance. Nothing wrong with it, certainly not while Capellan boots may stain New Avalon soil! However, the troops the duke has available are not enough to face the Capellan juggernaut alone. Unfortunately, Sandoval has failed to keep his province under control as well. They're in a frenzy because of the Combine's internal struggles. Too many clamor that all the recent wars have weakened the Combine, and that they ought to finish now what old Aaron started. I concede the timing would have been right for a strike into the Combine, considering the state it's in, but we simply are not in a position to do such a thing. We need the leadership to return New Avalon to us, after which we can concentrate on punishing the Capellans and Blakists for their crimes. As you noted, Jackson Davion is failing in that respect. Hasek seems capable enough, but he does not command the necessary respect outside his own March.

Who, then? Who can lead our nation out of this dark time? I'm sure you can guess who has my favor. And I'm sure you'll agree he will need our organization's support. Don't you concur?

Respectfully yours, with hope,
Augustus

—Intercepted letters (flagged "for later analysis," circa 1 March 3068) found in the ruins of an MIIO IGS department office on Chesterton.

would not comment on future plans to lift the siege, though he did indicate that HPG communications with New Avalon are still spotty because of damage sustained in the initial strikes.

"AFTER THE RATS"

(6 January 3068)

Electra, Pleiades Cluster [FSNS] – A fierce battle continues between Charlie Company of the [censored], Second Battalion, and the Taurian guerrillas here in the Tamoon Canyon. The guerrillas have so far eluded most of our patrols, and when we do find a few, combat has been intense. We can see even from a distance the heat emanating from the warriors' machines as they push them to their limits. One *Chameleon* last week waded into a pool of water to cool off, raising clouds of steam from the second it stepped in to the second it stepped out.

I'll tell you, Rhett, morale these past few weeks has not been good and is only getting worse. Charlie Company was expecting reinforcements to block as many entrances as possible, but they never came. Supplies are still arriving, but less and less with every shipment. Last shipment was food, medical supplies and ammunition. No spare parts or replacement armor. Not one.

Most of the company I'm with doesn't want to be here. They'd rather be at the siege of New Avalon fighting the Word of Blake, not Taurian guerrillas. Their pursuit is half-hearted at best, the men too eager to pull back. We've lost the will to fight for this system, and it's starting to show. The guerrillas have resumed offensive operations, launching sporadic attacks on our bases and logistics centers. Though these assaults rarely succeed, the fact that they happen at all illustrates the growing problems here on the ground. Lots of soldiers resent the hell out of George Hasek for not backing off his invasion of the Capellan Confederation, and resent Yvonne Steiner-Davion for hiding instead of being in the open giving support to her troops. Some even resent Victor Davion for not returning to the throne to help out his people in their hour of need.

Rhett, I'm getting reports of incoming enemy units, apparently heading right for our position. The MechWarriors are powering up their machines and heading out to meet them, but we're being ordered to take cover. Brian, get a shot of those two *Cataphracts* coming around the bend five hundred meters down the canyon meeting our *Stealth* on guard. Our other boys are rushing to help their beleaguered comrade, but I'm not so sure they can reach the *Stealth* in—[*Several explosions go off in the background.*]

Whoa, what's going on here? It looks like we're taking a massive artillery barrage. All right, we're heading to the nearby cave entrance and let the professionals do their thing.

This is Mich Steinback, FedSuns News…[*drowned out by more close explosions*] ...Pleiades Cluster, signing off for now.

—Holo-report filed by an embedded FedSuns reporter on Electra

Davion went on to confirm Blakist attacks on Tharkad, Outreach and Luthien, including the use of nuclear weapons on the first two worlds. Though the Word of Blake's true motive in these assaults remains unknown, all indications point to the Blakists "punishing" the leaders of the Inner Sphere for dissolving the Star League in November. Additionally, the Free Worlds League has apparently struck the Lyran world of Skye, though we have yet to determine whether or not this occurred as part of the Blakist war.

Questions about the location and condition of Princess Regent Yvonne Steiner-Davion and Duke Tancred Sandoval remained unanswered—on the grounds of national security—though Marshal Davion repeatedly stated that the government and military chain of command continued to function. Likewise, the Marshal did not answer questions about Duke Hasek's involvement in the day-to-day decision-making process.

Following his press conference, Marshal Davion met with AFFS senior officers here on Markesan before leaving the world, presumably to brave the Blakist blockade of New Avalon and return to the Fox's Den.

THE FORGOTTEN FRONTS

Even as a new war dawned over New Avalon, the lingering strains of older grudges remained alive and well. Between the stubborn resistance of Taurian holdouts in the Pleiades and the persistent rumors of civil war POWs in the Combine, the embers of old fires soon found fuel to spark new flames.

THE PLEIADES QUESTION

Concordat Remains "A Nuisance"

(13 March 3068)

New Syrtis [FSNS] – In light of the Word of Blake's expanding war on the entire Inner Sphere, many ill-informed people have been asking if there's any reason to stand fast in the face of the Taurian "victory" in the Pleiades Cluster. The power of the press to misinform once again rears its ugly head.

Though Duke George Hasek easily evicted the Taurians from the six worlds they struck, their mere presence in the Pleiades Cluster has required the greatest effort. Months after the Taurians entered the Cluster, our Second Ceti Hussars are still hunting down what remains of the invaders.

Mainstream press agencies throughout the Inner Sphere are calling this a triumph of will for the Taurian Pleiades Hussars, claiming that they are winning the war by appealing to centuries-old pangs of nationalism among the local population. Those reporters conveniently overlook the massive militia, police and civilian effort to root out the few Taurians still operating in the Cluster.

In the Federated Suns, the story is more about the supposed hopelessness of the situation—all because of a Kittery News Service report that featured a letter home "from the front" in which a young soldier complained that the "indigs" were all out to get

BLAKIST ASSAULT CONTINUES

Federated Suns News Service

EXCLUSIVE

(20 February 3068)

New Avalon [FSNS] – The citizens and soldiers of New Avalon have taken up arms to defend their homes for the second time in as many years, this time to fight back the Word of Blake assault against what seems to be all of humanity.

Just as news spread that the Second Star League had permanently disbanded, Word of Blake WarShips arrived in orbit around New Avalon and Tharkad. These ships immediately loosed their destructive energies against both worlds in an attempt to cow the leaders of the Inner Sphere into re-forming the Star League. Instead, their wanton depravity was the first strike in what has become their own private "holy war" against all of humankind—a Jihad that began with New Avalon.

The first strikes against the FedSuns capital hit in the early morning hours of December fifth, shortly after the attacking vessels arrived in-system via a LaGrange point close to the planet. Before alarms could sound in the cities, the Blakist ships opened fire, striking Avalon City, Ranford and New Rennes with energy blasts and missile strikes that killed tens of thousands and ignited firestorms that swept through all three cities for most of the next day. The Blakist ships continued their rampage of destruction for hours, targeting city after city, before vengeful Federated Suns fighters, DropShips and WarShips finally intercepted the invaders.

The resulting battle cost the Word of Blake at least one WarShip and left the rest of their fleet seriously damaged. In the exchange, New Avalon's defenders lost two WarShips, numerous DropShips and fighters, and thousands of brave men and women. Moreover, the orbital strikes, which were aimed not at military bases but at cities, took the lives of 2.3 million innocents, left at least five times as many homeless and cut utilities across a quarter of the planet. Yet instead of falling victim to panic, the people of New Avalon spoke as one and refused to capitulate.

The assault wasn't over, however. Six days later, the Blakists dropped their invasion force, damaging what military bases they could with orbital strikes before landing troops outside the still-burning Avalon City. AFFS forces rushed from their mountain bunkers to stop the invaders, halting them within kilometers of the city and beginning almost four months of constant fighting.

At first, the Blakists seemed to have one goal: capturing Avalon City and the Davion palace. As the battle for New Avalon dragged on and more Federated Suns' troops entered the fray, Blake's crusaders launched a campaign of terror. When they failed to conquer the world by February, they brought in reinforcements.

Still the people of New Avalon continue to resist. Tens of thousands have taken up arms to defend their cities against random attacks, while millions more work to keep power and telecommunications operating, or to repair the damage, or to otherwise aid their fellow humans in surviving this dark time. As the fighting continues and hundreds, if not thousands, fall each day, the people have spoken: tyranny shall not prevail!

BROKEN SWORDS

them, that the chain of command gave his unit no support and that the Taurians were inflicting horrendous casualties on them. No one reported, however, that this young soldier was a constant discipline problem and faced a court-martial for desertion shortly thereafter.

True, the Taurians are doing everything they can to slip supplies and insurgents into the Pleiades Cluster, but the best estimates from military and civilian analysts say that less than a battalion of Taurians remains in the region. But it's going to take time to root them all out, even with a full RCT on the job. After all, there are hundreds—if not thousands—of places to hide in the Pleiades.

LEST WE FORGET

(12 August 3068)

Robinson [ROBINSON REPORTER] – With all the misery afflicting our proud nation, it is hard not to get distracted and mourn for all the countrymen who suffer. But the Draconis Combine can always be counted on to provide us with the proper perspective.

Last night, Governor Morris Harland-Davion of Bryceland was found dead, literally cut down by what police have called "machete-like instruments." Harland-Davion, the fifth in a string of recent assassinations of border world governors, is likely the latest in these Kurita-sponsored hits. Add to that the recent raids against Errai and Murchison, and it's clear Victor's good friend Hohiro has his sights set on the Draconis March. Such raids are common precursors, and the assassinations further serve to destabilize the region in anticipation of an invasion.

And let us not forget our brothers and sisters we had to leave behind the last time. With the evidence presented to us by Narhal's Raiders, no one can doubt that the Dracs have pressed our soldiers into slave camps to effect "war reparations." I'm sure you've seen some of the footage cleared for the public, or at least heard about it.

How much longer must we stand by before we act? The best defense is a good offense. That's been true almost as long as we've waged war as a species. The time to act is now.

THE TAURIAN PROBLEM

—Excerpted from a private blog by Ikonoklast on the Kathil InterWeb, 24 September 3068

You know what? I don't care about your inferior **opinion**, MattSlatt. Go engrave it on a slab of ferrocrete and shove it up your {CENSORED} colon sideways. Your constant whining about the Capellan people this, the Capellan people that, is not scoring any points with ANYONE **this side of the border**. In fact, at the rate you're going, I can't help but wonder whether your income includes any funds of **Confederation origin**? Maybe someone ought to point out your **happy little page** (needs a bit more green there, buddy!) to our good friends in the **MIIO**.

And while I'm talking about **Crapellan-huggers**, I'm also getting sick and tired of all those pansies whining about **New Avalon**! People, it's been {CENSORED} nine months already! If it could be liberated, it would've been. Those WoBblies have got the **whole system locked down** with WarShips! WarShips, people! You know, those handy little economy-sinking bathtubs of doom that can vape any invading force? Heard of 'em? Until we crank out a few more of those ***Avalon*-class ships** from Kathil, we're stuck without a way to kick that door open. So let those posh **butter-eaters** on New Avalon cower a bit longer in their {CENSORED} **bomb shelters**.

Meanwhile, has anyone noticed that we're still experiencing another invasion? No, not the Clans, **idiot**, I'm talking about the damn Taurians. Yeah! **Remember them**? They hit a bunch of our worlds back in early 3067 before we kicked 'em back out. Oh, except they didn't quite leave. Nope. They're still in the **Pleiades Cluster** after all this time, for {CENSORED}'s sake! And **Dukey Hasek** couldn't get rid of 'em, 'cause he's WAY overfocused on the Crapellans. (Shut UP already, MattStatt!) And now with **his FUBAR invasion**, looks like we can forget about kicking those invaders back to their **loser Periphery state**. In fact, a little military birdie told me the Taurians recently reinforced the Cluster and may soon pacify it! How about THAT for disgraceful! Nine months on New Avalon, twenty-one months in the Pleiades, hey everybody, just {CENSORED} invade us already! Make {CENSORED} landfall and we can't {CENSORED} get {CENSORED} rid of you {CENSORED} {CENSORED}!

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MARCHES AT WAR

In a grim echo of the Lyran border crises, the collapse of central authority with the siege of New Avalon quickly became apparent on the FedSuns Marches closest to their ancient enemies in the Draconis Combine and Capellan Confederation. Duke Sandoval's attacks against the Combine would seem almost restrained, considering the strikes of the civil war, but the Capellan campaign waged by Duke Hasek would push the Federated Suns into full-scale war even as the Davion capital fought for its life.

OPERATION SOVEREIGN JUSTICE UNDERWAY

(4 July 3068)

New Syrtis [FSNS] – Five years after the signing of the Capellan Peace Accords, the worlds of the St. Ives Compact are once again fighting for their freedom—this time without interference from the Star League or indifference from the Federated Suns.

Today, Duke George Hasek released the following statement: "At the request of Duke Kai Allard-Liao and the St. Ives legislature, we are providing support to the freedom-loving people of the St. Ives Compact as they once again fight for independence from the tyrannical Capellan Confederation." His statement provided no further details and he did not answer questions from

BROKEN SWORDS

the press. Nevertheless, we have obtained further information from sources in Duke Hasek's headquarters as well as correspondents in the Compact.

On 25 June, agents working for Hasek spirited Duke Kai Allard-Liao away from St. Ives. According to reports coming out of the Confederation, Allard-Liao was kidnapped by the infamous Bounty Hunter, who killed a dozen bodyguards and more than a hundred civilians. By contrast, news from Free Capella does name the infamous Bounty Hunter as Allard-Liao's rescuer, but says the dead were eight Death Commandos and a battalion of Capellan bodyguards charged with preventing Duke Allard-Liao's escape.

Three days later, the first of four mercenary regiments officially released from AFFS service to take part in this operation made landfall in the St. Ives Compact. Coordinating with freedom fighters and home guard units identified by Free Capella agents, these mercenaries overran and destroyed Capellan-loyal garrison forces. According to press releases from St. Ives, that world and three others are free from Capellan rule and requesting humanitarian aid and other support from Duke Hasek. AFFS units along the Capellan border are on high alert and mobilizing for response to any Capellan aggression.

"EVADING THE HOUNDS"

(6 January 3068)

Electra, Pleiades Cluster [TPB] – Michael, we're on the move, this time on yet another offensive operation. A company of Fedrats has been pursuing us for the past four months and our subaltern has finally begun striking back. This will be the third such operation since the Blake assault on New Avalon began last month. The Blakist attack seems to have sent massive shockwaves rippling through the Federated soldiers' ranks. They're on edge now, fearful that any concentration of troops or supplies will bring a Word of Blake fleet over their heads.

The subaltern has been relaying news of the New Avalon siege to all the other resistance groups, and the response has been overwhelming. Some now think the Word of Blake has taken sides in the crusade to reclaim our homelands, and believe we're over the hump. Nothing, it seems, will stop our Taurian soldiers from marching forward to reclaim the Pleiades Cluster.

I'm sitting here in the back seat of one of the lead *Cataphract*s as we approach the enemy's position, and we're relaying our telemetry to a battery of artillery we quietly moved into position three days ago. Michael, you need to understand, a month ago that accomplishment would have been inconceivable. The Davions would have detected the movement and intercepted our forces long before they made it to their designated spot. Now they've gotten so sloppy and distracted that we can advance and fall back wherever and whenever we want.

We've turned the last corner inside the canyon and can see the Davions' base camp up ahead. A lone Stealth seems to be protecting this area of the camp; we're getting ready to throw everything we have at it and anyone else who attempts to assist it. This time we're going for it all, to finally get rid of our pursuers while we have the chance. I think we may have caught most of them out of their ma— What's that?

Oh, all right. I'm being ordered to end my live transmission to clear the comm channels for the military chatter. So we're cutting this transmission short and I'll come back later with the results.

But before I go, I just want to say that the heavy LRM carriers have begun showering the Davion camp with missiles, and it looks simply marvelous.

For Taurian Public Broadcasting, I'm Richard Walker. Over and out.

—Filed by a reporter embedded with Concordat forces on Electra

OVERSTATEMENTS OR UNDERESTIMATIONS?

(23 September 3068)

Reisterstown [REISTERSTOWN GAZETTE] – I am confident that everyone has Operation Sovereign Justice on their minds almost as much as the ongoing siege of our capital. The latest reports suggest that Duke Hasek is making progress, taking some additional worlds, though those same reports also speak of terrible civil unrest on the planets already captured. Sun-Tzu Liao seems to be using the same ploys that worked so well in the Chaos March: seeding terrorist cells among captured populations, supplying any insurrectionist movements that might pop up and overall supporting subversive propaganda.

Duke Hasek states that his campaign is proceeding well and advancing toward Sian. Meanwhile, however, we've seen almost no reports on the St. Ives region—the reports that describe civilian unrest and insurrection. Sure, some St. Ives troops have joined us. Others still fight us. Who exactly are we liberating here? We come to give these people freedom, and instead they kill our troops? What is wrong with them? They fought for independence only a few years ago, and now they're willing to lay down their lives for Sun-Tzu's oppressive regime! Why do we bother?

Meanwhile, we continue to lose battles and take casualties. Did Duke Hasek underestimate the Capellans that much? Did we all? Or perhaps our troops are not as strong as we thought? I'm sure you've all seen the news reports suggesting far too few DropShips are being moved to transport all elements of a unit, almost as if many units are understrength. The duke has so far ignored such claims, but sheer numbers don't lie. You need more than an *Overlord* and three *Union*s to move a 'Mech regiment.

The prospect of an invasion collapsing on itself, with Capellan troops counterattacking, is grave; the suffering of the Capellan people in the war zone is awful. But not as chilling as the thought that Federated Suns citizens are in a war zone just two short jumps away.

Why haven't we liberated New Avalon yet?

BROKEN SWORDS

HERDING CATS

Lord Marshal, I order you, as Regent of the Federated Suns, to stand down and recall your forces to worlds within the Federated Suns borders in order to assist in our defense against the Word of Blake invaders. This is the third such order I have sent since you initiated hostilities with the Capellan Confederation. Your actions have not benefited the Federated Suns' interests or her people.

George, I know you probably still think someone else should be running our nation, and that rightfully Victor should stand where I do. But I am here instead, and I need your help to keep this state together.

If you do not withdraw your troops and redirect them to the Federated Suns' defense, I will be forced to take appropriate measures to deal with such insubordination. I deeply regret that it has become necessary to issue such threats, but I will do whatever it takes to keep this nation safe.

The ball is in your court now, George.

(signed)
Princess Regent Yvonne Steiner-Davion

—AFFS Priority One communiqué issued 2 August 3068 (undelivered)

Baron Linus Rou, spokesman for Duke Hasek, said of this alert, "We will not invade a foreign nation, but the Federated Suns will respond to requests for aid from our allies, and must provide the assistance demanded by our treaties with them. The St. Ives Compact is fighting for its freedom, and we will support them as they battle an unjust and totalitarian government—one curiously unaffected by the Blakist war currently being waged across the Inner Sphere."

By all accounts, Duke Allard-Liao is in transit to New Syrtis and could not be reached for comment. Likewise, his mother, Duchess Candace Liao, is currently on Sian and unavailable to the press.

SOVEREIGN JUSTICE STRIKES DEEP

Capellans Unable to Stand Fast

(5 October 3068)

Kathil [FSNS] – Amid the chaos of the Inner Sphere, the war to again win freedom for the St. Ives Compact looks as if it might once and for all crush the Federated Suns' greatest enemy—the Capellan Confederation.

Operation Sovereign Justice began a little more than three months ago as Duke George Hasek supported the St. Ives Compact's bid for freedom. Initially intended as a humanitarian mission to provide relief to worlds freed from the Confederation's tyrannical grasp, with attached military forces authorized only to defend themselves and their charges from counterattack, the operation turned military when Capellan forces counterattacked the Compact and the Federated Suns.

"The citizens of St. Ives have themselves thrown off the bonds of oppression," Duke Hasek said almost two months ago on New Syrtis, standing next to Duke Kai Allard-Liao. "Yet their cousins refused to recognize their independence in the most despicable way. Chancellor Liao must learn firsthand the price of despotism." The very next day, AFFS forces crossed the Capellan border and struck targets in the Confederation.

NEWS DOWNLOADER v3.7

DATE & TITLE	*SERVICE*	*STATUS*
(18-DEC-67) "WORD OF BLAKE SHIPS DESTROY HIGHLANDER JUMPSHIPS"	[MERCNET]	COMPLETED
(19-DEC-67) "NEW AVALON DEFENDERS HOLD LINE, CRIPPLE BLAKE FLAGSHIP"	[NANS]	DOWNLOADING
(21-DEC-67) "BLAKE WARSHIPS ASSAULT OUTREACH"	[INN]	ACCESSING

A SERVICE OF IRIAN NEWS INTERSTELLAR

HARD EVIDENCE

Major,

During Recon Operation Domingo, our operatives located an apparent prisoner-of-war camp on Altais, confirming your suspicions about the illegal and inhumane detention of Federated Sun soldiers.

After following several dead leads, our operatives located the camp several kilometers away from a newly started germanium mine on the planet's more remote continent. Providing little safety gear or proper equipment, the Combine handlers are working the prisoners sixteen hours a day with scant food and water. For punishment, they send prisoners to "The Hill" in the center of the camp, where they publicly flog them or perform rudimentary "medical" operations for the sole purpose of inflicting pain and humiliation.

Our last tactical operation immediately before extraction to our safe house was an unauthorized raid into the prison camp to extract several prisoners. Though we lost two operatives and three prisoners, the liberation of a dozen more prisoners, including several higher-ranking officers, allows us to classify the operation a success. Per your request, we have located Leftenant Jacob Grunder, who is currently being held in "The Hill," but were unable to extract him.

Given that the DCMS now knows of our presence, we expect them to quickly relocate the camp to another site. I suggest another, larger-scale operation to extract the rest of the prisoners before they can do so.

—Report synopsis by DMI Operative "Gabriel" to Major Grunder on the latest operation in Draconis Combine space, delivered 28 August 3068

"IS ANYONE OUT THERE?"

Dear Joanne,

I'm not sure if our runners will get this out to you, but if you're reading this, thank God for small favors. He doesn't seem to be granting us any inside this city.

We made it off the bases after the initial bombardment and got into the city ok. The abandoned warehouse where my company took refuge is holding up pretty well, though it hasn't withstood one of their naval bombardments yet. Probably won't hold up to a few laser bursts either, but right now, it still has three and a half walls and a roof.

I wish our chain of command were as intact. The highest-ranking officer we've managed to contact is our colonel, and it seems we have no organized resistance to speak of. The only thing keeping the Wobblies out is our collective sheer determination. I bet if we had some coordination, we could push these bastards off the planet.

We keep getting news articles about everywhere but New Avalon. It sounds like Sandoval is getting ready to go another round with the Draconis Combine, and Hasek seems more intent on freeing some damned Liao district than his own capital! Even before Hasek gets done pushing that Periphery scum out of the Pleiades, he's starting another war. And what is our precious "Princess Regent" doing? Who knows?! I wish she'd stop acting like a scared kid and start acting like a Davion. Oh, to have Victor back in charge.

If those idiots don't get their heads out of their rears, we're going to end up like Tharkad, nuked and bombarded off the maps. Because we've been showing the Wobblies on the ground the price they'll have to pay to take to get this rock, and if they want us gone, they have to send New Avalon to hell along with us.

I've got to go. Smitty just stumbled in with his damaged *Centurion* and now we only have three and a quarter walls to hold up the roof.

Love ya lots,

Mikey

—Letter discovered in the ruins of an Avalon City warehouse, dated 14 September 3068

Shortly after Hasek's appearance, Baron Linus Rou, the duke's press secretary, and Leftenant General Yelena Westerbridge, spokesman for the AFFS on New Syrtis, presided over a press conference. "The Capellans have taken a cue from the Word of Blake and are striking civilian targets in the St. Ives Compact and the Federated Suns in an apparent attempt to erode popular support for the Compact's fight for freedom," said Rou. "And they do this while holding Duchess Candace Liao hostage on Sian. You can almost see the gun to her head as she reads those statements condemning the people who 'fight against the wisdom of the Celestial Throne.' The people of St. Ives are not buying it, and neither should anyone else."

Westerbridge spoke about specific details of the military operation. "To this point, AFFS forces have defended themselves without penetrating the Capellan border. Those gloves are coming off now. In conjunction with St. Ives Military Command troops, regular and mercenary, we will begin targeting military objectives in the Confederation."

The leftenant-general did not name specific targets, but she did indicate that the planned strikes will decimate critical military infrastructure while crippling Capellan logistics lines. Already we are hearing reports of assaults on military bases deep in Confederation space, including worlds just a jump or two away from Sian and Capella.

"We will make it impossible for Sun-Tzu Liao to prosecute his war on freedom, ensuring the continued survival of the St. Ives Compact," said Westerbridge. When asked about reports of St. Ives forces battling AFFS troops, she said, "In every war of independence, some support the wrong side. Some have freely chosen their way, while others have fallen prey to the Chancellor's secret police. Already, the people of St. Ives are speaking as one—they have known freedom and they have known the yoke of oppression. They have chosen freedom, and we stand beside them in that choice."

TEARS OF THE DRAGON

TEARS OF THE DRAGON

Karma.

Does that not encompass the events that have transpired over the past twelve months? Have not our past transgressions returned to us a hundredfold? A thousand? Ten thousand? Like a viper allowed to fester in the tall grass until the stoutest bamboo walls cannot protect against sharp fangs and glistening venom. Not since the appalling time of the Von Rohrs and their defilement of the Chrysanthemum Throne has the Dragon felt the savage beak of the Yellow Bird so keenly.

When did our actions bring about such backlash? Karma tilting for rebalance? When did we stray?

In Volume II of the Dictum Honorium, do we not read the following Greater Quintadocs:

• Working toward the destruction of all our enemies.

• Promoting a unified Star League under the banner of the Dragon.

And who are our enemies? Have we made the gravest of mistakes—believing that the enemy of my enemy can offer more than a momentary alliance between warriors on the field of battle? That when the common foe has been vanquished, the alliance of contrivance can allow for the sheathing of blades? Have we taken enemies into the Dragon's lair? Allowed swine among our most precious jasmines?

Some will decry my words. The word "traitor" will surely ring amid the Imperial City's teak and marble towers, while a quick brush stroke might send me to a hole from which I'll never depart. Others will assume I am in league with the *bakemonos* blackening the jewel of the Combine even as I write.

But it is it traitorous to speak the truth?

Have we not allowed House Davion to befriend us? The enemy of our enemy, they came as a Dragon's Dove, and united we slew the Smoke Jaguars and put the remaining Clans in their place. But have they not struck across our borders since? Are they not even now striking at our worlds unprovoked, while the entire Inner Sphere shakes from the plague of the Word of Blake? Are the warriors of the Pillar of Steel not becoming a river of Dragon Tears? Should we not have turned our swords against an enemy who has brought war to us for centuries as soon as the last Jaguar fell?

And what of the *Kokuryu-kai*? While some will say I am in league with these *ronin*, they are gravely in error. The Black Dragons have risen against their rightful lord and there is only one punishment fitting for such actions. A clean death is too simple for the Yellow Birds they have placed at the Dragon's eyes. Yet again, they represent an enemy we did not destroy. No matter how often their poisoned darts cut us, we failed to excise their disease from the Dragon's womb.

And what of this Star League? Perhaps the greatest of all misjudgments—to join an alliance of convenience? To lay aside the greatness of the First Egg instilled in House Kurita by our founder Shiro himself, so that we may purchase cheaper trinkets from merchants? So that our Unproductives might find a path to unjust riches, wealth they might have secured if they worked for the Dragon as they should? Or perhaps the Star League provides a cover to allow a swine to snuffle our jasmine, ultimately wilting and destroying the flower of the Dragon?

The original Star League succeeded because of the iron-fisted rule of House Cameron. A second Star League can only succeed under a similar iron will. That will should be the Dragon's. Without it, all is folly… pearls before swine.

In defense of the Coordinator and myself, I do not decry all his actions. His reforms within our nation I applaud, because I know those changes have made us stronger, more unified and focused. Yet we have gone astray in thinking such reforms need apply to our enemies as well.

With Luthien truly blackened, with the Coordinator and his heir leaving us rudderless and the Word of Blake spreading their pogrom throughout the realm of the Five Pillars, it is time to remember our roots. Time to ring the Dragon's lair in a storm of swords. Time to sweep our shores clean.

Or karma will destroy us.

—Mishcha Kurosawa, Koe No Ryu, 18 October 3068

DREAMS TORN ASUNDER

Unlike the attacks on Tharkad and New Avalon, the Word of Blake's holy war did not touch the Draconis Combine immediately or with the same evident ferocity. However, to say the Combine was not shaken by the events surrounding the Star League's dismemberment would be a grave error. Within a few weeks, the dream of a united Star League was dashed and close allies of the realm were under attack, while at home dark and ominous events had just begun to unfold.

—Michael Bosworth, INN Special Correspondent

LEADERS GATHER FOR WHITTING 3067

(27 November 3067)

Tharkad [VOTD] – House leaders and their entourages from all over the Inner Sphere have begun to arrive here on Tharkad for the 3067 Whitting Conference. Coordinator Kurita made planetfall last night aboard the DCMS *Spirit of the People* with several members of the royal court and ISF Director Ninyu Kerai-Indrahar. The Dragon's heir, SLDF Commanding General Hohiro Kurita, is already in-system and on final burn with an estimated arrival tomorrow.

First Lord Månsdottir has had a tumultuous term these past three years, seeing the end of the FedCom Civil War and border raids into Combine space. General Kurita's term as Commander of the SLDF was a huge success; SLDF units received multiple upgrades, new bases were constructed in the Combine and Free Worlds League, and the SLDF showed a strong presence along the Clan fronts, keeping Clan raiding parties to a minimum.

Many hope for a peaceful outcome from this meeting of the Star League Council, given that most fighting along major borders

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everywhere in the Inner Sphere has quieted. For the first time since the Clan invasion, peace may be the norm rather than the exception for the Inner Sphere. Coordinator Kurita is expected to offer several new proposals that will boost the Combine's economy, open up new colonization efforts along the Pesht District border and develop stronger ties with Lyran agricultural shipping conglomerates.

Expectations are high for the upcoming conference, where several new members are expected to be formally welcomed into the Star League, including the Taurian Concordat and the Word of Blake. The topic of conversation across the Lyran capital, however, is who will be elected as First Lord for the upcoming term. Speculation runs high that Captain-General Thomas Marik will assume the post, with the Lyran Archon Peter Steiner as a close second.

With three days to go until the opening ceremonies, only representatives from the Capellan Confederation and her trading ally, the Magistracy of Canopus, have yet to arrive. These members are needed to maintain unity and equality for the Inner Sphere, and we understand that the Confederation's representative is en route. Barring travel delays, the Whitting Conference will start as scheduled.

STAR LEAGUE DISBANDS

*****For Immediate Release*****

(30 November 3067)

Tharkad [VOTD] – Over vehement objections from Coordinator Theodore Kurita, Elected-Prince Christian Månsdottir, Precentor Martial Victor Steiner-Davion and representatives of the Word of Blake and the Taurian Concordat, the Star League dissolved today. This unprecedented—and unanticipated—action came on the heels of caustic statements issued by the Capellan representative condemning the Star League and its function. His remarks sparked a long and heated debate that ended the dreams of unification for many in the Inner Sphere in a close but damning vote of no confidence, despite the desperate incorporation of the Taurian Concordat and Word of Blake into the voting membership.

"Where once we were harmonious, discord has fallen," remarked the Coordinator in a brief statement. "It pains me to see all the hard work of my fellow citizens and many others across the Inner Sphere pushed aside out of selfishness and greed. We have proved the Clan enemy correct by allowing our discord and individual desires to sever our hopes for peace and a new Golden Age."

The stunned crowds booed the Capellan representative, Mandrinn Kian Lih Sung, as he headed out of the Alessandro Memorial Auditorium on his way back to his DropShip. Immediate reaction on the streets of Tharkad put the blame squarely on the Confederation. "This was the best chance at peace we had, and that no good power-monger Sunny-Cho ruined it for all of us so he could make the evening news," commented Alexis Draven, a local record executive in the crowd outside the Auditorium.

The Word of Blake representatives seemed particularly shocked at the results of the no confidence vote, as the quasi-religious order was scheduled to make its membership presentation at this summit. The Blake entourage left the Auditorium in tense silence, with Precentor Martial Cameron St. Jamais promising the media a statement tomorrow. The Word of Blake's probationary membership was to end with this session and a vote was to have occurred in a few days to consider them for full membership in the Star League. Instead, the withdrawal of the Confederation and summary call of no confidence in the League forced a vote that required a three-quarters majority to sustain the body. Breaking protocol, the standing First Lord enabled the probationary members to vote, but to no avail.

The Capellan Chancellor was not present at this year's conference, choosing instead to send his vitriolic holovid message

THARKAD BOMBED!

*****For Immediate Release, Top Priority*****

(6 December 3067)

New Samarkand [VOTD] – "Tharkad City has been bombed." That was the word today out of the governor's office, confirming the rumors that have swirled around water coolers, taxi stands and college papers across the planet. According to Governor Rothschild, the Lyran capital suffered a nuclear strike from an unknown WarShip orbiting the planet. Reports that the strike came from the ancient Lyran ship LCS *Invincible* remain unconfirmed.

"Coordinator Kurita and his heir are safe, having departed Tharkad almost twenty-four hours before the bombardment. They are currently en route to the Combine through a secure route and will enter our nation's borders in the next few weeks," said Governor Rothschild.

Details of the nuclear holocaust are sketchy at best, but various sources confirm that the devastating attack wiped out much of the capital city. Most of the planet is without power, and unsubstantiated rumors tell of elite BattleMech squads landing on the planet's surface.

"The Draconis Combine condemns the perpetrators of this attack and their use of illegal weapons of mass destruction on the innocents of the Alliance," commented the Coordinator in a message sent to all Combine news stations. "Once the identity of these murderers has been confirmed, appropriate measures will be taken to assure the safety of the Combine people and the population of the Inner Sphere."

To protect the loyal citizens of the Dragon, all military leaves have been cancelled in all districts, and the DCMS has gone to standby alert. "Any attempt to strike a Combine world will be met with swift action," said *Tai-sho* Hohiro Kurita in a brief statement sent to prefecture capitals. "All on-world militia commanders are to report to their superiors. To the citizens of the Dragon, we understand the hardships you are about to face with the increased security and the calling up of our reservists. Rest assured that if the blood of the Dragon is spilled, we will spill much more from our enemies."

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via special courier. Also absent were representatives from the Magistracy of Canopus.

THE DRAGON SPEAKS

The past few weeks have been trying to us all.

With the dissolution of the Star League, we are once again left alone in the stellar night. However, rest assured that we are not adrift.

We have come through much these past months and years, from outside enemies and certain internal disruptions. The Ghost Bear raids. Minor attacks by disloyal members of the Federated Suns. The unfortunate passing of the Keeper of the House Honor. The dashing of our hopes for economic growth and prosperity among the other Great Houses. Yet we survive. We are strong. Because we are the Dragon.

As we prepare for our future, know that the Dragon is stronger than it has ever been. I know this because I know the Dragon's strength is you, the glorious citizenry of the Combine. You have helped move the Dragon to new heights economically and militarily, and even in the troubled times of the Star League, the Dragon has held its head high because you believed. You are the purity, the honor, the shape of the Dragon.

Our honor is intact and will not be broken. Our duty is clear: to remain a beacon to our neighbors, embodying the ideals and character of the Star League now departed.

As these crises pass, we will stand unbroken, unbent by the waves that crash over us. I know this because I see the stoutness of heart in you, the people.

The Combine shall prevail in this uncertain future. Because we are the Dragon.

By cowardice struck
The Dragon sheds tears anew
Fire is rekindled.

—Statement issued by Coordinator Theodore Kurita, 15 December 3067

FAILURE

It is sad to learn of the breakdown of the Star League. That which offered hope to humankind—and, more importantly, to *us*—is now nothing but another shattered dream.

How could this happen? An institution that helped rid us of the vile evil known as Clan Smoke Jaguar? That subdued the Nova Cats to become almost-citizens of the Dragon?

It is Coordinator Theodore's fault. His lack of fortitude and determination has failed the Combine.

How many loyal soldiers died under the Star League banner? Were they not deemed worthy enough to sail under such an honorable flag to help spearhead the removal of the Yellow Bird in the form of the Jaguar? Are the lives they gave on so many worlds—Luzerne, Schuyler, Byesville and more—worth nothing? They watered the Star League's soil with blood, and for what? So that the Coordinator can—dare I print it—betray the spirits of those honorable sons and daughters?

His abuse of the First Lordship's powers pales in comparison to his refusal to uphold the ideals of the Star League. We are no better than the *gaijin* around us. The demon-spawn Victor can throw away lives in a reckless attempt to seize his throne, because the hated Federated Suns do not value life or honor.

But we know better. And our Coordinator—who embodies the Dragon, no less!—should know better. Now our enemies view us as baseless cowards and we are weakened as a society. How can we look at ourselves every morning, knowing that our beloved Combine—our life!—has been called into question? Are we a failure as a people? Do we share the shame of our Coordinator's inaction? How shall we carry this burden?

Perhaps a change is needed. Perhaps a new sun should rise. Or perhaps our "beloved" Coordinator needs to turn his eyes away from the Federated Suns' blinding glare and look back to our roots, our glory, our honor.

Shameful days have come. We should mourn the loss of honor and the ideals we have spurned. The Dragon weeps today. And I weep with it.

—Editorial by an unknown author, "erroneously printed" in "Plurality This Week" (Shimosuwa Cultural College), ed. XII, vol. iii (Dec 3067)

LUTHIEN BLACKOUT

For General Release

(20 December 3067)

Dieron [VOTD] – Minister Tsuroi Chamberlain of the Ministry for Communications (MinCom) briefly announced today a loss of communication from Luthien. "There is nothing to worry about, as the system was scheduled for a routine relay upgrade. Under normal circumstances, such upgrades only take the transceiver offline for an hour or so, but in some cases errors may be found and need additional time to be corrected. This is the case here. Luthien received its last upgrade well over five years ago and is known to have some power connection issues, so this problem was not unanticipated.

"We assure the good citizens of Dieron that there is nothing unusual about this temporary loss of communication. ComStar has assured us that they will continue to take messages for Luthien as normal and will transmit them once the HPG comes back online in a day or so. In the meantime, MinCom will reimburse Combine citizens and businesses twenty percent for all transmissions passing through the Luthien station for the inconvenience.

"Thank you for your understanding and patience in this matter. Any further questions may be directed to your local MinCom office."

TEARS OF THE DRAGON

BLACK DRAGON RISING

For the Draconis Combine, the true crisis of the Jihad began with betrayals and the retreat of a trusted ally at the most unfortunate moment. Even as the embodiment of the Dragon returned to face the emergencies on the home front, tragedy struck again, leaving the future of a nation in doubt as the fires of war spread throughout the Kurita realm.

UPRISING ON LUTHIEN!

Citizens of the Dragon! The Imperial City's alleged communications upgrade is a lie. Luthien is under siege!

"LOYAL CITIZENS OF THE DRAGON, UNITE!"

Citizens of the Combine, hear us!

Today we have done what honor has demanded ever since the collapse of the Second Star League. The fall of such a noble enterprise, bought and paid for with the Dragon's own blood, is the final evidence needed to show that our Coordinator has failed in his duty to safeguard the entirety of the Combine. Because of this failure, we have deemed it necessary to seize control of the Palace and of Luthien, and hold it in trust for the people until such a time as worthy leadership arises.

It is the right and duty of the people to reject our Coordinator if we see that he has become tainted by the *gaijin* around him. Who better to show the error of his ways than the Order of Five Pillars, the embodiment of the Purity of the Dragon? Is it not right that in order to save the whole we must sacrifice part of the body?

Our pledge to you, loyal citizens, is that we will merely safeguard the Chrysanthemum Throne until the Dragon can reclaim his majesty and reject these new ways that threaten our existence, our purpose, our being.

Soldiers loyal to the Order and to the *Kokuryu-kai* are being deployed around Luthien to protect the Dragon from foreign infection. Cooperate with them. Love them. Honor them. They are the scalpel to the cancer of Theodore. They are the extension of the Dragon's will, if not the head.

We pledge to you our duty and honor to hold this world in trust for the Dragon's resurgence. We will fight for you and die for you, shedding our blood for your souls. Remember, Theodore and his evil spawn spilled the bloods of thousands of your fathers and sons for no noble cause, no honor, no sense of duty—only to fulfill the whims of the *gaijin* Davion and his poisonous family, to create more powerful enemies of the Dragon that threaten our very existence.

This day shall long be remembered as the Day the Dragon Returned. Celebrate! And wait with us as the true Dragon comes to reveal himself, to carry us forward into a brighter future!

—Front page message on all Luthien press pieces, 30 December 3067

The local militia force responsible has been identified as servants of the Black Dragons (*Kokuryu-kai*), a reactionary political movement targeted by the ISF in several purges since 3057. Reports of sporadic fighting in some areas continue to pour in, and many of the capital's key people are missing. The city is held hostage at this point and all communication in and out has been severed, except for broadcasts of anti-Kurita propaganda by the invading force.

We know little about the true purpose of this attack, so close on the heels of the Star League's disbanding as well as Tharkad's bombing. One cannot help but wonder at the timing of these events and speculate as to their connection. And as we were misled in the beginning—with Luthien's blackout officially attributed to a communications system upgrade—how can we trust *any* other reports glossed over by the Dragon's Voice?

—Anonymous underground student pamphlet circulated on Benjamin, 25 December 3067

BETRAYAL AT THE DRAGON'S HEART

(16 January 3068)

Galedon V [VOTD] – Officials in the Prefecture Government confirmed today that Luthien is under attack by *dohi*—rebel—forces, and further complications have arisen from the arrival of a Word of Blake war fleet that has dispatched troops without authorization from the DCMS High Command.

Forces from the *Kokuryu-kai dohi* have seized the Unity Palace compound and declared the Coordinator unworthy of his position as leader of the citizenry. They have executed several members of the palace staff and captured *Tai-sa* Franklin Sakamoto, head of the *Otomo* after the assassination of Griffon Meshune in the opening hours of the sneak attack. These same individuals attempted to assassinate the Coordinator in 3058, the blessed Omi Kurita and her friend, Victor Steiner-Davion, in 3060, and who instigated the Ghost Bear war on our border, which saw the needless deaths of many of the Dragon's sons and daughters.

Demanding to be heard, the *dohi* seized the VOTD broadcast facility in the Imperial City and have been broadcasting their propaganda over the planetary communications networks. They demand that the Combine revert to the isolation of the early 31st century, reject the mercenaries assigned by the DCMS to protect certain worlds, and remove Theodore and his offspring from the Kurita bloodline "so that a true Kurita like the great Takashi may take the Dragon to its rightful place in the Inner Sphere." If these demands are not enacted, they threaten to plunge Luthien into a bloodbath "that rivals Kentares IV."

Within hours of that statement, a Word of Blake war fleet arrived in orbit around the planet and has begun landing troops in key positions around Unity City. Spotty reports from sources in the DCMS describe the Word of Blake commander broadcasting his arrival "to assist the true forces of the Combine to reassert rightful control of the realm."

TEARS OF THE DRAGON

THE NOVA CATS: WHERE ARE THEY?

dragonpirate: no one's heard a word in over a week. Dad thinks it's worse than what we know
DCPCModerator: ***A friendly reminder to all participants today of the likelihood of VotD monitoring on all chats. ***
dragonpirate: damn i hate that bot
PixieTrish: So it's true, then, about the Irece Prefecture going dark?
dragonpirate: yeah its true happened overnight no more anything
fistacuffs: Anyone in here have any news if the blackout with Irece is just another "system upgrade" or are they under attack like Luthien?
****Shoshopeter has entered the chat****
PixieTrish: Yeah—*right*. Upgrade, my ass. My neighbor has family there and her grandfather's blaming everything on the FedSuns.
fistacuffs: Then I'm guessing we're all pretty much in the dark as to what's happening there, just like we were with Luthien.
****hot4ad8t has entered the chat****
dragonpirate: Hi hot
PixieTrish: Evening Dave.
hot4ad8t: I've got news on the *Nova Cats!*
dragonpirate: more than the rumor that they left for the periphery?
PixieTrish: They did? When did they do that? My boyfriend's brother knows a member of the Nova Cats.
hot4ad8t: They left just after the whole Star League break-up. I just got a copy of *The Drake*—says they might be heading toward Luthien—maybe kick some Black Dragon ass!
****screwdapooch has left the chat****
fistacuffs: I hope the Nova Cats aren't planning anything rash.
hot4ad8t: Why not? I hope they storm Luthien and take Imperial City back. Someone needs to get in there and clean up the mess.
dragonpirate: unless they're up to something else.
PixieTrish: Dave, you know you shouldn't be reading that paper. *The Drake's* not VotD approved.
hot4ad8t: Screw 'em. If we want any truth about where the Nova Cats really are, we're gonna find it in the student presses. Not from the VotD.
fistacuffs: Could be they went back to Irece Prefecture. Dragon's got family there.
dragonpirate: trish does
PixieTrish: Not me. My neighbor.
DCPCModerator: ***A friendly reminder to all participants today of the likelihood of VotD monitoring on all chats. ***

—Excerpted from Pesht network chat room, 20 January 3068

Regardless of the Blakists' intent, it is clear that the *Kokuryu-kai dohi* intend to turn Luthien into a slaughter of the innocent. Whether they are in collusion with the Butchers of Tharkad is in question—though the current actions of the Word of Blake commander leave much to be desired. Until these actions can be understood, DCMS forces on and around Luthien will defend the Heart of the Dragon against ALL interlopers. To this end, Warlord Minamoto has declared a State of Emergency for the entire Pesht Prefecture until the Coordinator arrives in Combine space.

The warlord has asked the citizenry to remember the many sacrifices of the Dragon as they resist the unlawful demands of a minority of malcontents.

"COWARDICE!"

Evil has befallen us! But the will of the Dragon remains steadfast!

The Word of Blake has taken it upon themselves to fulfill the plots of the *gaijin* Theodore and has attacked us as the Jaguars did on Edo. They light up the sky with fire and smoke, burning Luthien and attempting to scour the planet.

They do this under Theodore's command! He has no honor and refuses to even address our grievances against him, so he sends his Blakist mercenary lapdogs. They will not face us on the field of honor; instead they bomb us from the sky, from space! They treat the Combine as the Jaguars did in their war of conquest only a generation ago!

We will not let them get away with such cowardice! Such lack of honor! Just as the Dragon did a mere few years ago, so we will do again. The Dragon will rise up and smite the money soldiers from the sky and from our Combine! We will eradicate them as we did the Jaguars—balanced on the edge of Hell, we will push them in along with us. Not with our swords, not with our duty, but with our honor—for our honor DEMANDS we resist, and show no mercy toward those who refuse to honor us.

Once the Blakist threat is removed, we will carry our rage to Theodore and demand his place on the mat before us so we can remove this vile cancer once and for all!

Resist, people of the Dragon!

—Masthead story, *Luthien Today*, 12 January 3068

DOCTORS: COORDINATOR ILL, RECOVERING

*****For General Release*****

(2 February 3068)

Al Na'ir [VOTD] – Coordinator Theodore Kurita is doing fine after a short stay at the Okinawa Medical Facility. The Coordinator checked in for a medical exam after symptoms developed during a tour of the newly built military base in Aldinga. "The Coordinator exhibited symptoms of Unole Flu, which is as common to residents of Dieron as the common cold is to citizens of Luthien. The Coordinator had a mild bout of the flu, which had him bedridden for a few days and unable to travel. He is doing much better but is still recovering," reported Doctor Michelle Elyorc, head of the Okinawa facility. "Common symptoms of the flu include upset stomach, heavy mucus drain and loss of appetite. The Coordinator began exhibiting symptoms shortly after arrival and was admitted as a precautionary measure."

The Coordinator will continue on into the Combine. His son and heir, former SLDF Commanding General Hohiro Kurita, will arrive shortly and remain on Dieron to oversee DCMS training maneuvers.

"THE KING IS DEAD!"

Theodore Kurita is dead!

Do not let the propagandists fool you. It is true that Theodore Kurita, the blight on the honor and duty of the Dragon, is dead.

His ill-conceived spawn, the *gaijin*-loving Hohiro, is too weak to take the throne—a sure sign that the Kurita line no longer has the stomach to fight—to be the Dragon!

This is our time! This is our place! Arise, loyal Sons of the Dragon, and let us remove this taint of *gaijin* disease from our realm once and for all! Let us purge our homes and our borders of this cancerous growth and reclaim our rightful heritage so that we can welcome our new Coordinator with a clean spirit and once again raise our heads above the gutter trash of the rest of the Universe!

—Black Dragon Society propaganda, anonymously posted on the Galedon V public forums, 3 February 3068

COORDINATOR DEAD?

(7 February 3067)

Al Na'ir [THE DRAKE] – Coordinator Kurita is not dead, as the Black Dragon propaganda machines wish us to believe. Nor was he ever admitted to the Okinawa Medical Facility on Al Na'ir with Unole Flu.

Sources confidential and close to *The Drake* (your loyal source for the truth) report Coordinator Theodore Kurita suffered a stroke in January and remains in stable condition in an unnamed facility. His prognosis is still under review, but he is rumored to be comatose.

Citizens! How can we sit blindly as our leaders lie to us? First there was the cover-up of the Blessed Omi Kurita's assassination, exposed by *The Drake*—explained later as a move for Theodore to aid his *gaijin* friend Victor Davion as he finished fighting his civil war.

And what of Kurita's wife? Was it seppuku, as *The Drake* reported, or did she die in her sleep as we were told? Then there was the lie about the attacks on Luthien. Systems upgrade or local military? In every instance *The Drake* reported the truth. Why does the Dragon hide behind lies? Why must our pride come before facing harsh reality?

Citizens, how can we build strength when we can't even trust our own government?

"WHO AMONG US SHALL RULE?"

[Diamond]: "So, gentlemen. What are we to do with the situation now that our wayward son has stirred up Luthien?"
[Sapphire]: "You mean it was not planned that way? He acted alone?"
[Ruby]: "Not without help."
[Pearl]: "Yes, he did have help. My sources point to the Second Sword's overeager *Tai-sa*. Apparently, he did not care to wait until called upon."
[Ruby]: "No, it goes further than that. Our Pillar has rotted."
[Diamond]: "Interesting. Our friend is the source of our problem on Luthien, then?"
[Ruby]: "*Hai*."
[Obsidian]: "So sure are you, Ri—?"
[Diamond]: "No names! Do it again and I will demand your heart as well as your head!"
[Ruby]: "It is nothing. Yes, I am sure. Emerald has gone the path of *ronin*. He thinks he knows the way when he does not. The impetuousness of youth, I think."
[Sapphire]: "This sets us back, then."
[Diamond]: "Not entirely."
[Ruby]: "*Hai*. It is actually beneficial. We can front someone now without fear of discovery."
[Obsidian]: "We are going to hang Emerald out to dry?"
[Pearl]: "For the good of the Dragon, yes. Let them think when they beat him down that the menace of the *Kokuryu-kai* is diminished, while instead we continue to gain power."
[Sapphire]: "So whom shall we consider?"
[Diamond]: "Sakamoto?"
[Ruby]: "No. I have watched him since the incident. He will not bend our way. However, his offspring may…"
[Pearl]: "Ah, yes, his marriage and coming child. We shall make arrangements. But for the time being…"
[Obsidian]: "Toytomi?"
[Sapphire]: "Too impertinent. He bears watching."
[Ruby]: "Why not someone already beyond the shadows? Hiding in plain sight? The bastard Kerai would never question it, not now."
[Diamond]: "Don't delude yourself. Kerai questions all."
[Pearl]: "Perhaps, but not the one we know Ruby speaks of. It is an elegant plan."
[Obsidian]: "Interesting, at least…"
[Sapphire]: "Right there, in the light of day. Where everyone can see, yet does not see…"
[Ruby]: "Yes. And in the perfect position for us to take advantage of."
[Diamond]: "Then let us make it happen. And make sure Emerald finds his place among the dead. We are too close now. We cannot afford another mistake."
[Obsidian]: "And I will send a message to our 'champion' personally this time—just in case *he* develops delusions of his own power."
[Sapphire]: "Then it is decided. The Dragon is blind and we will soon be the saviors that work the miracle of sight."

—Partial recording made between unknown parties, recovered from the ruins of the Imperial City, Luthien (date unknown).

THE WIDENING CONFLICTS

The coup on Luthien, complicated by the intervention of Blakist forces and coupled with the Coordinator's illness, would only be the first of the Dragon's woes. With the battle joined on other fronts, the Word of Blake's war quickly expanded to include

DRAGON'S SON DECLARES STATE OF EMERGENCY

VOICE OF THE DRAGON

*****FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE, ULTRA-PRIORITY*****

To All Voice of the Dragon Affiliates:

You are to immediately put into print and voice the following statement. Override all other headline and story events.

—Regional Director Miygaki Gershwin (VOTD, Pesht)

From Hohiro Kurita:

"Citizens of the Dragon, I greet you on this dark day. Today we find ourselves embroiled in war within and without the Combine. For months now our valiant DCMS troops have engaged Word of Blake forces on Dieron and Luthien. This new enemy, this diabolical splinter group of the benevolent ComStar, has risen from the darkness and bitten us on our heel. Since the dissolution of the Star League, they have transformed themselves from ComStar's competitor into the Yellow Bird that threatens not just the Dragon, but all of humankind.

"The Word of Blake has used against human targets weapons that have been banned for centuries. Reports of chemical attacks and nuclear firestorms have been received from countless worlds outside the Combine. They have manipulated whole planets and governments—even House Lords—into furthering their destructive agenda and are even now attempting to cut the Dragon off at the knees.

"Because of these hideous events unfolding around us, I hereby declare the Draconis Combine to be in a state of emergency, so that we may properly handle the onslaught that faces us. To citizens held hostage by these fanatical zealots, know that the Dragon has arisen to crush the Word of Blake as it did the Smoke Jaguars. Your tears are felt and your blood is remembered. The Dragon will roar once more."

Tearing through the void
Prepared for the Yellow Bird
Expect victory.

—Broadcast by all Voice of the Dragon affiliates throughout the Draconis Combine, 1 May 3068

TEARS OF TH

more assaults on Combine worlds. Worse still, the legacy of conflicts fought in the past few years returned to haunt a nation already reeling from multiple tragedies.

DIERON UNDER QUARANTINE

*****Travel Advisory*****

(10 February 3068)

Benjamin [VOTD] – If you plan on traveling to or through Dieron, be advised that you may need to alter your travel arrangements for the time being. Prefecture officials announced today that Dieron is under medical quarantine due to an outbreak of a strong strain of Unole Flu. As a precaution against spreading the virus to neighboring worlds where it might mutate into something more deadly, planetary officials have curbed all travel on and off the planet until the outbreak passes.

Unole Flu is a common virus on Dieron. Every century or so, an intense outbreak occurs, prompting whole towns and cities to close off to outsiders until the outbreak subsides. This is not the first time a planet in the Combine has been temporarily quarantined. Donenac was closed off for three months during an outbreak of Chelosian Virus in 2964; Shimosuwa in 3011 from a planetary outbreak of the Notilc Sweats; and Sertar for almost a year in 3043 from a bad outbreak of Darr's Disease.

Citizens who have passed through Dieron on planetary visits are advised to notify their local doctor if they exhibit three or more of the following symptoms: night sweats, hallucinations, thick mucus discharge, gastric discomfort, excessive tiredness, loss of appetite or heavy nausea.

Dieron officials believe the outbreak will peak in the next few weeks and predict the system will be open for travel in the next month or two.

DEATH TO MERCENARIES!

The honorable Takashi Kurita was right.

Mercenaries deserve to die, for they serve only the god of money. For all their fine vows to "protect the citizenry," it boils down to this ugly truth: the mercenary will follow whoever has the most cash, like an ox with a ring in its nose.

Wolf's Dragoons embody the heart and soul of the mercenary, all right—black and cold, like the heart of the Christian devil. They came here to protect us, to keep us safe from the Davion bogeymen—but once their master Mammon calls, they move on, leaving us alone and defenseless against the Davion hordes.

And what of the rumors from Fletcher? And Galatea? That mercenaries there are nothing more than fronts for the evil Word of Blake—the Coordinator's own "white army" to crush loyal opposition? If you doubt my words, look sometime at the devastation caused by these supposed saints—the shattered ruins of towns and factories and thousands of innocent Combine citizens slain, wiped out by a Blakist WarShip captain who chose the dark heart of money over the honor of combat.

It almost makes me want to believe in God. That the love of money is the bedrock of evil is a hard truth to ignore…and that evil is personified in the mercenary.

We should demand the reinstatement of the honorable Takashi's formidable decree! We should follow such venerable wisdom and strike them down where they stand!

Death to all mercenaries!

—Underground pamphlet circulating throughout the Draconis Combine, circa March-April 3068

ALLIANCE, FREE WORLDS LEAGUE AT WAR

So was the dissolution of the Star League a good idea after all? We know our Coordinator was against it—we've seen the footage from that day in November 3067. Apparently the foolish leaders of the other realms thought they could maintain their own peace without "outside interference."

Looks like they were wrong. News coming in from the Alliance and the Free Worlds League shows Skye province attacking the Free Worlds—without the sanction of the Lyran Estates General, no less. Not that anyone can blame Skye. Without an authoritative body to rein in the Alliance military, apparently provincial leaders feel they can declare war whenever they want.

If the Star League still existed, Skye could have appealed to that body for restitution of damages that Duke Kelswa-Steiner claims his world has sustained. Instead, power-hungry politicians believe they answer to no one but themselves and take matters into their own hands.

Well, we may not have the Star League anymore, but I for one am thankful to live in the Combine, where our sense of honor and duty overrides our selfishness. Seems the Alliance could learn a lesson or ten from us.

—Trevor Lindensholm, Editor, *Minakuchi World Times*, 1 June 3068

IRIAN

(23-DEC-67)
"BLAKISTS KILL THOUSANDS ON STYK" [MERCNET] COMPLETED

(31-DEC-67)
"TALL TREES OVERRUN!" [INN] DOWNLOADING

(04-JAN-68)
"WORD OF BLAKE SEIZES EPSILON INDI, FLETCHER" [MERCNET] ACCESSING

A SERVICE OF IRIAN NEWS INTERSTELLAR

"DIERON IN FLAMES"

(26 June 3068)

Benjamin [THE DRAKE] – Dieron is under siege thanks to a sneak attack by the Word of Blake. After four months of denial, the VotD can no longer hide the true state of affairs on Dieron and Luthien.

Little hope remains of discovering Hohiro Kurita's whereabouts. The acting Coordinator and leader of the DCMS forces that engaged Word of Blake troops on Dieron in March is "missing and presumed dead." So say the Coordinator's commanders.

It is this reporter's fear that Coordinator Theodore's only *legitimate* heir is now in the hands of the Word of Blake—which means he's as good as dead. I fear there won't be any attempt made to retrieve him from the hands of the Yellow Bird. Such tragic news arrives on the heels of recent information brought to light on Theodore Kurita's deteriorating condition. Languishing in a coma, he can do nothing to help the morale of the citizens of the Combine.

With both Kuritas missing or out of action, who will lead the Dragon out of chaos? The Lyrans and the Free Worlds League battle on their fronts. We fight the Federated Suns along our own borders. And let us not forget the treacherous Ravens and their Alliance cronies! Or the Black Dragon coup on Luthien, complicated now by unwanted Word of Blake intervention. Or the Nova Cat desertion, which has included the Dragon's only other legitimate—if questionable—heir, Minoru Kurita!

The Word of Blake has thrown the universe into chaos. As a people we must take up arms and fight. We must call on our warlords to take charge and to bring this war to a close.

BORDERS ON ALERT

*****Travel Advisory, Priority Alert*****

(14 July 3068)

Pesht [VOTD] – Notice to all Combine citizens traveling to and residing in worlds along the Federated Suns and Outworlds Alliance borders: travel is restricted until further notice. A "high alert" advisory from the offices of Warlord Minamoto warns that travel to worlds within two jumps of the stated borders has been restricted to military traffic only. "For the safety of our citizenry, we ask that civilians refrain from visiting these worlds, as military activity in both nations threatens possible hostilities along these borders. We wish to lessen the risk as much as possible for travelers and residents in the affected areas."

DCMS officials also suggested that residents of the listed worlds purchase extra supplies in case of loss of power, water and other utilities. "While no attacks are expected or imminent, we are erring on the side of caution because of recent events outside the Combine. We wish to be prepared for any eventuality and hope that this advisory is nothing more than a false alarm," stated *Tai-sho* Howard Mencio, aide to *Tai-shu* Minamoto.

Refunds for travel packages and system jumps may be obtained at your local planetary travel office. Businesses may apply for tax relief for affected areas at their local Bureau of Interstellar Trade offices.

OUTWORLDS ALLIANCE ATTACKS!

(15 July 3068)

Galedon V [THE DRAKE] – Citizens of the Dragon, we are being invaded from all sides during this time of chaos. Reports of fighting along the Outworlds border have recently come to our attention; do not be blinded by Voice of the Dragon claims to the contrary. Outworlds Alliance forces have attacked the worlds of Enif, Tabayama and the prefecture capital of Galedon V. Not only are these attacks unprecedented, but we have received word that the Outworlds Alliance is in league with Clan Snow Raven, recently seen often along the Outworlds border. News of this connection came to us from several sources who saw firsthand the Alliance's First Air Wing using *Corax* OmniFighters, Alliance-produced aerospace craft reported to incorporate Clan technologies.

In the wake of the Nova Cats' departure from their Tabayama garrison soon after the dissolution of the Star League and the bombing of Tharkad, the only defenders of these worlds are their planetary militias. The Twenty-First Galedon Regulars on new Samarkand and the Nineteenth Galedon Regulars on Bad News have been called in as reinforcements.

Some suggest that the Outworlds border attacks have little to do with the present uprising on Luthien and Star League troubles, and are nothing more than the Snow Ravens making good on threats of revenge for the destruction of their precious WarShip, the *White Cloud*. But others—this reporter included—fear that this is only the beginning.

THE DRAGON'S REVENGE

(20 September 3068)

Proserpina [THE DRAKE] – We have done it, citizens of the Combine! We have struck back against the Federated Suns!

How long have we known there is no trust, no honor among the warmongering Davionists that plague our borders? With the attacks on Tharkad and New Avalon to fuel their false sense of grievance, spouting accusations of POW injustices since before the FedCom Civil War, Federated Suns forces sporadically attacked worlds along our borders, ignoring treaties authorized by the now disbanded Star League. Altais, Chichibu, Junction, Barlow's Folly, Misery and Beta Mensae V—our ancient foe hit all these undefended worlds. But along the Federated Suns front, local warlords counterattacked and have won their first victories. DCMS forces struck back at David, taking over the planet within a week. Next came Xhosa VII, where again the local militia was no match for DCMS might. Benet III and Cassias came next, and all reports from those worlds say fighting is still heavy in some areas. We're not sure the DCMS can hold these last two worlds, but we can certainly claim the Dragon has bloodied the Federated Suns' nose.

The Davion scum have once again shown their true colors. Striking at us in our moment of confusion, they prove themselves the cowards they are. Displaying their ancestors' tendency to bed their sisters and farm animals, the Davion filth now finds itself outmaneuvered before it begins to infect our worlds.

Let our ancient foe know we will not vanish into the night. Long live the Dragon!

EAGLE SCREAMS

EAGLE SCREAMS

It should have been our finest hour, the day on which Thomas Marik took his place as First Lord of the Star League and expanded his unifying vision across the Inner Sphere just like Albert Marik of old. Instead, treachery and war came upon us unexpectedly. At first we thought we could stand above the rising tide of chaos, but the murder of General Helen Thrall and the heightened tensions between Skye and Sirius drew us into the fray. The mutual recriminations of that early skirmish have become a footnote in history, lost in the war that erupted along the entire front: They hit us; we hit back. The ancient cycle of violence began. A succession of worlds fell to the invaders; others simply dropped out of the communications loop, taken by enemy assaults or otherwise isolated from the HPG network. With Lyran troops driving deeper into the Free Worlds League, unraveling such mysteries would have to wait.

Internally also, we felt the pressures of war. Zion Province protested the redeployment of troops from its worlds; suggestions of isolation from the League and murmurings elsewhere followed suit. Can we not stand aloof from this turmoil, was the whispered message. To the surprise of many, the call for unity came from an unusual source: Duchess Alys Marik, who only months before the Tharkad incident had proposed an end to "the crisis" and repeal of Resolution 288 that gave the Captain-General his power. Though careful not to support her uncle Thomas, Duchess Alys told people that division would only see the League crushed and in enemy hands, and she warned us to be as wary of the enemy within as of those outside our borders.

Thomas Marik, covertly making his way home from Tharkad, held back from wholly committing the FWLM to the fight, redeploying troops while attempting diplomacy to resolve matters. Coordinating our border defenses fell to Jeremy Brett, Marshal of Tamarind. Limited troops severely constrained his efforts, but his hard work earned him the hearts of the people, particularly when his counterstrikes liberated worlds lost to the Lyran behemoth. Could this be a potential Captain-General, bound to the Mariks but not a Marik? Certainly some people thought so—but Brett and his officers were too busy fighting the war to be dragged into the quagmire of politics. When the Captain-General and the LCCC finally moved, the Lyrans learned the error of their ways. They had mistaken tolerance and a desire to maintain the status quo for a lack of willpower—but now, with rogue forces at work in the Lyran state, they would see the FWLM's true strength and the League's determination. Triple FWLM thrusts along the Lyran border halted Alliance incursions and then turned them back. Unlike Operation Guerrero in 3057, this time our military did not stop at the pre-Fourth Succession War borders. The hunters had become the hunted.

Despite these successes, questions were asked on the streets: Why are we standing alone? We have allies, internal and external, but none stood with us. The Word of Blake, though targeted by an unlawful mercenary attack in the Terran system, maintained a presence in the League. Why did they not bolster our defenses? Were they too preoccupied with defending themselves against the power-hungry Dragoons, or was this—as some "out there" journals posited—part of a grand plan to bring humanity to its knees? Were we seeing Operation Scorpion on a much larger and more convoluted scale? No one seems to know for certain whether Thomas even asked for their aid, but all the evidence suggests the League has been operating largely solo, relying on the Blakists solely for communications links—including those on WarShips.

Amid the chaos, as the counteroffensive gained pace, the inexplicable happened. The Knights of the Inner Sphere were recalled to Atreus, and several other formations were pulled from their task forces and recalled to unspecified duties. Why the Captain-General ordered this move remains unclear. All affected units heeded their orders, returning to the League capital with alacrity. The parade to be held later today marks their first public appearance and seems to be part of Thomas' efforts to convince the people of the FWLM's strength. "Bread and circuses," as the ancient phrase goes. As if this pageant—a demonstration of chivalry and military might—will make any real difference. Winning the war is what counts. From that perspective, this recall order makes no military sense, and whatever his enemies say, Thomas is no fool.

—Corrine Marik, Atreus, 20 October 3068

WINDS OF CHANGE

For some, the jury is still out on the role played by the Free Worlds League—the Word of Blake's staunchest ally since the Schism of 3052—in the current holy war being waged against the Inner Sphere. Is the Free Worlds allied with the Blakists, or has House Marik become yet another pawn in Blakist machinations and their campaign of terror and destruction? We do know that this realm, an ardent supporter of the Star League and a nation that arguably owes its current greatness to Word of Blake influence, has become embroiled in the chaos of this war along with every other major power—yet its capital, Atreus, remains unscathed.

—Michael Bosworth, INN Special Correspondent

THE STAR LEAGUE FAILURE: WHAT HAPPENED?

The Star League is in session again.

News agencies from across civilized space are focused on Tharkad as representatives of the member states and would-be member states confer with great solemnity. Hard news reporters will give us the facts, what few there are, in mind-numbing detail. Investigative reporters will press the limits of creative nonfiction as they parse innuendo and supposition in search of the "real" story. Gossip columnists and social reporters, an elusive distinction, will update us *ad nauseam* on who had dinner with whom and from which hotel room they emerged in the morning. And of course, cultural pundits such as your own humble servant will thoroughly mull over all of this to provide Thoughtful Readers such as yourself with the benefits of our insights and predictions.

Those Thoughtful Readers familiar with this humble servant's past musings, or who took the time to read the title of this week's column,

EAGLE SCREAMS

will not be surprised to learn that the future of the Star League is not bright. Indeed, if one were bold enough to predict, this year's session may well be remembered by history as the first of the last times—if not *the* last time—humanity conducted this august experiment.

The failure of the Star League lies not in the institution itself, but in the composition of its member-states.

Throughout the bulk of the Human Sphere, worlds and lives are traded at the whim of monarchs who hold sway over hundreds of billions of people through no other merit than an accident of birth. Though these blessed beneficiaries of random chance may care for the well-being of their subjects in the abstract, they have no visceral connection to the souls of common men. They have no dialogue—nor the mechanism to conduct one—with the ordinary people whose lives they hold daily in the palms of their hands.

In short, they hold power by the opposite of the ideal on which the Star League is based.

"What ideal is that?" Thoughtful Readers may ask.

The same ideal that shaped and forged our own Free Worlds League: our desire to preserve freedom while serving the common good.

We are a league, a confederation, an amalgam of worlds united not through the charisma of a monarch or the machinations of a despot, but by our own clear-sighted recognition of what is in the best interests of all concerned. Certainly we have our differences. We are a family, and the members of a healthy, dynamic family redefine their relationships within broad and well-understood limits every day. The free worlds of the League work together for the common good because it *is* the common good, while our individual states enjoy autonomy of which the rest of the galaxy can only dream.

Unless and until its other members embrace this fundamental principle of freedom, the Star League is doomed to forever be a hollow shadow of what it could and should be.

—Kenneth D'Candide, *The Candid View*, Free Worlds Features, 28 November 3067

CIVIC ADVISORY

To all print, broadcast and hyperpulse news agencies and media affiliates throughout the League:

An incident has occurred on Tharkad, apparently perpetrated by a party or parties unknown in an effort to destabilize existing governments. While the exact nature and extent of the incident are not known, there is reason to believe control of HPG stations has been compromised. Therefore, any broadcasts received from worlds in the Lyran Alliance and the Federated Suns are to be regarded as suspect.

Formerly reliable information sources within these realms can no longer be trusted, as they are most likely providing misinformation, with or without malicious intent, based on corrupted or limited resources. More important, it is almost certain that any transmission from within the affected areas contains disinformation calculated to spread doubt and indecision at a time when our focus and resolve are vital to the survival of the Free Worlds League.

Therefore, any information that has not passed through this Office should not be rebroadcast until after its submission to the Office of the Captain-General for validation.

Your cooperation in this urgent matter is essential to the well-being of the Free Worlds League.

—From the Office of the Captain-General, 6 December 3067

MERCENARY ASSAULT ON MARS FAILS!

(10 December 3067)

Mars, Sol System [VOICE OF TRUTH] – Rogue mercenary units, including fragments of the discredited Wolf's Dragoons, made a vicious and unprovoked attack on Mars in the Terran system yesterday.

The Word of Blake Militia's Seventh Division, which is responsible for the safety and protection of the citizens of Mars, handily repulsed the disorganized onslaught. Though individual members of the attacking mob made planetfall, there was no loss of civilian life and no significant damage to the planet's robust infrastructure.

Casualties among the elite Word of Blake units were light. Precentor XIII Carol Widegren, commander of the Seventh Division, attributed this to her troops' discipline and professionalism.

Military analysts are puzzled by the raiders' evident lack of cohesion and command structure. There was no apparent reason for the assault, which observers characterized as "suicidal."

THARKAD: WAS IT OR WASN'T IT?

[*MP Gerald Rollinson (Molokai)*]: "The use of a nuclear device is completely in keeping with the Blakist rant of cleansing civilization—"
[*MP Everett Gould (Gibson)*]: "The cleansing the Word speaks of is symbolic, or at most spiritual. They seek a return to a more fundamental and honest time—"
[*MP Barbara Scott (Clipperton)*]: "Which never existed."
[*Gould*]: "Which *did* exist, for centuries!"
[*Rollinson*]: "What existed for centuries was ComStar's stranglehold on human knowledge. We now know, what? Ten percent of what they did in shaping the course of human history. Only recently have they made the laudable decision to treat the rest of humanity as responsible enough to make informed choices about its own collective fate. The Blakists want to undo all that, return to the days of hidden cabals maneuvering history from behind the scenes—"
[*Gould*]: "That's ridiculous. The Word of Blake is working toward a restoration of enlightened, centralized human government. The whole point of the demonstration at Tharkad—"
[*Rollinson*]: "Was to throw a screaming tantrum and hurl nuclear bombs when the legitimate leaders of human civilization chose, rightly, not to turn back the clock but move forward?"
[*Scott*]: "Jerry, you know I agree with you right down the line on their politics, but I don't think the Blakists nuked Tharkad."
[*Gould*]: "Of *course* they didn't."

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[*Rollinson*]: "You're kidding!"
[*Scott*]: "Look at what we know of the pattern of bombardments. Saturation bombing of the countryside surrounding the city, displaying a massive array of conventional weapons. Followed by a single nuclear strike in the heart of the industrial district? It doesn't make sense."
[*Rollinson*]: "Terror tactics! They fired warning shots across the bow and when the national leaders refused to submit immediately, they fired a killing blow to the center, to prove they won't hesitate."
[*Gould*]: "You enjoy rancor more than you respect reason. There was no nuclear bombing of Tharkad. If a nuclear explosion occurred—"
[*Rollinson*]: "'*If*?'"
[*Gould*]: "Yes, *if*! Then, it was an accident, pure and simple."

—Excerpted from *Off the Floor: Roundtable Debate After Session*, Globe Broadcasting, 16 December 3067

ASSASSINS GUN DOWN HEAD OF SIRIAN CONCORDANCE

(28 December 3067)

Pollux City, Pollux [MARIK COMMONWEALTH TODAY] – General Helen Thrall, strong-arm leader of the military junta that seized control of the Sirian Concordance nine years ago, was gunned down last Tuesday morning as she exited her groundcar at the Ministry of Trade in Pollux City, Pollux.

Though eyewitness accounts vary widely, it is known that anywhere from two to seven gunmen, armed with sniper-type slug rifles, fired on Thrall and her party as she exited the open groundcar. The fatal shots came from a pedestrian overpass overlooking the entrance to the Ministry and from an upper window in the adjacent Ministry of Education annex. Several of General Thrall's bodyguards were also killed or injured in the attack.

None of the assailants were apprehended. Given Pollux's open and busy ports, it is believed the perpetrators may already have fled the planet.

An outspoken critic of Captain-General Marik, Thrall was known for putting the interests of the Sirian junta ahead of the greater good of the League. Among other controversial actions, she withheld the Sirian Lancers from service to the FWLM.

Initial suspicion centered on Sirian Concordance citizens responding to Thrall's iconoclastic and heavy-handed policies. However, evidence characterized by investigators as "credible" and "damning" implicates Lyran Intelligence, Free Skye or both. Details of this evidence were not released to the press.

No official statement has yet been made concerning how the remaining members of the junta will respond in the face of this assassination. However, given their nature and history, a military response is expected.

OUTREACH NUKED!

(30 December 3067)

Zion [ZION INTELLIGENCER] – Reliable reports from several independent observers in the Chaos March, monitoring the ongoing conflict between Word of Blake forces and Wolf's Dragoons, have

MISSING: THOMAS MARIK

(18 December 3067)

Atreus [STELLAR INQUIRER] – Thomas Marik is missing.

There have been no authoritative, confirmed sightings of the Captain-General of the Free Worlds League since the apparent disaster on Tharkad.

Official communiqués that have appeared over his signature were in fact written by General Selim Halas. While the Office of the Captain-General insists no deception was intended—that General Halas was simply exercising his pro tempore authority in the Captain-General's absence—the fact remains that no effort was made to alert the people to the Captain-General's disappearance.

The last credible evidence available puts Captain-General Marik on Tharkad, perilously close to ground zero of the alleged terrorist bombing of the Star League Conference. Since that time, the authorities have woven a complex fabric of partial information that seems intended to distract the people from the fact that the Captain-General cannot be found.

Persistent investigation by this news source has prompted government spokespersons to say only that the Captain-General is "safe in an undisclosed location"—a buzz phrase for "we don't know" that predates space flight.

The time may have come to prepare for the worst.

The tireless investigative journalists at this news source will continue to pursue this mystery. Download daily updates for the full story as this potential tragedy unfolds.

PERCIVAL CONTINUES SHAKEDOWN

(25 December 3067)

Pollux [POLLUX MIRROR] – Pollux lost one of its most celebrated satellites yesterday at 1300 hours Pollux City time. The *Percival*, an *Eagle*-class frigate and a designated escort for the latest of the *Thera*-class supercarriers (the *Attica*) left orbit to continue its shakedown cruise, three months ahead of schedule.

The *Percival*, more than half a kilometer long, has been a familiar sight in the evening skies over Pollux City for the past two weeks as technicians worked to integrate all the systems assembled by construction crews in the Ionus orbital docks just over a month ago. According to sources, the final refit and testing exceeded all expectations, and every shipboard system checked out at optimal efficiency on the first or second trial: a feat of shipbuilding excellence unmatched in any vessel this size.

Carrying a full complement of DropShips for escort and emergency purposes, the *Percival* is expected to begin deep space trials immediately, before returning to Regulus to join the *Attica* battle group, the fifth and latest addition to the League's rapidly expanding naval force.

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confirmed reports received Monday. On 28 December, elements of the Blakist forces in conflict with Wolf's Dragoons bombarded the Remus continent of Outreach with nuclear weapons.

Outreach had long been a nexus of the mercenary industry: a neutral meeting point where mercenary commands from all over the Inner Sphere could train, trade and negotiate with prospective employers. That ended in October when violence broke out between rival organizations in the mercenary community.

The origin of the initial dispute is not known, nor is the Word of Blake's motive for taking up the cause of those opposing Wolf's Dragoons. But whatever the bone of contention in October and whatever the military situation now, nothing—absolutely nothing—justifies the use of strategic nuclear weapons. We call on the civilized nations of the Inner Sphere to jointly require the Word of Blake to surrender the officer responsible so that he or she may stand trial for this war crime.

DAY OF THE HAWK

Though the circumstances surrounding the League-Alliance conflict remain murky on both sides of the border, it comes as little surprise to many who believe in the League's complicity with the Blakists that the Free Worlds has held the upper hand throughout the fighting. Despite initial losses and Thomas Marik's public objections to "Lyran aggression," FWLM troops on the Lyran border have easily pushed back the offensive and are poised to strike deep into Skye and Bolan provinces. A final League victory could conceivably cripple the Lyran state, an outcome that would doubtless have the Free Worlds' Blakist allies drooling in anticipation despite their unexplained absence from the combat region.

WAR!

(12 February 3068)

Zosma [BPNS] – Duke Robert Kelswa-Steiner has declared war on the Free Worlds League.

According to a statement released by Duke Kelswa-Steiner's office on Thursday, 6 February 3068, the declaration of war came in response to an unprovoked naval attack on Skye by the Free Worlds League.

This accusation, coming just two months after the Free Skye movement was implicated in the assassination of Sirian Concordance leader General Helen Thrall, has been denounced as "transparent propaganda" by the Concordance. The Council of the Silver Hawks Coalition has also rejected its validity, characterizing the uncorroborated statement as "disingenuous." Responses from Border Protectorate leaders to the duke's claims range from skepticism on Alula Australis to suspicion on Zosma.

Though the Free Worlds League Military would not provide a detailed fleet deployment, the Office of Information made the unprecedented gesture of stating unequivocally that no active-duty FWLM WarShips have entered Lyran Alliance space.

TAKING THINGS SERIOUSLY

(9 February 3068)

Marik [MALKENT MALCONTENT] — In a shocking turn of events, Duke Robert Kelswa-Steiner, ruler of the Free Skye Republic (formerly Skye Province of the Lyran Alliance) declared war on the Free Worlds League, in response to a recent raid on Skye that allegedly involved elements of the Sirian Lancers and an equally alleged *Eagle*-class frigate. Even though Duke Kelswa-Steiner failed to take any prisoners, he claims to have enough (alleged) proof of League involvement in "this insidious assault on the Free Republic's capital." After all, the 'Mechs involved were clearly painted in Sirian Lancer colors, right?

Faced with such overwhelming proof of our unprovoked attack, it is no wonder our own Captain-General has so far failed to comment on this recent outbreak of war. Skye forces wasted little time in persecuting the conflict when they aggressively redeployed a handful of units to the League-Skye border, including the Fifth Alliance Guards from Dalkeith, which is scheduled to arrive in no less than three months. Clearly these lightning-fast redeployments are a mere prelude of a full-scale invasion. We've asked our strategy panel to comment on these disturbing developments.

Colonel Allyce Verschwunden (Ret.): "I project that at this rate of maneuver, Skye forces will make landfall on Atreus early next century."

Colonel Coram "Old Cory" d'Youville (Ret.): "Hahahaha!"

To get the political angle, we discussed the prospect of a Skye invasion with several Members of Parliament:

"I would recommend that people consider stockpiling some necessary items, just in case," suggested MP van Leeuwen. "In particular, the Nostia gems from my native region have grown nicely this year, so take advantage of that and make sure you don't run out!"

"Without the guidance of the Star League, I simply don't know how we'll bring this horrible conflict to an end without additional bloodshed," stated MP Itibina. We asked whether Mrs. Itibina was aware that Skye forces had not yet crossed the border, and that there thus had not been any bloodshed. She quickly replied, "Not true! I was opening a letter when I received this news, and I suffered a horrible paper cut because it made me lose my concentration. Clearly, my injury could have been avoided! How much more must we suffer?"

In closing, it appears we have rough times ahead. This war with the Free Skye Republic must not be taken lightly, as we have only two to three times as many regiments on our border as Skye is currently deploying. The threat of imminent invasion looms over us all. Be careful out there.

Duke Kelswa-Steiner was apparently speaking on behalf of the Province of Skye alone and not the entire Lyran Alliance when he declared war. Some speculate that the province lacks the military resources to make good its declared intent.

Other observers point out that if the duke intended a limited war that struck isolated provinces such as the Silver Hawks Coalition, the Sirian Concordance or our own Border Protectorate, Skye troops might overrun one or two border worlds. Arguing that it is much easier and more prudent to defend a world than to take

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it back, some urge augmenting the military forces already in place on worlds that may be in danger.

BOLAN DECLARES WAR

(4 March 3068)

Zosma [BPNS] – The Lyran Alliance's Bolan Province declared war on the Free Worlds League earlier this week. They have pledged to join forces with Skye Province, which made a similar declaration in the first week of February. Neither province seems to be acting in concert with the Lyran Alliance central government, and many League officials question whether either combatant can raise a viable invasion force to back up their declarations without active support from their central authorities.

Skye Province's declaration of war early last month was predicated on their duke's unsubstantiated claim that a Free Worlds force—including WarShip support and BattleMechs—assaulted Skye. However, some analysts argue that this provocative accusation should be viewed in conjunction with last December's assassination of General Helen Thrall, leader of the Sirian Concordance. Attempts to destabilize the government of an adjacent state, followed by disinformation and manufactured outrage to provide a rationale for action, are all classic opening moves in any territorial war.

That Bolan Province chose to capitalize on the unfortunate death of Margrave Caesar Steiner last week—publicly blaming it on assassins or agents from the Free Worlds League—is unfortunate. Now Bolan has joined its sister province in attempting to leverage "restitution" from the League.

Whether Skye and Bolan provinces hope to use the threat of war to extort trade concessions or even territory from the Free Worlds remains unclear. However, without the weight of the Lyran Alliance behind them, it is doubtful this "war" of postures and threats will evolve into actual weapons fire.

CAPTAIN-GENERAL CONDEMNS "LYRAN AGGRESSION"

From: Office of the Captain-General
To: All News Agencies and Affiliates League-wide (for immediate release)
Date: 18 March 3068

Captain-General Thomas Marik, currently safe in an undisclosed location en route to Atreus, has issued this communiqué

COM GUARD BLOODIED, BROKEN AT TERRA

(15 March 3068)

Terra [VOICE OF TRUTH] – In what has been described as the largest single naval engagement in recent history, ComStar forces invaded the Terran system. Their attempt to seize the birthplace of humanity lasted nearly two weeks and ended in failure.

The bulk of the ComStar aggressor force was destroyed in space. However, several DropShips made planetfall and an estimated two to three invading divisions gained two temporary footholds.

The smaller assault force attempted to establish a stronghold in the southwestern quadrant of the North American continent. There, the Word of Blake Militia's Ninth Division, under the leadership of Precentor XVII Alice Phuong and supported by elements of the Militia's Tenth Division led by Precentor VII Robin St. Nicholas, decisively confronted and destroyed the invaders, sustaining light casualties.

The major thrust of the Com Guard assault came in the north central region of the European continent. This larger force was valiantly engaged by elements of the Word of Blake Militia Third Division, commanded by Precentor XIV David Fellers, and the Eighth Division, led by Precentor XIII Alex Winningham.

Fighting was heavier and casualties higher in this densely populated region. Faced with defeat, the Com Guard turned their weapons on civilian targets, even resorting to weapons of mass destruction in an effort to maximize damage. The historic cities of Tallinn and Riga were destroyed in the final frenzy of destruction.

ComStar offered no rational justification for the assault. Observers speculate it represented a final, desperate bid of the failed and fading hierarchy to reassert control over the minds, hearts and sacred institutions of our free people.

SKYE, BOLAN FORCES HIT THREE WORLDS

(17 March 3068)

Amity [SILVER FREE VOICE] – Megrez, Cascade and Togwotee fell to Lyran forces last week. The whirlwind attacks, which analysts believe were launched from the Lyran worlds of Ford and Loric, overwhelmed the Sixth Marik Militia stationed on Megrez. We have received no reliable data on casualties among the military or loss of life among the civilian populations of those worlds.

What does this tragedy mean for us on Silver, or for the rest of the Abbey District? True, we are not one jump away from Lyran space, nor are we on a direct route to the heart of the Free Worlds League. Nonetheless, we are at risk.

No one should forget that the Seventh and Tenth Lyran Regulars regiments, along with their myriad supporting units, are stationed on Cavanaugh II. Though it is unlikely they could catch the Abbey District completely by surprise, could the noble Second Brigade of the Fusiliers of Oriente hope to defend the entire district? Even if the Sixth Regiment of the Orloff Grenadiers could somehow offer support from distant Cerillos, it is doubtful even the Golden Phoenix could stand against such an invading force.

The fall of Megrez, Cascade and Togwotee, worlds very like our own, serves as a reminder that no planet is safe in the current crisis. We cannot afford to be complacent, thinking ourselves safely distant from the thrust of Lyran aggression. We must all be vigilant, all stand ready to take up arms in defense of our homes and our families.

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for immediate release by all media outlets throughout the Free Worlds League:

Citizens of the Free Worlds League,

Months ago, a series of unfortunate events unfolded on the Lyran capital of Tharkad. The end of the Star League was tragic in and of itself. Equally tragic, and criminal, is the fact that persons unknown chose to respond to this demise with violence.

Now should be a time for the nations of the Inner Sphere to come together. Even if rebuilding the Star League is an impossible ideal, as some claim, we remain civilized enough to support each other in this time of trial.

Instead, based on no evidence other than their own prejudices, elements within the Lyran Alliance have chosen to blame the Free Worlds for their misfortunes. On the face of it, these accusations are nothing more than a pretext for invasion.

We do not mean to trivialize the disaster on Tharkad, or the other attacks—if any—that have allegedly befallen the Lyran people on several worlds. However, whatever internal conflicts beset the Alliance, they do not justify a destructive war of conquest against an innocent people.

This aggression by the Lyran Alliance against the Free Worlds League must cease immediately. All seized worlds must be repatriated and reparations to civilians who have lost property and loved ones must be paid at once. Only then can we meet at the negotiating table to forge a lasting peace.

As a civilized nation, we stand ready to help our neighbors heal the damage they have done themselves in this period of senseless internecine violence. However, as a sovereign nation, we stand ready to defend our borders against unprovoked aggression—and to pursue the aggressors as far and as hard as we must to ensure they do not threaten innocent lives again.

"ENOUGH IS ENOUGH!"

Danger and death threaten Zion Province on every side.

The Capellan Confederation is under siege, its people coming apart at the seams, as the Federated Suns continues to invade.

The Chaos March is in flames. Rogue mercenary armies tear at each other's throats, grinding helpless worlds to bloody mire beneath their treads. Our doom could fall from our skies at any moment.

What does Thomas Marik, our wise and compassionate Captain-General, do for us in this, our darkest hour? What do our noble leaders at League Central Coordination and Command do? What, oh what, does the Free Worlds League Military, our stalwart protector, do?

They withdraw the Third Free Worlds Guard, our only defense, and dispatch it to bolster the Marik Commonwealth's already impenetrable barrier against imagined threats from disgruntled provinces of the Lyran Alliance!

Enough is enough!

The Free Worlds League has abandoned Zion Province. As we are alone, we must now stand alone, relying on our own solidarity to see us through the present peril.

The time has come for Zion Province to secede from the lie of the Free Worlds League. Independence for Zion! This is the ideal for which we must now stand and fight!

—Op/ed from *The Zion Intelligencer*, 22 March 3068

SILENCE ON SHILOH

(16 April 3068)

Danais [SILVER FREE VOICE] – The Public Information Office of the Silver Hawks Coalition Council announced today that the hyper-pulse generator on Shiloh has fallen silent. The Type B station did not transmit any indication of trouble before ceasing transmission, and apparently shut down in good order.

Long known for priding themselves on their independence from modern technology, the citizens of Shiloh have been reducing contact with other Coalition worlds. Their highly sought-after wood sculptures and rugs have become scarce (see "Investing in Folk Art," *SFV* issue, 11 July 3066), and Shiloh's consumption of off-world foodstuffs and farming equipment has steadily declined over the past decade in reverse proportion to the number of children being adopted off-world in Shiloh's burgeoning—if unlikely—new export industry. Yet even this new trade abruptly ceased in recent weeks, adding an eerie quality to the world's suddenly conspicuous silence.

Given the Shiloh ethic of self-reliance, these decreases in imports and exports can be seen as evidence of growing stability and economic self-sufficiency. Under normal circumstances, it would be easy to imagine that this sudden silence is a goal toward which they have long worked.

But circumstances are not normal.

In the face of recent Lyran conquests of League worlds, intelligent people must consider the possibility that Shiloh has fallen. While professing not to be alarmed at the world's silence, the Coalition Council has asked that any vessels whose routes take them close to the Shiloh system stay alert for any signal or other evidence that may indicate a Lyran presence.

STEINERS LAUNCH SECOND WAVE

(31 March 3068)

Thermopolis [SILVER FREE VOICE] – Mere months ago, the talk was of the Fifth Brigade of the Fusiliers of Oriente, popularly known as Bolton's Rangers, and whether that unit would rejoin the Star League Defense Force. Upholding tradition, they would have reclaimed their original designation of Independent 208th Hussar Regulars as they took their place among the reborn and reorganized defenders of the Inner Sphere.

That plan ended with the second and many say final demise of the Star League last November. Yet none among the Fifth regret the lost opportunity to be part of a unified Inner Sphere. As Force

APPEAL FOR UNITY

AN APPEAL FOR UNITY

Today we face a threat to the very existence of our Free Worlds League far greater than any that has gone before.

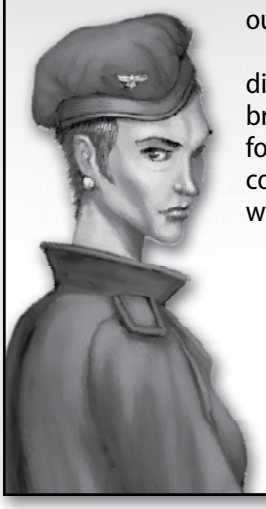
To date, seven of our worlds have fallen before invading forces from the Lyran Alliance. While this is in itself a tragedy, more far-reaching in its significance is the fact that these forces seem to be sanctioned by only two Alliance provinces. To the best of our knowledge, Alarion, Coventry and Donegal provinces have no part in this war. While this may look like good news—that we face only two-fifths of an enemy—it is in fact an omen of a darker possibility.

That unknown forces used nuclear weapons on Tharkad is a given. That Tharkad City is gone is a certainty, and that the entire world has become a radioactive wasteland is a credible probability. The Lyran Alliance, bereft of its core, may be finding that the center cannot hold. Instead of a united government making balanced considerations based on the needs of all its provinces, the Free Worlds League may face a loose alliance of independent states—an alliance that may unravel as each province pursues its own goals. The recently reported attacks on Lyran provincial capitals may in fact be evidence of intense conflict.

And this malady, this fever of rebellion and Balkanization, is not limited to the Lyran Alliance. Reports from the Federated Suns and the Capellan Confederation attest to similar instability and outbreaks of violence.

What must we of the Free Worlds League do in the face of this rising tide of anarchy and war?

We must stand firm. We, an amalgam of many noble states and worlds, must stay united in our resolve to hold fast to that which is ours; that which makes us who we are.



Now is the time for the Tamarind, the Regulan, the Andurien and the Stewart, to set aside differences. Not to forget our heritage—never that—but to stand shoulder to shoulder with our brothers and sisters of the Free Worlds League. We must as one people turn faces of flint to the forces of chaos that threaten our League, our worlds and our families. Through our resolve, our commitment to each other and to the principles that give this, our League, its life and power, we will persevere. We will weather the storm that threatens us. And we shall overcome.

—League-wide public address by Alys Rousset-Marik, Duchess of Augustine, 1 May 3068

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Commander Brian Domenic expressed it: "History and tradition and what might have been all take a back seat when it comes to doing what is right. The Free Worlds League is our home."

From the moment they learned that the Lyran invasion force—reportedly including elements of the Fifteenth Arcturan Guards, Fourth Alliance Guards and Fourth Skye Rangers—had taken nearby Cascade, Megrez and Togwotee, the Fifth Fusiliers have been preparing for the onslaught. With Thermopolis squarely along the shortest route from the Lyran beachhead to the heart of the Free Worlds League, it was only a question of when battle would be joined.

True to predictions, the second wave of the Steiner invasion began with an assault on Thermopolis just as dawn broke over the capital yesterday. From the first salvo, the true spirit of the Fusiliers has shone through. From Colonel Jerry Wagner down to his greenest tech, every one of Bolton's Rangers is determined to make the Lyrans' stay on Thermopolis short, expensive and painful.

The hand-lettered signs on the Fusiliers' BattleMechs, tanks and infantry helmets say it all: "The Steiners stop here."

THE QUAGMIRE OF THE ALLIANCE

Alethea Colby [Foreign Ministry Attaché (ret.), *Foreign Market Report*]: "It's true ten worlds have fallen to the combined forces of Bolan and Skye. These are League worlds and should and must be freed. But there's no need for a war to progress beyond this point. The liberation of our worlds, yes. Restitution for damages, yes, certainly. All evidence indicates the Bolan/Skye forces have observed the rules of warfare in these campaigns, but if any crimes were committed, the criminals should be prosecuted to the full extent of the law.

"Duke Robert Kelswa-Steiner is a reasonable man. He would certainly be open to reasoned diplomatic overtures on all of these points. But reprisal attacks? Punitive raids against Alliance worlds? No. An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth leads to an endless cycle of vicious retribution. A return to borders, proper restitution and restraint. That's the path to lasting peace."

Keith D'Candide [syndicated columnist, *Free Worlds Features*]: "You're assuming both parties want peace. The Lyran Alliance is interested only in expanding its borders at the expense of the Free Worlds League. They've lost territory to the superior fighting forces of the Clans, and the idea of diminished power is repugnant to House Steiner.

"Faced with a real enemy that is stronger than they are, the Alliance has taken one unfortunate death and isolated incidents of civil unrest on a handful of their worlds, and woven them together to create a conspiracy theory of epic proportions, painting as villains an innocent people whom the Lyrans believe are incapable of defending themselves. The implausibility of this construct is immaterial. It distracts the citizenry from the government's failures and provides a rationale for conquest. The only way to meet such a threat is to disabuse the Alliance of the notion that the Free Worlds League is either helpless or unwilling to defend itself.

"A military response, focused and unrelenting, is the only thing these Huns will respect. Continue to dither about talking, and we will continue to lose worlds. And lives."

Colonel Caleb Moneith [FWLM (Ret.), *Armed Forces News*]: "Your habit of dismissing as lies any information originating from the Alliance is shortsighted and dangerous. Credible evidence exists—verified by a variety of sources—that several worlds in the Lyran Alliance, including Skye, Donegal, Coventry and Hesperus II, have come under attack. These stories have the ring of truth, particularly since decapitating the Alliance makes sense strategically. Coordinated attacks of this sort require forces positioned in advance, lying doggo until the set time. Not a Clan tactic.

"If we grant that these attacks took place, then we have to grant that the Alliance command is not being completely irrational in suspecting the League. More is happening than we can see. Legal maneuvering over borders and restitution are out of place. And this is certainly no time for jingoist rhetoric. We need clear communication if we're ever going to get out of this mess."

—Partial transcript from *Commentators' Weekly Roundtable*, first aired 6 June 3068

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DATE & TITLE	SERVICE	STATUS
(11-JAN-68) "AMC DEFENDS LIBERTY"	[MERCNET]	COMPLETED
(26-JAN-68) "MYSTERY SHIPS ATTACK TUKAYYID"	[DBC]	DOWNLOADING
(03-FEB-68) "TUKAYYID NUKED!"	[SBC]	ACCESSING

A SERVICE OF IRIAN NEWS INTERSTELLAR

EAGLE SCREAMS

AT LAST!
(1 July 3068)

Stewart [STEWART FREE PRESS] – With nothing short of jubilation, we report that the Free Worlds League Military has struck back against the Lyran invaders. Though the details of the campaign must remain confidential to prevent information from reaching our enemies, FWLM forces under the command of General Jeremy Brett have liberated Preston.

Whether one characterized the military's hesitation in the face of recent Lyran aggression as confusion or restraint, it is heartening to see them take such decisive action. We are confident that this is the first of many such actions as the Free Worlds League takes back what is ours and frees our fellow citizens from the yoke of oppression.

At a time like this, it is perhaps inevitable to draw parallels between the events of 3058 and this deliverance of Preston—and with it the impending liberation of Rexburg, Pingree, Sheridan, Thermopolis, Togwotee, McAfee, Colfax, Cascade and finally Megrez as our forces push the Lyrans once and for all beyond the borders of the Free Worlds League. Shall we stop now, as we did ten years ago, with the righteous reclamation of our imprisoned sister worlds? Or should we press on, beyond our traditional borders, to establish a protective buffer against future crimes of aggression?

Only our military leaders can answer these questions. For the moment, those of us who can only stand and wait have a duty to offer our support—and our gratitude—to the valiant men and women who have at last struck the first blow for freedom.

WHAT OF THE FLEET?

(9 July 3068)

Andurien [ANDURIEN CHRONICLE] – For the first time since the Lyrans invaded the League four months ago, the League Military has finally struck back. Rushed communiqués were forwarded by HPG per Marshal Jeremy Brett's orders to coincide with the landfall of several FWLM units. The exact composition of this counterattack is unknown, but we do know that a number of border worlds will be liberated.

The biggest question of late, from officials and civilians, is: What of the fleet? The Free Worlds League has pressed into service the largest fleet of any Successor State, easily capable of repelling any invaders. But this behemoth failed to even slow the Lyrans as they swarmed across our borders.

The *Andurien Chronicle* is credited with being the first to discover why. Apparently, the Lyran invasion could not have come at a worse time. As you may remember, last December, the *Eagle*-class *Percival* was briefly lost during her final shakedown cruise. Apparently, a critical flaw in the vessel's life-support systems forced her immediate withdrawal to dry dock for an extensive overhaul, and all vessels have since been recalled for immediate inspection and preventive maintenance to avoid similar mishaps among the rest of the fleet. This recall was kept top secret, so as not to compromise national security—but with the Lyrans invading without WarShip support and the Capellans under attack by the Davions, secrecy seems to be of increasingly less concern. Marshal Brett's counterattack may be a sign that the overhaul is complete, and that we can once again depend on our naval assets.

May *jagganath* Krishna protect and aid the defenders of our realm.

"PROFITS UP"

The numbers for the fourth fiscal quarter, ending 30 June 3068, exceeded projections by twelve percent. Of the BattleMech producers, Earthwerks-FWL remains the strongest in terms of profit per man-hour, while Kali-Yama Weapons made the greatest gains in gross income. Irian BattleMechs made more modest gains, their components and upgrade kits carrying them through a slight dip in large 'Mech production. Only StarCorp fell short of expectations, due primarily to political difficulties softening their Capellan market, but their profits were still up four percent over last year. Corean Enterprises and Free Worlds Defense Industries both provided solid year-end dividends for their stockholders.

Naval production was less volatile given the long-term nature of their production and market. Kallon, Nimakachi, Irian and Illium Naval all reported very strong years. The possible fall-off from an over-extended national economy did not materialize, as foreign sales more than made up for any hesitancy in local markets. ImStar Aerospace reported its most profitable year in more than a decade, while Free Worlds and Gutierrez Aerospace both reported strong fourth quarter earnings.

The big winners this past year, however, were the component producers. With the FWL/LA war heating up, as well as conflicts in almost all primary markets, the demand for missiles, weapons systems—both replacements and upgrades—armor and support technology of all sorts has been absolutely phenomenal. Oriente Weapon Works, Garret Satcom and Quickscell all had record years, while Fusigon-Flametech and Imperator Automatic were both in back-order status for the first time since 3065. Small arms and ammo producer Austen-Armstrong describes its profit outlook as "robust," while Gilmour Miltech, specializing in 'Mech rebuilding and upgrading, has announced plans for major expansion. With the recent opening of its new light Gauss rifle plant on Wallis to support the company's latest revision of the venerable *Warhammer* BattleMech line, Ronin Incorporated has come into its own as a major component producer, seeing a two percent market share increase last month alone.

As the various regional conflicts show every sign of continuing, the market outlook is intoxicating. Analysts predict that the 3068-69 fiscal year will be the brightest in recent memory.

—From the Introduction to *Military Engineering Market Report (FWL Edition)*, dated 2 September 3068

EAGLE SC

JEREMY BRETT: USURPER IN A HERO'S CLOTHING?

(9 September 3068)

Oriente [ORIENTE OBSERVER] – At last, the tide of battle has turned.

The past week has brought news of daring advances by our Free Worlds League Military along three fronts. Three actions, not to retake League worlds, but to advance into Lyran space. Given the momentum of these victories, no doubt the days weeks ahead will bring news of more and greater triumphs as our finest men and women carry the war to the aggressor's heartland.

However, the name on everyone's lips is not that of Captain-General Thomas Marik, leader of our great League. Instead, the hero of the hour, credited as architect of these victories, is General Jeremy Brett.

Certainly, he is the officer in immediate command of the offensive, but is he the master strategist who positioned our forces and set all the wheels of supply and transport in motion? We do not know. The FWLM does not make public the inner workings of command. However, it is highly doubtful a field commander, no matter how talented, could have mobilized resources on this scale.

Yet a great deal of effort has gone into creating the perception that Jeremy Brett is the heart and mind of our resurgence. Why? Toward what end is this media manipulation aimed?

One need look no further than the Duchess of Augustine, Alys Rousset-Marik.

Her recent plea for unity notably omitted any mention of supporting Captain-General Thomas Marik. Taken in conjunction with her ardent and ongoing efforts to repeal Resolution 288, the glue that holds our Free Worlds League together, this lapse makes clear that she is pursuing a personal agenda. Nor does it take any great stretch of the imagination to see that Brett—who has in the past violated direct orders and the best interests of the League, throwing away the lives of those under his command in an impulsive and ill-considered effort on behalf of the Duchess' late mother—might be a tool of that agenda.

No one questions that General Brett is an able military leader. We do not fault his heroism or his effectiveness in carrying out our current campaign. But citizens should recall that he holds his field command under the overall leadership of the Captain-General.

Captain-General Marik guided our great nation through the initial stages of the Lyran assault while in mortal danger behind enemy lines. This ordeal of sacrifice, statesmanship and heroism far from the public eye bespeaks the soul of a true leader; a leader who places his people and his nation above all else.

Celebrate our victories. Honor our brave and valiant men and women who are even now giving their all in service to us and our great nation. But do not, in the emotion of the moment, forget our true leader, Captain-General Thomas Marik, who serves us even as we serve him.

"WHERE *ARE* THEY?"

(16 September 3068)

Regulus [REGULAN REPORTER] – The Word of Blake Militia has trained and served side by side with some of the finest units of the Free Worlds League Military for years. It has always been understood that if the Word ever found themselves in need, we would be there. And if the Free Worlds League ever had need, the Word of Blake would stand by our side.

Half a year has gone by since the Lyran invasion began. The Free Worlds League is at war, and our ally is...missing. Not a single unit of the Word of Blake Militia can be found defending our borders.

Where is this friend on whom we were led to believe we could count? From elsewhere throughout the Sphere, we hear of war and rumors of war, and all too frequently blame is laid at the feet of the Word of Blake.

We have been told that much of what we hear from other nations is disinformation; that we should take little of it at face value. But the rumors persist, and as we stand alone to face our enemies, they raise a question we cannot ignore: Have we been had?

If the Word of Blake truly is our ally, where are they?

KNIGHTS RECALLED

(5 October 3068)

Atreus [MARIK COMMONWEALTH TODAY] – In a surprise move earlier this week, Captain-General Thomas Marik recalled the Knights of the Inner Sphere to Atreus, along with a host of other units currently engaged in the fighting along the central League-Alliance front. The move comes just as the counteroffensive led by Tamarind Marshal Jeremy Brett penetrates deep into Lyran space, with some forces a mere jump away from the planet of Skye.

To recall the Knights after their stunning defeat of Lyran forces on Loric and Ford—and even on Cavanaugh II, where the Second Knights reportedly landed barely more than a week ago—seems counterintuitive. Likewise the alleged speed of the recall, for which a command circuit is reportedly being arranged, at least for the Knights. Should not the most celebrated champions of Free Worlds League ideals be at the forefront of our advance?

To date, all attempts to reach a diplomatic agreement with the Lyran invaders have failed. It seems painfully evident that the Lyrans neither seek nor desire a peaceful settlement as long as they believe they have a chance to seize more worlds. In light of this, a strong military response, vigorously prosecuted, would appear to be our best course.

However, the Captain-General has been known to play the long game. What may in the short term seem inexplicable may in the end turn out to have been careful preparation. This sudden recall may be part of a grander scheme.

Whatever the Captain-General has in mind, we can only wait and see. And hope he does not take too long to make his plans manifest, for the Lyrans will surely take anything short of the business end of a laser as a sign of weakness.

ENEMY BROTHERS

ENEMY BROTHERS

They can't say we didn't warn them.

On the day the Second Star League died amid selfishness and backstabbing, the Word of Blake showed their true colors and launched attacks on the Inner Sphere states and our order, the bloody specter of Myndo Waterly coming to the fore. Their brutal assault on our humanitarian centers in the Chaos March was only a precursor to their main event: the treacherous orbital bombardment of Tukayyid.

The Blakists were indiscriminate, striking civilian targets as often as military ones. The people of the Free Rasalhague Republic, a nation birthed in fire and then almost crushed by the Clan juggernaut, once again bore the brunt of the assault. Though ComStar's facilities took grievous damage, First Precentor Dow and Precentor Martial Steiner-Davion were not on-world at the time and escaped the initial attacks unharmed, though Primus Mori was trapped for a time behind enemy lines. The First Precentor immediately announced that our retribution would be swift and merciless, though he did not reveal specifics; Gavin has learned to leave military matters in the hands of those skilled in their use, even though his relationship with Victor is…tense. The arrival of ROM agents at my little retreat came as something of a surprise. Perhaps the Blakists had forgotten me—a minor ignominy—but Dow apparently felt my safety would be better served through ROM's professional efforts, and would also enable ComStar to call on my military advice in Victor's absence.

Not even Blakist attempts to assassinate the Precentor Martial and his sister—though it did delay Victor and prevent his joining the task force—halted the Com Guard operation. As March dawned, Case White went into effect: the largest naval campaign since the early Succession Wars, and the largest planned single ground offensive in the Inner Sphere since the same formations faced off against the Clans in 3052. A score of WarShips escorted eleven divisions of troops against Terra, enacting plans that had lain dormant ever since Blakist treachery seized humanity's homeworld in 3058. Only by sanitizing the viper's nest could the Inner Sphere be spared another Operation Scorpion. Cut off the beast's head and its body dies.

A fine thought—and one certainly espoused by many of my peers—but the first rule of warfare is that no plan survives contact with the enemy. Case White called for an overwhelming force to be deployed against Terra, and though I initially outlined the operation myself ten years ago, both Gavin and Victor had updated the plans numerous times. What precisely went wrong is unclear, but it appears the Blakists were more numerous and powerful than even my most pessimistic estimates projected. Together with technological advancements I dare not even speculate on, this strengthened force held off our assault with a fearsome loss of life on both sides.

Precentor Martial Steiner-Davion's report spoke of death and ruin, and he barely escaped from the Blakists' clutches with sensor recordings of the Terran system. Aside from the *Invisible Truth,* no other ships escaped to the rally point. It could take weeks—if not months—to realize the full weight of what happened. In the meantime, our Primus remains under siege, as do we all. We must mourn quickly and rebuild more quickly still, hoping all the while that the enemy—though far from crushed—is sufficiently bloodied to withdraw to its den.

Assuming the Blakists will do that, however, might be the last mistake we ever make. Some animals, when cornered, strike out even harder. And if the past six months are any indication, the Word of Blake fanatics are such animals indeed.

—Anastasius Focht, Orestes, 29 April 3068

TUMBLING DOWNWARD

What happened at Outreach, at Mars and at Tharkad? What did the various powers of the Inner Sphere do to invite this so-called "holy war" the Word of Blake now wages against us all? Did they plan this all along, a conspiracy to bring humankind to its knees? Or did a series of accidents lead us to this path?

—Michael Bosworth, INN Special Correspondent

WORD OF BLAKE DECLARES WAR AS STAR LEAGUE DIES

(9 December 3067)

Tukayyid [INN] – Four days ago, decrying the dissolution of the Second Star League, the Word of Blake launched devastating dual assaults against the capitals of the Federated Suns and the Lyran Alliance. The two well-coordinated attacks, launched by Blakist WarShips slipped into the Tharkad and New Avalon systems, unleashed orbital bombardments against both planets. In the case of Tharkad, reports indicate that at least one nuclear device was detonated inside Tharkad City limits, causing massive damage and uncounted casualties within minutes of the first shots fired.

Preceding these attacks, Word of Blake forces issued brief messages to both of the former FedCom state governments, declaring a holy war—a *jihad*—against the corruption and disharmony that destroyed the Second Star League. This jihad, the Blakists say, will continue until the nations of the Inner Sphere reconsider their decision and reconvene the Star League.

In response to these horrific events, ComStar Primus Sharilar Mori, speaking from ComStar's headquarters on Tukayyid, released a brief statement condemning the Blakist attacks and offered ComStar's immediate assistance to both stricken nations.

HERETICS AND TRAITORS!

(9 December 3067)

Terra [VOICE OF BLAKE] – Do not believe the lies spread by the traitors who serve the false Primus!

As was prophesied, the rise of a new Star League set humankind down the path to redemption. Even though the murderer Focht and his puppet Mori inducted the son of the Fox into their

ENEMY BROTHERS

NORTHWIND UNDER GUARD

(24 December 3067)

Terra [VOICE OF TRUTH] – Following the sneak attack by members of the so-called Allied Mercenary Command against the Terran system, it has become necessary to place Northwind under protective quarantine. The Word of Blake acknowledges and salutes the contributions made by the heroic Northwind Highlander regiments in the fight against the Clans, and wishes to preserve their safety and neutrality and that of their world in these difficult times. With that view in mind, elements of our fleet have been deployed to protect Northwind from certain local powers that have demonstrated imperialistic ambitions.

Commercial traffic through the system's nadir and zenith jump points may continue to pass unhindered, though vessels may be required to submit to inspection at any time. The services of Northwind's recharge stations will remain available. We request that any vessels passing through the Northwind system refrain from using non-standard jump points, as such use constitutes a hazard to local shipping and will be deemed a hostile or criminal act.

Regretfully, travel to and from the world of Northwind has been suspended indefinitely. The Word of Blake regrets any inconvenience this restriction may cause for travelers and merchants.

The peace of Blake be with you.

ranks to aid them, they could not prevent the First Transfer. The Second Transfer was marked with portents both wondrous and terrible, but the traitors' unholy influence over First Lord Theodore could not prevent us from assuming our rightful place. As 3067 dawned, we rejoiced, for at last the long wait was over. The will of Blake would be done.

Then we were betrayed! Betrayed by those we sought to save!

Yet we could not abandon humanity as its last steps faltered. With the moment of the Third Transfer slipping away, we acted in the only way open to us. Like a surgeon who must amputate a limb in order to save the patient, we tried to cut out the cancer that was killing the Inner Sphere.

But always the traitors are there, whispering their evil lies. Claiming that a nuclear device leveled Tharkad City. Saying this was our doing! Lies! Vile falsehoods spread by Focht's puppets as they tried to keep the truth from you! We did not destroy Tharkad. That unfortunate planet succumbed to the incompetence of the infidels who thought to do the work that blessed Blake charged to our care. Like children playing with matches, they burned themselves.

Do not listen to the heretics! Soon we will show you the depth of their deceit. Then you will all know where your salvation truly lies. It is not too late! Together we can complete the Third Transfer and save humanity!

Blessed are those who walk along Blake's shining path!

SLAUGHTER!

(26 December 3067)

Ivanovitch, this partial transmission comes from Joseph Lawson, an INN correspondent embedded with the Second Division on Epsilon Indi. We can't air this, but you must know. —Petra

[*Joseph Lawson kneels in a bunker. Behind him, Com Guard officers work at a holotable surrounded by a host of computer stations, the screens blurred for security purposes. Busy but organized activity fills the command center, and the room occasionally shakes. Nearby weapons fire and explosions outside are clearly audible.*]

[*Lawson*]: "It looks like this will be the last transmission I can make. The Langendorf Lancers so far have not responded to Precentor Grandi's call to join against the Word of Blake invaders. It remains unclear whether the unit has been subverted or destroyed by the Blakists, or because the mercenaries have simply chosen to stay out of the fighting.

"In the meantime, we are on our own. The Second Division is possibly the finest military force in known space, but the Blakists have an impressive numerical advantage and have used it to devastating effect. A number of defections to the Blakists have complicated matters further, and the Second's advantage in mechanized infantry has not allowed them to withstand the Word of Blake's BattleMech onslaught. The Blakists are also deploying a new type of battle armor, which is proving lethal against conventional infantry forces.

"Precentor Grandi informed me that our defenses are crumbling. Soon this command post will be overrun. I may die. I… I just want to say th—"

[*With a tremendous thump, the blast door behind Lawson bulges slightly at one side. A second thump, and the room shakes as the bulge expands. Officers yell out orders, and heavily armed troopers take up position opposite of the door as Lawson ducks behind the planning table. Junior officers abandon their consoles, drawing sidearms as they scramble for cover.*]

[*Lawson*]: [unintelligible]

[*The blast door bulge becomes a crack wide enough for metal fingers to poke through. The door servos whine as they are forced open halfway, revealing a smoke-filled corridor. With a short, barked command, the Com Guard troops open fire and toss grenades toward the opening. Smoke billows out after the blasts, then nothing.*]

[*Lawson*]: [*twitches*] "Is it over? Is it over? Is it o—?"

[*A rifle muzzle aims around the corner, and with a loud "crack" a single slug fires into the room. Gas begins to spread from the unseen impact point. Lawson crumples forward, clutching his unprotected ears. The muzzle disappears as the opening is flooded with weapons fire again. A standard Inner Sphere battlesuit, missing its left arm, rushes in. A second follows on the opposite flank as both immediately take harrowing fire. Plodding on, both troopers open up with machine guns, tearing through computer stations and technicians in a deafening hail of bullets. The roar nearly drowns out the screams of the dying.*

ENEMY BROTHERS

A third humanoid shape—shifting and almost semi-transparent—emerges from the opening, sweeping the room with slugs that burst forth from one of its arms. As return fire pelts it, the mimetic effect fails, revealing gouged and tattered armor as the Purifier trooper falls back, one arm limp and one leg frozen. Shouldering past it, a fourth trooper, clad in Phalanx armor, storms into the room. The Phalanx's Gauss rifle fires with another deafening report, and voices cry out as an explosion hurls bodies across the chamber.

Recoiling from heavy small-arms fire, the Phalanx stumbles and then rushes forward, savagely snatching up a nearby Com Guard trooper in a battle-clawed hand. It uses its armored glove to crush the man's skull. The battle claws twist savagely, tearing out entrails as the corpse is released.

The camera swings, catching sight of the Purifier trooper just behind the Phalanx as the armor sheds, revealing the horribly wounded, heavily muscled woman within. Her left arm is cybernetic, a mass of myomer and metal. With an animal growl, the now-unsuited trooper leaps over the Phalanx to land on top of a corpse closer to the camera. Reaching out with her right hand, she snags a nearby officer, ignoring a burst of submachine gun fire that rips into her chest with a spray of blood. The wound reveals a web of metal fibers beneath. Her cybernetic fist punches through the officer's chest with little effort, tearing out a ruined mass of blood and tissue through shattered ribs and the man's blood-soaked uniform. Lawson's screams pick up where the dying officer's leave off.

Additional large humans stalk through the opening and join the melee, grabbing, pulling, breaking and maiming everyone their hands can reach. Suddenly the camera spins again, slamming to the ground as smoke and debris dance across the cracked floor before it. Lawson, a few meters away, turns at the sight and crawls toward the device. Blood flows from his ears and tears from his eyes.]

[Lawson]: "Mary! Mary—!"

[*A metal-shod foot slams down on Lawson's outstretched arm. The crunch of bone can be heard over a cacophony of cries and weapons fire in the distance as his face contorts in agony. The female Purifier warrior bends down, driving her cybernetic arm into his back with earth-shattering force. Lawson convulses once, then goes limp. The arm is withdrawn, covered in blood and gore. It reaches for the camera. Lifting the device to eye level, the female Blakist, her flesh-and-blood arm little more a bloody stump and splintered bone, her body covered with deep flesh wounds that reveal hints of metal plates and fibers beneath her chest and face, grins into the camera. Her eyes are wild, her pupils dilated. Her voice rings out like a bird among the cries of the dying and the continued killing.*]

[*Trooper*]: "I'm sorry…did I interrupt something important?"

MONSTERS!

As I write this, Harlech burns.

The majestic spires of Wolf Hall, once strong and proud on the skyline, are blackened and broken. Now they are nothing but a grave marker for the fallen Dragoons.

Choked with oil and debris, Lake Kearney is a black pit that devours light and reflects nothing. The Harlech Links (where I have spent so many pleasant hours over the years) is a blasted heath gouged with BattleMech footprints. In the streets, once filled with cosmopolitan bustle, only the dead now linger.

The sky is black with smoke from a thousand fires. They rage unchecked, for to venture out invites attack from the white BattleMechs and packs of battle armor that stalk the streets firing at any movement. The wounded fill the hospitals, but are not safe even there from infantry searching for mercenaries or their families.

During the night (or what the chronometers tell me was night), the fighting came a lot closer to the HPG. I only have a Level II of infantry to defend the transmitter. I hope we can hang on. I hope the remaining Dragoons can defeat those who were once my brothers.

I hope Precentor Martial Steiner-Davion can save us all from these monsters.

I don't know how much longer I'll be able to keep transmitting…

—Acting Precentor Eric Dyllon, Outreach HPG, 10 January 3068

REVIVE THE STAR LEAGUE—OR ELSE

(5 January 3068)

Terra [VOICE OF BLAKE] – People of the Inner Sphere, citizens of the thousands of planets settled by humankind. Once you were united under the Star League, but for three hundred years savage wars have consumed your worlds. Until a new enemy appeared, mysterious invaders known as the Clans. Powerful and ruthless, they struck like lighting, driving a wedge deep into the Inner Sphere. Then they made one mistake: they threatened hallowed Terra and had to face the warriors of blessed Blake! In the spirit of the Star League, ancient foes reunited and we took the fight to the enemy's homeworlds.

Citizens of the Inner Sphere, beware! Your leaders have betrayed you at the moment of triumph! Together we stood on the eve of the golden future the Third Transfer would have ushered in. But when the time came, your leaders faltered, once more letting their own petty weaknesses and jealousies rip apart one of humankind's greatest achievements.

Now the Master comes, bearing the torch of Blake's wisdom. See the light and revive the Star League, or face the cleansing fire as we burn away the corruption of those who have betrayed us all.

The peace of Blake be with you.

COM GUARDS SHATTERED

(14 January 3068)

Zurich [INN] – I'm here at the headquarters of the Com Guards' Seventy-sixth Division, having jumped from Tall Trees with the survivors from the Eighty-third Division.

The Eighty-third (known as the White Cyclones) was forced to withdraw from Bryant when that world joined the Word of Blake

ENEMY BRO

Protectorate back in early 3066. Having set up new headquarters on Tall Trees, the division was eager to face the Blakists, but the rapidity and force of the enemy onslaught that fell upon them caught the Cyclones by surprise.

Initially confident that he could hold the ComStar HPG in Fa Shura and the city of Helena against the invading Third and Fourth Word of Blake Militia divisions, Precentor Omlid was rudely surprised to learn that the Blakist forces possessed significantly greater strength than reported in ROM intelligence briefings. While the Fourth Division troops pinned down half of Omlid's units in Helena, the Third Division threw a full six Level IIIs—comprised mostly of BattleMechs and battle armor—at Fa Shura.

Fighting in the city was reportedly fierce, with significant property damage and heavy civilian casualties. I was with the troops in Helena when we lost contact with Precentor Omlid and the HPG station during the fourth day of fighting. A few hours later, Fa Shura fell, with only a handful of survivors escaping aboard a pair of Com Guard *Overlord*-class DropShips. Rather than wait for the inevitable, Demi-Precentor Edmund Rydz elected to spare Helena the devastation that had ravaged Fa Shura. Mounting a breakout under cover of darkness, Rydz drove to link up with the fleeing DropShips. Dogged pursuit by the Fourth Division whittled the Seventy-sixth down, and less than a Level III of troops escaped Tall Trees.

Reports are sketchy, but it appears that the Com Guards' Second Division on Epsilon Indi and the Eleventh Division on Fletcher have suffered even higher casualties than the Eighty-third. As of this time, it appears that all Com Guards forces in the Chaos March have essentially been destroyed.

This is Moore Kramer, Zurich, reporting for INN.

TIDE OF FIRE

With the devastating assaults on Outreach, Tharkad and New Avalon under way, it was only a matter of time before the militant followers of William Blane and Cameron St. Jamais would finally target ComStar. Sure enough, in the final weeks of January 3068, the first strikes fell on Tukayyid, delivered just as indiscriminately as those launched against the Blakists' previous targets.

TUKAYYID HIT, HEAVY CASUALTIES REPORTED

31 January 3068

Tukayyid [INN] – In a devastating and unexpected assault that began yesterday morning with the detection of anomalous jump signatures by Tukayyid's orbital space stations, the Word of Blake WarShips *Deliverance* and *Blake's Sword* have struck the de facto capital of ComStar operations and the headquarters of the Com Guards. The Com Guards WarShips *Blake's Vengeance* and *Hammerstrike*, together with aerospace elements from the 278th and 472nd divisions, promptly engaged the Word of Blake vessels, but the attacking ships quickly deployed a large number of fighters, assault craft and attack DropShips that turned the initiative against the ComStar forces. Precentor Allian Higham, commander of the Com Guards' Twelfth Army, has confirmed that both Com Guards vessels were lost in the fighting, and that few aerospace fighters successfully disengaged. The *Deliverance* apparently took severe damage, but the Blakist WarShip has not left the battle site, while the *Blake's Sword* has since taken up position above Tukayyid

THE HOLY SWORD OF BLAKE

[*Guiding Light*]: "*North Star*, we've got an odd reading at vector oh-one-seven by one-zero-niner, station relative. Are you reading this as well?"

[*North Star*]: "Roger that, *Guiding Light*. Seems to be a building jump wave, but the signal's odd…"

[*Guiding Light*]: "It's registering a normal IR signature, but it's climbing four times as fast… *North Star*, are there any scheduled stops on the log for today? Include Alpha Priority in search."

[*North Star*]: "Negative, *Guiding Light*, no incoming vessels logged. Might be an early arrival, we've got the *Charles Grant* due in two days, bound for Orestes."

[*Guiding Light*]: "Emergence bubble expanding….will you look at that? I think it's a misjump in progress, the IR sig's too high for any known vessel…"

[*North Star*]: "Registering another jump wave, fifty klicks from first anomaly…Hell! Another at thirty-five klicks…"

[*Guiding Light*]: "Damn, log this! K-F bubble has severe fluctuations. Expansion rate is triple the standard ratio! Heat signature is passing contact plus three minutes!"

[*North Star*]: "Secondary waves are following the first anomaly's parameters, only smaller in scale. Same rates of progression… Link datastreams to planetside dump, Control Research will want to see this if it is a misjump in progress."

[*Guiding Light*]: "Expansion is beyond standard size for *Aegis*-class. Image forming now…"

[*North* Star]: "Beta anomaly is surging hot! Whatever it is must really have been moving when it hit the—"

[*Guiding Light*]: "Bubble at known expansion limit for anything we've got on record…Blake's ghost!"

[*North Star*]: "Object Beta is surging through…K-F field has fragmented! EMP wave at five times standard; initiate safety protocols, pull all sensors offline…."

[*Guiding Light*]: "Blake's holy sword…it's gigantic…wait a minute, that's the…" *[explosion of static]* "…sil! How the—Weapons lock! Weapons lock! All hands, battle stations! Repeat, all hands, battle sta—" *[explosion, static whine]*

[*North Star*]: [static] "…elocity pass! Weapons engaging! Brace for imp—" *[sudden squeal, static]* "—*Star* to Tukayyid Control! We are under attack! Say again, we have hostiles in system! *North Star* is under att—"

—Comm logs recovered from the ruins of Tukayyid Space Traffic Control HQ, dated 21 January 3068

ENEMY BROTHERS

and has begun to bombard all Com Guards elements on the planet. Caught away from their underground bunkers, much of the 278th Division and the Twenty-first Centauri Lancers mercenary command have already suffered severe casualties.

Worse, there is still no word on the fate of the First Royal BattleMech Division of the now-disbanded Star League, or of the Killer Bees mercenary command. According to the last reports prior to the attack, both units were engaged in extended field exercises and undisclosed discussions in the Dinju Mountains region, but all communications with that area were lost during the initial bombardment.

Precentor Higham indicated that the rest of ComStar has been notified of these events, but could not say for certain when reinforcements might arrive.

"THE SKY IS FALLING!"

[*Reporter*]: "…Civil authorities are recommending that anyone within a ten-kilometer radius of the War College evacuate. While it has not yet been targeted, officials believe it is only a matter of time.

"Here in Skupo, the situation is dire. Most of the population was caught unawares as more than fifty aerospace fighters bombed the Com Guards barracks to oblivion at dawn today. Even now, only two hours after the initial strike, the fighters still rain fire and death from the sky.

"The entire district has become a war zone, with at least three waves of fighters raking the embedded Com Guards troops. Behind me you can see the Teirgaard Cannery on fire…"

[*A Com Guards* Rifleman *barrels past and plants itself at the intersection, arms elevated. Car alarms wail from the 'Mech's heavy passage.]*

[*Reporter, continuing*]: "The Com Guards have put up a valiant stand, but the Blakist fighters just keep coming. North of here, the Toyota-Miuki warehouse district has been completely leveled, more than ten thousand people are dead or missing. Emergency crews can't reach the raging fire because of the—"

[*Dual high-pitched whines come from the* Rifleman *as the autocannons in each arm spin up. A tearing sound accompanies twin flashes as the arms begin tracking a fighter that streaks overhead.*]

[*Reporter, shouting over scene*]: "You can see here another pass by the Word of Blake, apparently on the Com Guards column behind us—"

[High-pitched wail and twin explosions in background.]

[*Reporter, his face drained of blood*]: "By Thor's holy hammer—that was the Heinrich Månsdottir Memorial Hospital…." [*Camera turns wildly and focuses on a towering skyscraper that burns from several gigantic holes.*] "There are more than one thousand beds in that hospital…."

[*Camera slowly pans one hundred eighty degrees. The view catches multiple burning buildings, craters, piles of rubble and a shattered highway span, then stops on the openly weeping reporter.*]

[*Reporter*]: "When will this madness end? What have we done to deserve this fate at the hands of the Blakist terrorists? Simply because we allowed ComStar to use our worlds as a forward base? Have we sold our souls to the devil hands of Blake?

"Who will come to our aid?"

—Live special news broadcast aired by Republican News Interstellar, Tukayyid, 28 January 3068

DOW VOWS "SWIFT RETRIBUTION"

(9 February 3068)

Orestes [INN] – Releasing his first public statement about the ongoing siege of Tukayyid, First Precentor Gavin Dow today promised "swift retribution" in the making for the Word of Blake.

"We have left these misguided fanatics alone for too long, preferring peaceful coexistence to open warfare with our former brothers. It is clear now that they seek to harm us as well as all of humankind, and so the time has come to finish what we should have finished in 3058."

The First Precentor did not comment on the fate of Primus Sharilar Mori, who remains missing since shortly after the Blakist attack began. Nor did he comment on the nature of the promised retribution, beyond assuring its swift occurrence, though he did say that "the most capable and experienced officers available" would lead the imminent response to the Com Guards.

CASE WHITE

The swift action promised by First Precentor Dow soon fell with a vengeance when ComStar activated Case White, a preplanned mass assault against the Terran system, developed soon after that world's fall to Word of Blake in 3058. With an overwhelming force that comprised nearly all of the Com Guards fleet and included more than ten divisions of ground troops, the assault seemed sure to overrun the Blakist defense. Even considering the results of Wolf's Dragoons' failed attack in December, few could have predicted the fateful outcome.

PRECENTOR MARTIAL VICTOR STEINER-DAVION SPEAKS

(11 February 3068)

Orestes [FSNS] – The following is a transcript of a Federated Suns News Service interview with Precentor Martial Victor Steiner-Davion, recorded on 9 February 3068:

[*Willard Stevens*]: "I'm here with Precentor Martial Victor Steiner-Davion aboard the Com Guards flagship, *Invisible Truth*. Precentor Martial."

[*Victor Steiner-Davion*]: "I prefer plain 'Martial'."

[*Stevens*]: "Martial, how do you view the current situation, in the Chaos March and elsewhere?"

[*Steiner-Davion*]: "I was horrified to hear the reports that the Word of Blake has resorted to weapons of mass destruction and war on civilians, especially in their attacks against Outreach, Tharkad and New

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Avalon. I can only add my condemnation of the Blakists' actions to those already voiced by Primus Mori and First Precentor Dow."
[*Stevens*]: "First Precentor Gavin Dow has promised that the Com Guards will swiftly deal with the Word of Blake. Just what action are you going to take?"
[*Steiner-Davion*]: "You understand that operational security forbids disclosing any details. I'm certain the First Precentor would be more than happy to talk more to the press on the subject."
[*Stevens*]: "Of course, but when are the Com Guards going to get involved, and where?"
[*Steiner-Davion*]: "If you've been hearing the same reports coming out of the Chaos March as I have, then you'll know we've already seen heavy fighting there. But before the Guards can act, several divisions have to be redeployed. While that happens, ComStar and allied states need to gather as much intelligence as we can. As a relative of mine is so fond of saying, 'information is ammunition.'"
[*Stevens*]: "Can we expect to see you take the field against the Word of Blake? Will the *Invisible Truth* head for the Terran Corridor? Will you escort your sister back to the Federated Suns?"
[*Steiner-Davion*]: "I can't comment on any of that at this time."

CASE WHITE UNDERWAY!

(9 March 3068)

Orestes [INN] – Case White, ComStar's contingency plan to liberate Terra, is finally underway, First Precentor Gavin Dow reported today. After spending a month marshalling the Com Guards fleet and enough troops to secure humanity's homeworld, Com Guards forces reportedly infiltrated the Sol system sometime today and were advancing toward Terra. Word of Blake resistance is expect-

"DUTY OR SUICIDE"

Foolhardy.

That's the word Alain used this morning when we discussed our route to meet up with the Case White task force. And I have to agree.

The events of the past few months have definitely been one shock right after another. With Tukayyid hit, the Guards need to regroup there, not strike back at Terra, where we simply don't know what awaits.

Focht's information was scant—the defenses ComStar had in place before Terra fell to the fanatics surely have been upgraded by now. The Dragoons' slaughter is proof enough of that. But how much of an upgrade are we talking about? By all estimates, the ships the Blakists had at Tharkad, New Avalon and Luthien—that should have been all of them accounted for, and yet something took out Wolf's people before they could say more than that they were dying.

We won't go in blind like they did; recon ships will lead the way. But Gavin is too confident about this, believing this hasty strike will be enough. He thinks we can overwhelm anything the Blakists have on Terra and strike the head off of this beast.

That *alone* is enough to worry me.

But it isn't my decision to make, is it? Up to this point, I've been the master of my fate, answerable to no one higher save God. My duties as Prince required me to consider my people when a decision needed making, but ultimately I had complete control over which way I would go. Gemini was abhorrent and vile, but it had to be done; at the time my people needed safety, and I sacrificed honor for duty then.

Here and now, I suppose, I'll have to make the sacrifice again. No choice. I am subject to the First Precentor (galling as that may be) and must follow his orders. One thing every soldier knows is how to follow orders. I haven't forgotten my lessons…

My reservations are grave. As are Alain's. What if the League fleet lies in wait at Terra? What if *that's* the Blakists' surprise?

No matter. We'll make the best of what we have, because that's where our duty lies.

I need to at least make sure Yvonne is safely away; I am still honor-bound to the Suns enough to safeguard the Princess Regent. And she *is*, at the end of the day, still my baby sister.

I'll need to talk to Alain about arranging a rendezvous with a Suns tramp carrier. One of MIIO's watchdoggers should do nicely.

—From the personal journal of Victor Steiner-Davion, 10 February 3068

DIERON UNDER ATTACK

(19 February 3068)

Dieron [FSNS] – Two weeks after contact with Luthien was lost, unidentified forces struck Dieron in a lightning assault that shattered the Third Dieron Regulars and forced the Eridani Light Horse back to Fort Winston.

The attackers have since been identified as elements of the Word of Blake's Eighth Division, supported by the Hannibal's Hermits mercenary command. The Light Horse can field their Twenty-first Striker and Nineteenth Cavalry regiments and their Brigade Command. However, Fort Winston is home to the Light Horse's dependents, effectively nailing them in position.

The Horsemen are probably trying to hold out until the 151st Light Horse can arrive, said to be en route from the Clan homeworlds. But with the dissolution of the Star League and communications patchy at best, the exact status of the 151st remains in question. Right now, one additional Light Horse regiment, the 71st, remains deployed on Huntress, and nobody can guess how the Clans will react.

The few local officials I've been able to talk to subscribe to the theory that the Blakists are also responsible for our loss of communications with Luthien. Sketchy reports of attacks on Tharkad and New Avalon support this contention.

This is Archie Weston on Dieron, February 5, 3068, reporting for FSNS.

CRADLE OF HUMANKIND DEFENDED!

VOICE OF BLAKE

(14 March 3068)

Terra [VOICE OF BLAKE] – "It was the greatest fleet of WarShips assembled for an assault since General Kerensky jumped to Terra to defeat Amaris. As evening broke on 12 March of this year, the scene from three centuries ago was repeated over Terra. Ship after ship of the ComStar fleet appeared and slid into formation as the invasion flotilla known as Case White went into action. Twenty-one WarShips and enough DropShips and JumpShips to cloud the heavens..."

<<Voiceover begins>>
[Terra Space Control]: "What the… We have unannounced incoming jump signatures! Building near L2 on the far side of Luna. Counting… sixteen signatures and rising! Condition Red! First ships are appearing… Lola IIIs, Essexes… *Do we have any IDs?"*
[Tactical]: "Working on it. First ones are in. Lolas *are* Divine Wisdom, Holy Martyrdom, Ranger *and* Strength Through Adversity. *Holy Blake, those are Com Guards ships! They've got the whole damn fleet with them, even the* Vision of Truth, *fully loaded!*
[Terra Space Control]: "Central Command, this is TSC. We have a full Heretic invasion fleet incoming! Two score WarShips and a dozen jumpers. First and Second squadrons are burning for them at max G. Request Third Squadron also be released..."
<<Voiceover fades out>>>

"Facing them, prepared by divine Providence, were the heroes of the Word of Blake Navy, veterans of the unwarranted mercenary assault on Mars, defending the heart of humankind against those who wished it harm. The stalwart defenders launched their vessels and prepared to fight—and die, if necessary—to protect their home.

"At 1500 hours [TST] on 13 March, the fleets met above the blue jewel of Terra. Battle was barely joined when the True Believers of Blake rose up to strike their first blows against the Heretics."

<<Voiceover begins>>
*[*Righteous Fury*]: "What in Blake's name! Fleet Command! This is* Righteous Fury*! The* Swift Justice *just fired a broadside into the* Vision of Truth*! She's preparing to fire again! Permission to engage the* Justice*?"*
*[*Blake's Strength*]: "*Righteous Fury*, permission granted. Protect those droppers!"*
*[*Righteous Fury*]: "Command,* Justice *has just suffered three large onboard explosions. Her engines appear to be down and she's stopped firing, not responding to hails. We still have a solution on her…"*
*[*Blake's Strength*]: "Send a detachment of marines over to investigate. What? Damn them all to hell! Attention all captains!* Deathblow *and* Ranger *both report explosions onboard. Sabotage!"*
*[*Defender of Versailles*]: "Say again, Command? I thought ROM vetted all the crews?"*
*[*Blake's Strength*]: "Hang ROM, and don't speculate,* Defender. *Command to all vessels, prepare to engage enemy forces."*
<<Voiceover fades out>>

"Even the late arrival of the Heretics' Precentor Martial and his flagship, the *Invisible Truth*, could not stem the battle as it turned against ComStar…"

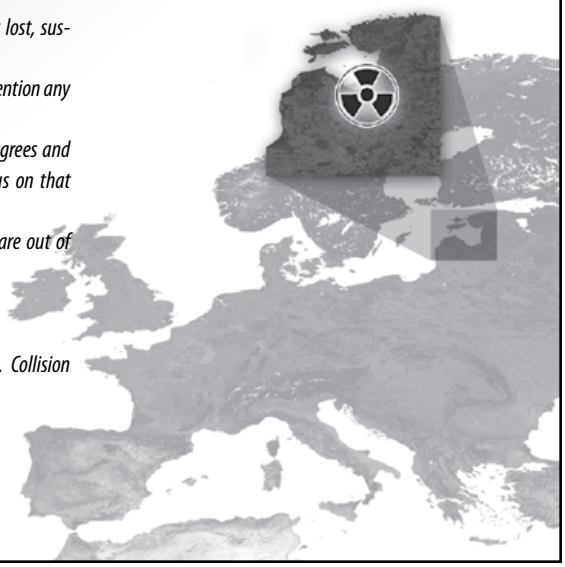
<<Voiceover resumes>>
[Truth Bridge Crewman]: "Admiral, the Strength *is lost, sustaining heavy damage on her port side."*
[Crewman]: "So many ships… The scouts didn't mention any of this!"
[Admiral Beresick]: "Forget the scouts! Roll 180 degrees and disengage at full thrust. Starboard batteries, focus on that Aegis*! Get us clear!"*
[Crewman]: "Hull breach! Both left PPC batteries are out of action!"
[Beresick]: "Helm, get us out of here now!"
[Loud alarms sound]
[Crewman]: "Brace for impact, brace for impact. Collision alert, collision alert!"
<<Voiceover fades out again>>

"…In the end, twelve Heretic WarShips were destroyed, while the remaining ten were disabled or surrendered, but not without grave cost. The heroic crews of six Word of Blake vessels paid the ultimate price in defending Blessed Terra.

"Unfortunately, not even their sacrifice could keep all the Heretics from slipping past the lines. Roughly three Com Guards divisions managed to make landfall, immediately going to ground in nearby cities. In the ensuing struggle, the Heretics proved why they are no longer fit to rule Terra as they fought to their bloody, bitter end in some of Terra's most ancient civilian population centers. Rather than accept defeat, one division even detonated several tactical nuclear devices in the ancient city of Riga, killing tens of thousands of innocents to thwart the defensive efforts of two valiant Level IIIs of Militia and TerraSec troops.

"But in the end, even the underhanded tactics of the corrupt Heretics could not stand against the fury of Blake's justice. To all true believers in the Word of Blake, let this victory be a sign! The time to turn your backs on the Heretics has come! The time for Blake's Vision has finally arrived, and we are its harbingers!

"The peace of Blake be with you all."



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ed to be fierce, as a similar assault launched by Wolf's Dragoons recently ended in disaster. But the task force—which includes ComStar WarShips *Blake's Strength*, *Vision of Truth*, *Avenging Sword* and *Narbonne*—is expected to cast aside all hostile units. The actual number of Blakist WarShips deployed in the Terran system is not known, but Com Guards military leaders have estimated that the Case White task force would likely outnumber Blakist vessels by as much as four to one, leaving a substantial margin of security for the roughly 40,000 men and women being deployed.

"Once the Sol system is secure, we can focus on other Blakist strongholds and operational areas," First Precentor Dow explained. "Terra is their industrial hub. Without it, they cannot hope to maintain their jihad and stand against us, even with the nuclear weapons they have begun to employ."

"DEVASTATION"

[*INN Anchor*]: "The First Circuit released a statement today confirming the failure of Case White. All Com Guards Divisions and all ComStar WarShips—nearly the entire Com Guards combat navy—dispatched to the assault on Terra are listed missing and presumed destroyed.

"With the losses over Tukayyid and elsewhere in the Chaos March, the Case White failure has all but eradicated the Com Guards admiralty and rendered its ground force a shadow of its former self. The First Circuit statement did not mention the use of nuclear weapons in the Blakists' defense of Terra, and First Precentor Gavin Dow could not be reached for further comment on the operation. However, INN has received this video release from Jenna Martins, our field reporter on board the *Invisible Truth*, soon after she narrowly escaped Blakist interceptors in the Terran system—contrary to earlier reports by Blakist outlets…"

[*Cut to: Reporter Jenna Martins stands in a small, soot-smeared corridor with several other reporters and their crews. A bulkhead door is visible some distance behind her, flanked by two Inner Sphere standard battlesuits. The letters 'C-I-C' can be seen stenciled on the door, over the ComStar and Star League logos.]*

[*Martins*]: "We are standing just outside the command and control center of the *Invisible Truth*, which has been under heavy and steady acceleration ever since our arrival in the Sol system. Adept LaMoine Oberschulte, a designated spokesman for Precentor Martial Steiner-Davion and Admiral Beresick, both of whom are on the bridge at this time, will be addressing us shortly on the status of the mission and of the rest of the Case White task force."

[*As if on cue, the sentry on the right side of the door shifts in place and a female voice issues from the suit's external speakers.*]

[*Sentry*]: "Ladies and gentlemen, Adept Oberschulte will see you now."

[*The C-I-C door opens to reveal a holographic presentation in the center of a dim room filled with computer stations and busy crewmen in Com Guards naval attire. The camera focuses on the hologram, which projects the Sol system, a single green triangle blinking near Terra and along the planet's orbital path. A dashed green line indicates the green triangle's projected course. Several red triangles are depicted closer to the planet and the moon, with multiple dashed red lines projected in front of them, all of which cross the dashed green line at various points. Numbers flutter around each icon, all apparently counting down. Stepping in front of the image, a ComStar naval officer in his mid-thirties clasps his hands behind his back and meets the eyes of the gathered reporters with a grim expression.*]

[*Oberschulte*]: "Welcome, members of the press. I am Adept LaMoine Oberschulte. On behalf of Admiral Beresick, I apologize for the inconvenience of our current 1.5-G acceleration, but as the projection behind me demonstrates, there is an urgent need for us to put as much space between us and the enemy fleet as possible.

"What I am about to discuss with you has already been shared with the crew of the *Invisible Truth*. It will likely be weeks before you can give this to your news outlets, and even then only after significant editing for security purposes. The Precentor Martial has chosen to divulge this information because he feels you have a right to know what kind of danger we are presently in, but stresses that we expect more responsibility from you than that of certain colleagues whose actions nearly got us all killed.

"You see behind me a plot of the *Truth*'s path away from our Word of Blake pursuers. We estimate no less than seven ships currently in pursuit, which we first detected at a spot roughly one point four one-gee burn-days away from our present location after our arrival here via a non-standard jump point believed to be that used by the initial Case White fleet. As far as we can determine, the Blakist ships were engaged in salvage operations on our arrival, and the space around their location appears to be filled with debris and derelict vessels. Unfortunately, sensors told us that all active IFF transponders in the field of debris belong to the Word of Blake. Upon confirming what appears to be the complete destruction of the main task force fleet, we received transmissions from the Blakists to cut our engines and surrender our vessel or be destroyed.

"Since then, we have picked up several drive flare signatures that indicate a large number of inbound vessels vectoring to intercept the *Truth*. In the past few hours, despite constant scanning, we have not picked up any ComStar beacons of any kind. We can only speculate as to what occurred here, but clearly the Blakist forces still active in this system are far more numerous than our scout reports let on. The cause of the intelligence failure remains under investigation, and I am not authorized to speculate.

"Ladies and gentlemen, it appears from the sensor evidence that Case White has utterly failed. We dare not speculate at this time how the Blakists managed to defeat a fleet three times as large as the vessels we knew they had, nor can we ascertain the composition and configuration of most of the Blakist ships now pursuing us. We *have* detected higher-than-normal levels of radiation from the debris field, suggesting that nuclear weapons may have been employed to destroy the Case White fleet, but we cannot be certain of that, largely because of some unusual signals and interference.

ENEMY BROTHERS

"With no apparent survivors or support available, and considering our present condition and prior battle damage, the decision was made to immediately move away from the enemy vessels in hopes of buying enough time to hot-load our K-F drive and effect an emergency jump out-system before the Blakists can engage. The admiral and the Precentor Martial want you all to be aware of the distinct possibility of imminent combat within the next twenty-four to thirty-six hours, and to know that we will do our best to assure the safety of everyone on board. But we are all in grave danger, and you have a right to know about it.

"I will not take questions at this time. Thank you for your patience and support."

[*Oberschulte nods to another pair of sentries and begins to move around the holoprojection as another pair of battle-suited troopers ushers out the small gathering of silent reporters.*]

—INN News Special Report, Orestes, 21 March 3068

MOPPING UP

With most of the Com Guards fleet destroyed and at least half the nations of the Inner Sphere in disarray, the Word of Blake has wasted no time consolidating its hold over several nearby worlds. The few leaders in their path who could have stood against the fanatics, cowed by the examples of Outreach and Tharkad or unable to muster the dedication and forces to hold the line like the defenders on New Avalon, began to cave in to Blakist demands, expanding a hegemony built on surrender and supplication, an empire based on terror.

"THE BRINGERS OF TRUTH"

My dearest Rianne,

We're in hot-drop mode, about ready to HALO deploy over our objective. Precentor Alvarez says it'll be a quick and clean strike on the array, but I don't trust that man's strategic depth as far as I could throw him. Good thing he's got us to watch his skinny butt.

Listen, I know we've had our disagreements about my assignment to this tour here on Keid. But I really believe in what we're doing. We've given these people jobs, protection, an education. We've reopened the underwater dome in the Allegheny Sea, installed a new magrail between Keid City and New Clairton. We've raised the standard of living to one of general prosperity rivaling any world in the League.

I know you feel that force isn't the answer. But in cases like this, it's needed. Governor Doucette has time and again stalled on passing Bill 47, which would give us the bond issuance we need to help fund the new spaceport. He practically blackmailed Alvarez with that ComStar scandal on Procyon, just because Alvarez was an unwilling member of that insane jackass's staff.

Yes, we could probably bring more pressure to bear politically. But there comes a time when politicking becomes just empty air. Someone needs to take action, for the future of the planet. For your future. And Jeremiah's. And Alyssia's. And all those other good, honest, hardworking people who deserve a better life than the one that this—this dictator—has given them.

I'll be careful, you know that. I've got five other men to watch out for as well, and they've got wives and children and parents to go

NEWS DOWNLOADER v3.7

DATE & TITLE	*SERVICE*	*STATUS*
(12-FEB-68) "AMC 'RUDDERLESS' SAY OFFICIALS"	[MERCNET]	COMPLETED
(13-FEB-68) "SKYE DECLARES WAR ON LEAGUE"	[DBC]	DOWNLOADING
(24-FEB-68) "MYSTERY SHIPS BATTLE IN NUSAKAN SYSTEM"	[SKYE BROADCASTING]	ACCESSING

A SERVICE OF IRIAN NEWS INTERSTELLAR

ENEMY BROTHERS

home to also. I know you won't get this until after my service tour is finished, but I want you to know now that I love you and have loved you since we first saw each other at the Pirouette on Solaris.

I need to finish getting suited up. These Purifier suits still amaze me. Hopefully one day the Precentor Martial will let us take vids with these babies so you can see what I'm always yammering about. I think Jeremiah'd get a hoot out of seeing his old man in one—you know, family memoirs and all that.

Ah, to touch your skin, to smell your hair again. If I close my eyes, I can smell the lilac of your perfume even now. A good thought to hold onto as I head once more into the breach.

Until the stars fade and time stops, I love you.

(signed)
Benjamin

—Demi-Precentor B. Emory, Personal Journal Entry 352/13-Apr-68:

THE HOLY LIGHT OF BLAKE COMES TO DEMETER

(26 April 3068)

Terra [VOICE OF TRUTH] – By withdrawing the Twelfth Vegan Rangers' Beta Regiment, the corrupt leaders on New Avalon and New Syrtis have abandoned the people of Demeter. Unable to defend his rich agricultural world, Planetary Governor Giovanni Estrella De la Sangre (CEO of Vicore Industries), formally requested aid from the Word of Blake. Filled with compassion, we dispatched the Ninth Division's Measure of Trust III-beta and Call to the Faithful III-delta. The enthusiasm of Demeter's population at the arrival of the valiant Word of Blake Militia troops on 12 April was indescribable.

Precentor Martial Cameron St. Jamais issued a statement assuring worlds in the region that the Word of Blake will endeavor to maintain vital food shipments from Demeter. However, he also expressed the fear that other powers in the region would act with no consideration for the millions who depend on Demeter's agricultural output, and has warned that any who try to do so will face "swift and final justice" for such an act.

"SELLING OUR SOULS"

[*Price*]: "I'm sorry, Ben, I just don't think it's wise."
[*Abraham*]: "I understand, Marjorie. But what choice to we have?"
[*Price*]: "None, apparently. Either we continue to suffer with inadequate turbines and slowly watch our people freeze to death during the cold cycle, or we sign on Blake's dotted line."
[*M'Benga*]: "If those damned Davions hadn't severed Mitercore's contract when they pulled out…"
[*Abraham*]: "I know, I know. We've tried everything, Samon. Tax breaks. Incentives. Even a seat on the governor's board. But no takers. The market for zinc and copper has just died these past several years. And the Commonwealth was our main buyer. With the split, the Suns have plenty of supply in the Draconis March, while the Alliance would rather look elsewhere than traverse the Chaos March for less-than-market ore."
[*M'Benga*]: "So they condemn us to die? And leave turning to these zealots as our only option?"
[*Price*]: "They're in the antechamber, you know."
[*M'Benga*]: "I don't give a ghu's fart! They're up to something. The deal is too good for us to pass up, which means there's a catch somewhere. A catch that will doom us all."
[*Price*]: "Legal's been over it with a fine-toothed comb. They can't find anything that would hurt us. We have no choice, Samon. Either we seal the deal or watch our planet die a slow death as each environmental system fails from our dwindling power supply."
[*M'Benga*]: "You know we're dealing with the Devil. And he's going to burn us alive."
[*Abraham*]: "I hope beyond hope that isn't true. But my friend, I think you're more right than I want to admit. Just remember who we're doing this for."
[*M'Benga*]: [*sighs*] "I know."
[*Price*]: "Shall I let them in, Governor?"
[*Abraham*]: "Yes, Marjorie. And afterward, I think we're going to need that bottle of Chateau Tamarind '42. All of it."

—Private conversation between Duke Benson Abraham of Epsilon Indi and his aides, Samon M'Benga and Marjorie Price, allegedly recorded by elements of the defunct Epsilon Indi Freedom Brigade, circa 20 June 3068

TRIALS OF VICTORY

TRIALS OF VICTORY

"United we stand, divided we fall." You might have thought the Clans would have learned the lessons of Tukayyid and the Great Refusal and realized they could meet the Inner Sphere on an equal footing only by working together. Well, for all our genetic superiority we're mightily shortsighted at times. Pardon me—too long on Arc-Royal and my language is slipping.

Even before the current bout of unpleasantness, the Clans had begun to turn on each other—the Ravens and Vipers, the Bears and Wolves—but matters seem to have taken a turn for the worse. Rumors first emerged about Tokasha, a buildup of forces and supplies suggesting an imminent resumption of hostilities. (*That* lesson we did learn on Tukayyid—the importance of logistics.) York saw clashes as well, as did our kinfolk's enclave on Tiber, though in a martial society like ours such events were hardly unexpected. The political angle of these fights and their brutality made them stand out from previous campaigns. The Cloud Cobra-Coyote feud over the Kufahl Bloodname was the low point of these conflicts, though such machinations—once almost unknown—had become a staple of the Hall of Khans. Watching it all were the 151st Light Horse, the now-defunct SLDF's garrison in Clan space. Unable to withdraw in good order, yet not trusting the provisions of the Great Refusal to secure their position, Colonel Sandra Barclay prepared for the worst while her troops faced a rising tide of challenges.

These clashes were not limited to the Clan homeworlds. The Ghost Bears reported attacks by forces purporting to be Hell's Horses, though it was not immediately apparent whether the assaults represented isolated raids or the preamble to another attempt to establish an Inner Sphere occupation zone. Coming atop the losses of their civilian kin in the Blakist assault on Tukayyid, these new attacks left the Bears off-balance. Meanwhile, the Snow Ravens, who had hitherto slowly built up their Inner Sphere presence, entered a frenzy after the loss of the *White Cloud* and instigated bloody assaults on Galedon, Enif and Tabayama after coursing the Periphery planet of Antallos. Even though they have always pushed the boundaries of normal Clan behavior, the Ravens' abandonment of zellbrigen in favor of a deadly and overwhelming assault without warning made friend and foe alike take notice.

In the Combine, the fall of the Star League—an event that directly contradicted their prophecies—unsettled the Nova Cats. Unsure of their next steps, Khan West ordered all elements of the Cats' touman back to Irece, foreswearing SLDF and DCMS postings while the Clan council met to debate the crisis. Though the pullback makes perfect sense to the Clan mindset, the Spheroids of the FRR and Draconis Combine might easily construe it as a betrayal, abandoning them during a crisis. Only time will tell.

For our own part, we did what we do best: fight and adapt. After staging a rescue operation to Outreach to extract what remained of the Dragoons, we moved to prop up Archon Peter's faltering reign. With the battered LAAF under strain on the Free Worlds border, Khan Kell ordered our forces to bolster the defenses on the Lyran-Falcon boundary, freeing up Alliance troops to meet the Marik juggernaut. Phelan Kell expected that, after our last clashes along the border during the FedCom Civil War, Falcon Khan Marthe Pryde would not be too hasty in staging another incursion. He did not trust her, however, hence our deployment in a move that proved prophetic and demonstrated his grasp of Clan and Spheroid politics. The Falcons jumped the border once more, seeking to incorporate worlds like Graus into their occupation zone. So far, their objectives seem conservative, particularly given their likely concern over the fate of their "embassy" on Solaris.

And where are the Wolves? Their homeworld assets are under grave pressure by other Clans, but Khan Ward seems to be taking little action against Spheroid or Clan enemies. He is certainly planning his moves, whether against his immediate neighbors—the Bears and the Falcons—or the Inner Sphere. Khan Vlad stated some time back that he did not regard his Wolves as bound by the Great Refusal. Now that the Treaty of Tukayyid has expired, will he drive toward Terra? I will tell you this: the Wolf is not sleeping, but is coiled to pounce.

—Carew Nygren, Arc-Royal, 19 October 3068

SILENT RUNNINGS

Even before the Star League disbanded, the Clans seemed poised at the edge of a new wave of internecine fighting. Bereft of an ilKhan, and with factions and power blocs eyeing each other for signs of weakness, the children of Kerensky—in the Inner Sphere and at home—grew increasingly tense in the months before the League's collapse. Ominous whispers and gossip filled the Clan channels, particularly on the Chatterweb, that peculiar and often-overlooked medium of daily trade and communications, where the boundaries of the rigid Clan caste system seem remarkably blurred. Overall, it seemed as if the Clans—much like their animal totems—could sense approaching danger, but could not quite place the source.

On behalf of ComStar and the Inner Sphere, INN would like to thank our comrades in the Clan homeworlds, as well as allied intelligence agencies in Clan space and in the occupation zones, who risked much to relay the glimpses of life in Clan-held territories we are about to see.

—Michael Bosworth, INN Special Correspondent

WHISPERS AND RUMORS I

>>>STRATDOM/MERCH-CHAT/DS-PRIV#832<<4members>>
Shark42: Interesting read, that is.
Hawker8199: What?
Shark42: New shipping manifest from Niles. Horses are using the *Hawker's Run* to augment shipping.
Spina_QM: Another? That's four this month. Where to?
Shark42: Unknown. Same location marker as priors. R-0421
Hawker8199: Huh. Wonder if we can profit from this?

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Spina_QM: Possible. I have a contact with the Falcons here.
S3nn3t: So what's the manifest?
Shark42: Another Star of *Orcs* heading to Theta.
S3nn3t: Thought Delta was the Proto Galaxy?
Spina_QM: Apparently not anymore. Falcons would bid well for this, I think…

>>>BARC/MERCH-CHAT/00-PUB#12<<9members>>
Wolfman: So the Coyote says, "Hey bub, not in here you don't!"
Wardog: LOL!
TigerS4: Good one, Wolfman
<<*FreeFury has joined the conversation*>>
Wardog: Ho, FreeFury!
Howler: Heya, FreeFury, what's new?
FreeFury: Your language is atrocious, Jade.
BloodNH2O: And your Clan is a bunch of yipping snow ferrets. What else is new?
TigerS4: LOL
FreeFury: Apparently, you Sharks. Continuing to double-ship from Alpha Port, are we?
BloodNH2O: You walk a thin line, Hellion. You apparently do not know how to savor information for greater impact.
Wardog: Sharks are double-shipping?
FreeFury: *Aff.* We have seen many DropShips come and go. Preparing to flee to the Sphere, Shark?
TigerS4: Never you mind, Hellion.
FreeFury: See? He does not deny it!
Howler: Doesn't mean it is true, FF.
BloodNH2O: It is not. We are only strengthening our holdings.
Wolfman: So the Sharks are increasing production, are they?

TARGET PRACTICE ON THE RIM

[White Talons] This is the Raven vessel *White Talons* to the bandit scum of Antallos. We have come to do some cleaning and lay our claws here. Remove your verminous hides before we do it for you.
[*Antallos Control*] Raven? What the hell is that, some newbie pirate greenies?
[Talons] Hardly. We are Clan Snow Raven, masters of the Void and reapers of your souls.
[*Drudge One*] Clanners, eh? Go suck on a Gauss rifle, you genetic freaks. Come down here and you'd better be prepared to reap the whirlwind.
[Talons] Leave the channel open, Tech Brenton. I wish to hear their cries.
[*Drudge Four*] Multiple fighters launching, Control. What the hell are those thi— [*explosion*]
[*Voidrunner Two*] Jerry, Pam, reroute the *Red Raider* to vector five-oh-nine. Alert Rezak and his boys and get them spacebound. That's his booty-hauler; if he wants it in one piece, he's gonna have to save it himself. We'll do what we can, but…
[*Raven Alpha Two*] Locked on target. Engaging.
[*Drudge Three*] Damn! He's outturning me! Get him off my ass!
[*Skull One*] Skull Three, break port on my signal…
[Talons] The *Buccaneer* is changing vector. Star Bravo, intercept. Bring it down.
[*Raven Bravo One*] Acknowledged, *Talons*. Color it gone.
[*Voidrunner Four*] BREAK! BREAK! Dammit, he won't get off my— [*explosion*]
[Talons] Four down, twenty to go.
[*Raven Alpha Three*] Another one dusted. This is too easy, Star Captain.
[*Raven Alpha Two*] I bid away my missiles and autocannon for the glory of the Raven!
[*Raven Alpha One*] Vainglorious sibbie. You expect to take out a *Chippewa* with only your mediums?
[*Raven Alpha Two*] Done and done, Point Leader.
[*Voidrunner Six*] <unintelligible> [*explosion*]
[*Raven Alpha One*] Impressive, Pilot Andrew. Worthy of that McKenna name…
[*Antallos Control*] Drudge One, Vance's crew is on their way up, but it'll be at least ten minutes before they can clear the horizon line.
[*Drudge One*] That's too long. *Raider's* lost her escorts and now portside thrusters. She's losing altitude.
[*Raven Bravo Four*] Ahhah! Another scum eats vacuum! This is like a Circian sibko turkey shoot!
[*Skull Six*] Six to any remaining units…lost Tyree, lost Clutch…I'm going in at that *Carrier*….
[*Antallos Control*] Fighters have hit low orbit, they're on an attack vector. Sound the general alarm! Switch all anti-air turrets to automatic locking sequences!
[Talons] Blow that insolent scum to hell. If he survives, I will claim him as bondsman just for avoiding our wrath so successfully.
[*Raven Bravo Five*] Acknowledged, *Talons*. Point Five engaging. They will not come near you.
[*Raven Alpha One*] Commencing run on Bandit Control. Point three, attack pattern Omega.
[*Drudge Two*] Great Dashkuta, *Red Raider* is gone…They took out a fragging *Buccaneer* with only three fighters…oh no, here they come….
<multiple explosions, static>
[*Raven Alpha One*] Point Four, execute flyby. See if anything is left down there.
[*Raven Bravo Five*] *Talons*, your attacker is neutralized. Target is EVA. Bandit pilot, you are hereby claimed as *isorla* by the mighty Clan Snow Raven.
[Talons] Welcome to Antallos, Unkindness. I think we will like it here.
—Intercepted comm. logs made over Antallos/Port Krin airspace, 3 November 3067

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Wonder if they have something going with the Horses…
Wardog: Why do you say that?
Wolfman: Well, Niles has had busy spacelane traffic recently, and Tokasha is undergoing a major overhaul. Plus, with the reacquisition of Tiber's plants….
Howler: So. The Sharks and Horses are preparing for war. Better watch out, Hellion. Methinks they are coming to shut your yaps…. :-)
<<*FreeFury has left the conversation*>>

>>>TOK/WARR-CHAT/00-PUB#839<<11members>>
SNerk: So the Falcon Guards did not fire first?
JadeHell: *Neg*. The Lyrans claimed so and doctored the evidence. Once again proving why we no longer need follow zell in regard to these barbarian warriors.
PaelHorse: True, true. Then again, the Wolves do not either, considering their actions on Tiber.
SNerk: They have been tainted by the Spheroids.
Darkrider: Yes, kicking a vehicle that had declared honorable combat…disgraceful.
PaelHorse: *Aff*.
JadeHell: Vehicles are not honorable. They are…techs pretending to be warriors.
SNerk: *Aff*. Maybe we should challenge the Horses for more territory. I am concerned about this increased traffic.
Peregrine: Buildup?
Necroaddict: Possible.
PaelHorse: *Neg*, we are only retooling our factories. We are content with what we have.
Necroaddict: Then we should take more from you.
Darkrider: Try, Scorpion, and get squashed
SNerk: In a necrosian nightmare, maybe. But we can take you. Especially if events on Strana Mechty unfold correctly.
JadeHell: Speaking in riddles again, Scorpion? Or is your brain already addled by that poison you so love to ingest?
SNerk: You will see, Falcon. You will see. The Scorpion's tail has not yet fully risen.
Darkrider: Thank Kerensky. I'd hate to have to view your rear end when you run away yet again….
Fins: HAHAHAH!
Necroaddict: Bah. You will eat those words when we strike, Shark.
Fins: Strike away, little bug. Be prepared for blood if you do.

—Excerpts from Clan Chatterweb chat logs (merchant caste), late October 3067

WHISPERS AND RUMORS II

>>>NEWKEN/WARR-CHAT/CW-PRIV#8<<7members>>
W-MATT: ovkhan, have you heard the news of Tiber?
W-JULIA: *Aff*. You take issue with my former kinsmen, *quineg*?
W-MATT: I do take issue! Certainly, the Horses had four times our numbers on the planet, but they bid far less to battle! Nowa Vickers wasted no time breaking her bid! By Osis' left nut, she even moved the rest of her force into position before breaking it! It was her plan along! And then to use infernos on the tanks and infantry the Horses brought, weapons carried only by the forces outside her bid.
W-JULIA: Lost for words, young trothkin?
W-MATT: Do not mock me, Star Commander!
W-JULIA: Anyone who takes himself too seriously is fodder for mockery.
W-HENRI: Hah! Spoken like the Black Widow herself!
W-JULIA: You certainly are ancient enough to recall.
W-GREGGOR: MechWarrior Matt's passionate diatribe notwithstanding, he has a point. All you hear these days is how one Clan misbehaves and disrespects another in combat. The Horses are fools for their over-reliance on tanks, but infernos are no better

DARK PORTENTS

To: saKhan Karl Devalis, Delta Galaxy Command, Tabayama
From: kaKhan Santin West, Alpha Galaxy Command, Irece
Date: 8 December 3067
Re: Change of Orders, Highest Priority

SaKhan Devalis, I hope this message sees you in good health, though I fear its contents will change that. The Watch recently provided Oathmaster Minoru with some horrific news that I still cannot grasp even though I reviewed the same reports. To say it shocks and appalls me is a grievous understatement. The Star League is no more!

This tragedy appears to stem from petty bickering among the Spheroid leaders, who chose to abandon the League rather than salvage it. The exact nature of events leading to this decision is sketchy at best, as Tharkad went silent shortly after the news broke. Rumors among the merchant caste speak of a nuclear horror visited on that planet, possibly by the Word of Blake, but thus far we have been unable to confirm that.

Whatever the case may be, this dissolution of the Star League puts our Clan in a precarious situation. We predicated our entire path on the re-emergence of the Star League, and this tragedy places us in a position of unspeakable uncertainty.

Therefore, you and Delta Galaxy are hereby recalled to Irece. After you arrive, we will convene a Clan Council, we will speak privately and we will seek a new vision to guide our Clan. On your journey back here, you are to avoid all contact with the DCMS and Combine merchants. I have heard whispers of unrest on Luthien, though the Oathmaster cannot confirm anything at this time. Considering the problems we had only a few years ago, it is best to keep our heads low but our eyes and ears open. Let our hosts tend to their own affairs this time.

I have a grave feeling about all of this, Karl. I attempted a vision three nights ago and even now, I shudder from the darkness I saw.

I will share more with you once you arrive.

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than poisoning your opponent rather than fighting him. Where is the honor in that?
W-MATT: EXACTLY! That *dezgra* pig-product semi-warrior should be Reaved for her actions!
W-JOLAN: You deride vehicles too much. A Horse Mars-ATM defeated sixteen BattleMechs that day! Certainly, it faced them piecemeal as they advanced over a bridge, but that does not lessen that accomplishment. Sixteen!
W-HENRI: Impossible! Perhaps you have mistaken a Horse report on a simulation against a Cluster of one-legged *Locust*s?
W-GREGGOR: *Stravag*! Shut up already, Matt! I am trying to make a point here, and I do not wish to have it weighed down with your idiotic overreactions!
W-MATT: WHAT? HOW DARE YOU! I CHALLENGE YOU TO A TRIAL OF GRIEVANCE!
W-GREGGOR: Do you? Do you REALLY?
<<W-MATT has left the conversation>>
W-JULIA: Hah!
W-JOLAN: He has some Ice Hellion in him, I swear.
W-HENRI: All the sense of a Smoke Jaguar, that much is certain.
W-GREGGOR: Laugh if you wish, Julia. He is right. Every battle these days involves actions such as these that offend the senses. Zellbrigen is cast to the wind.
W-JULIA: You and Matt, Greggor. Both overly prone to hyperbole. Feuding Clans often fight like this. Surely you remember our war with the Falcons, *quiaff*?
W-GREGGOR: Feuding Clans? Has your mind gone weak? The Horses feud with the Bears, not us!
W-HENRI: They were mere puppets for the Wolves, no? Used as lucre-warriors by our own Khan?
W-GREGGOR: Indeed, and whose fault was that sad state of affairs? Does he exist still? And if we feel any anger of such a nature as we feel for the Falcons, it should be with the Horses.
W-JOLAN: Not a Wolf survived that battle on Tiber. The Horses went berserk, they say. And now they are stripping that world bare.
W-GREGGOR: AFTER they were treated with such disrespect! Who uses inferno missiles in such a fashion but Spheroids and the Dark Caste? Are the Wolves at the same level now?
W-JULIA: Let us go and find a Wolf. You may ask him.
W-GREGGOR: Mock me. Mock me, Julia! But it is clear we are straying ever further from the ways of Kerensky. Should we allow this?
W-JULIA: Your rant bores me. What of our good friends the Ravens and the Falcons? I have heard rumors that they have both begun operations to shift more resources, castemen and equipment to the Inner Sphere. Perhaps they will pull a Ghost Bear on us?
W-JOLAN: Let us polish our boots that we may send them off properly.

—Excerpts from Clan Chatterweb chat logs (public), December 3067

AWAITING ORDERS

>>Message Date 12/10/67
General Amis,

I have found our bases in good condition. To make sure no "accidental" damage would befall our facilities, the 151st remained on station until we had fully deployed. I would like to commend Colonel Antonescu and his unit. They are obviously extremely eager to go home, and I can't blame them. We received various individual challenges to combat even before our first DropShip set down. To live with such constant harassment by the various Clans on-planet is nerve-wracking.

The only relief appears to be the Goliath Scorpions, whose challenges we can often resolve with non-lethal methods of testing our skills. They are respectful and very curious about even our most mundane habits. I credit Colonel Antonescu for building such a cordial relationship with this Clan, and for instilling a measure of respect for Light Horse prowess in the other Clans. Initially, challenges came frequently, but they tapered off after we proved ourselves equal to the 151st.

This deployment should prove immensely interesting. Thank you for the opportunity.

Colonel Sandra Barclay

>>Message Date 20/01/68
General,

The troops are buzzing with the news of the Star League disbanding and the resulting Word of Blake attacks. Many are concerned that we have been forgotten. So am I. Are we to abandon this site now that the Star League is no more? The number of challenges from the various Clans here on Huntress has increased since the news spread among them. The embassy staff on Strana Mechty is equally concerned.

I feel something big is about to happen in Clan space. I can't define the source of my concern, but I find it echoed by many of the Clansmen I have met. Star Colonel Blake Mannix, a Cobra warrior I've met with numerous times recently, seems to share this impression. He keeps making references to the calm before the storm, and suggests a major trial that awaits all the Clans. Mannix's presence here is puzzling on its own. The Cobras have no enclave on Huntress, and the Star Colonel always travels alone. I've asked him, and all he tells me is that he is on "Cloister Quarani" business.

Another puzzling development is the recent challenge I received from Galaxy Commander Rik Myers. This is the first I've gotten from the Goliath Scorpions, a Trial of Possession for part of our Lootera enclave and a full battalion of our troops. All the other Clans' Trial objectives have been smaller-scale, typically because most Clans require a Khan's sanction to make a challenge on the scale of Commander Myers. The implications are profound. I have not yet replied, but fear I must do so soon.

We do not have enough transport assets available to move ourselves and the embassy staff. Our options appear limited. Please forward guidance to us as soon as possible.

S. Barclay

—Excerpts from HPG message intercepts between Eridani Light Horse troops on Lootera and Huntress, and Eridani Light Horse Command on Dieron (via deep space relay TF4)

SEEKER REPORT YOR-017

Loremaster:

During our resupply here on Bazaar I found out some interesting information regarding the Adder's Upsilon Galaxy that went "missing" last year. We staged a Trial for the information; attached are the updated codices of the two Elementals who won for the glory of the Scorpion.

According to the Shark Watch, one of the Adder Clusters attached to Upsilon staged a series of Trials recently in the Suda Bay system: one to recharge their JumpShips, another for a Star of 'Mechs to replace lost units, and the third for a large amount of foodstuffs—enough to feed several DropShip crews for many months.

Apparently, the Adders lost the first Trial but won the last two, gaining a Star of *Mad Cat Mk II*'s. The Sharks' labor caste workers, while loading the DropShip hold with the newly won foodstuffs, overheard that one of the Cluster's next destinations was the Horse-held system of Nouveaux Paris. The labor castemen also noted that several Adder 'Mechs were in various states of repair, including a *Kit Fox* still sporting Ice Hellion markings.

As a show of good favor, the Sharks allowed us the use of their training fields outside Prater for several days so our warriors could get in some solid gravity time. We have also resupplied our DropShips and are ready to continue toward the Chainlaine Islands. I will send another update when we arrive at Wolf 82.

—Star Colonel Kernan Elam, Bazaar, report dated 3 December 3067

F VICTORY

BORROWED TIME

>>Message Date 03/11/67

To: Colonel Andrew Redburn, SLDF

Our duty station replacements are now two weeks overdue. We have not received confirmation from the *Starlight Explorer* on her status in more than three weeks and are unsure whether or not something has happened to the ship. I am requesting that an inquiry be submitted to the EC to determine her status and an update on her timetable.

We're kind of anxious to return home. Thank you.

EJL

>>Message Date 15/11/67

To: Colonel Andrew Redburn, SLDF

Still no word on the *Starlight Explorer* since last update sent six weeks ago. Embassy staff is getting antsy and the ELH on Huntress is chomping at the bit to begin pullout procedures regardless.

Trial issued today by the Wolf Clan over one suit of Gray Death battle armor. We accepted said Trial and Montgomery is making it a focal point for some entertainment to take everyone's mind off the late transport. We're also having some of the 151st transfer over here, after we won a small Trial against the Scorpions for one-way transport. I think we need the extra defense—tensions seem high around here. The Scorpions jumped at the chance to help; it seems they're fascinated with the ELH. Uncomfortably so, in my personal opinion.

Request for an investigation on disappearance of *Explorer*.

EJL

>>Message Date 17/01/68

To: Colonel Andrew Redburn, SLDF

Received word today of the Star League's dissolution. Requesting new orders and what our current operational procedure should be. ELH has asked for instructions from this office as well, though Colonel Barclay confided to me that, without compelling reasons to the contrary, she plans to abandon her Huntress garrison no later than 28 Feb 3068.

Three Trials fought against Sharks for embassy supplies, as we've seen no transports from the Inner Sphere in almost three months. We won all three, though Sgt. Detmon will need reconstructive surgery on his right femur after his *Guillotine* fell into the Ben-Shimon Gorge.

Sir, I respectfully request official orders to evacuate this posting.

EJL

>>Message Date 31/01/68

To: Colonel Andrew Redburn, SLDF

I am concerned about the loss of communication with Tukayyid HQ. We are receiving a Trial every day now from various Clans for our personnel, equipment and even our embassy building. The ELH lost a full company of troops on Huntress to Clan Goliath Scorpion yesterday after a pitched seven-hour night battle in the Kerensky Plains. The ELH won, which is fortunate, as the Trial was for the entire embassy and all property therein.

Though we are maintaining Clan ideals here, per the First Lord's standing orders, things are getting desperate. To be frank, sir, we want to go home. Two days ago we learned via the Sharks that Tharkad got hit by a nuclear weapon. It sounds as if all hell is breaking loose there and we feel we are needed back in the Inner Sphere.

If we receive no response in another week, I will issue a Trial against the Scorpions and Sharks for several DropShips and a JumpShip so that we can load up and come home. I take full responsibility for this action and you may court-martial me if you wish. But right now, my responsibility is to this staff and the Light Horse.

I will report in if I can.

EJL

—Excerpts from HPG message intercepts between the Inner Sphere Embassy on Strana Mechty and SLDF command via deep space relay TF4

ON THE PRECIPICE

Their unity fractured, their resolve weakened, the bizarrely subdued reaction by the Clans in the Inner Sphere to the collapse of the Star League bespoke a kind of shock, a confusion brought about by yet another example of incomprehensible Spheroid politics. But was it shock that sent the Nova Cats scurrying back to

A SPHEROID AFFAIR?

[*Loremaster Kael Pershaw*]: This meeting has been called by Khan Marthe Pryde. She has the floor.
[*Khan Marthe Pryde*]: I am certain you have all heard the rumors. The false Star League is no more! Its extinction proves what many of us have been saying. It is a farce, a ploy intended only to cage us. The splinter-group of ComStar has declared war on them all for disbanding it, and has laid waste to Tharkad and New Avalon. Now there remains no reason to be restrained by the Great Refusal. Let us resume the Crusade!
[*Khan Raina Montose*]: Khan Pryde is right! A "united" Inner Sphere challenged our decision to invade, but such unison exists no longer. I daresay it never existed. The Trial of Refusal is null and void.
[*Khan Garrett Sainze*]: We should reassign the Jaguar corridor to more suitable Clans.
[*Khan Bjorn Jorgensson*]: Your reasoning is flawed, Khan Pryde. The dissolution of the Second Star League does not affect the Great Refusal in the least. It was legal then, and it is legal now.
[*Khan Garrett Sainze*]: Surely you do not believe it still holds any value, or should dictate our course now that the organization is gone?
[*Jorgensson*]: Our laws certainly do still hold value to me, Khan Sainze. And they are very clear in this respect. The decision to invade was Refused. That the party who accomplished the Refusal no longer exists is irrelevant. Would you reinstate all decisions that were Refused in your Clan merely because the warriors who Refused them died in honorable combat? Your Clan has been host to more Trials of Refusal than any other.
[*Montose*]: The situation before us is different. As you said seven years ago, this is about destiny and superiority. It required the combined might of the Inner Sphere to destroy one failing Clan. That unity is gone. That claim to superiority is gone. But our destiny remains, a destiny your Clan also saw and understood. War has wracked the Inner Sphere for nearly as long as we left it. In all those wars over three centuries, literally billions of people have died, and as the Great Kerensky predicted, the Spheroids almost blasted themselves back to the Stone Age. Some saw the formation of the new Star League in response to our arrival as a sign that the Inner Sphere had come of age. It is clear to me now that this assumption is false. The so-called Second Star League was nothing more than the lashing out of a caged animal, desperate to maintain its barbarous way of life. Khan Ward himself voiced the concern that the Clans had become corrupted and weak because of exposure to the Inner Sphere. Such corruption would certainly explain the Nova Cats, Phelan Kell and the sale of new *Mad Cat Mk II*s to the Spheroid barbarians. But no matter how the Inner Sphere might challenge our convictions and separate the righteous from the weak of heart and mind, we must never forget that the Inner Sphere itself is thoroughly corrupted. The Second Star League could have been a sign that they were recovering on their own. Clearly, they are not. Clearly, they have squandered their right to make any claim on a reborn Star League. Clearly, they have proven the righteousness of the Crusade. We must strike and cleanse the corruption from humanity, once and for all!
[*Khan Brett Andrews*]: Khan Montose has a compelling argument. But I see no point in discussing this matter without an ilKhan present.
[*Pryde*]: Fine then, have your ilKhan. The Falcons require no such guidance to defeat the Inner Sphere, as we have proven countless times.
[*Khan Vlad Ward*]: Indeed, you have proven yourself quite adept at pecking the back of a wounded animal.
[*Pershaw*]: Khan Andrews called for a vote on the matter of installing an ilKhan. Khan Pryde seconded the call. The senior Khan will issue the vote for each Clan. I will have your votes now, by Clan.
[*Ward*]: Clan Wolf abstains. This matter is of no consequence to us, and we will not waste our time with it any longer.
[*Pershaw*]: It is not yet your turn to vote! *Stravag!* The Wolf Khans have disconnected their HPG link before this Grand Council has come to an end. I call for their censure!

—Partial transcript of Clan Grand Council emergency session, 12 December 3067

TRIALS OF VICTORY

THE COMING STORM

[*Star Colonel Cassin Drummond*]: You are wrong, my Khan. The Star League is dead! The visions of Khans Leroux and Carns were wrong! We turned our backs on the Grand Council and joined the Spheroids in destroying the Smoke Jaguars, for what? What is left of it? They cancelled it! They disbanded it, shut it down as if it mattered no more than a light bulb! They are no better than Amaris or the Not-Named!
[*Star Colonel Jokew Devalis*]: Cassin Drummond has the truth of it! Look at everything we sacrificed! We were all so certain of our path, the path to the Star League Reborn! Now, what is left to us? Nothing! Damn them! Damn them and curse them! I say that if they do not wish to continue the Star League, we will continue it without them!
[*Star Colonel Elrod Nostra*]: Enough of our subservient status! Let us claim the worlds we keep as our own. The Combine owes us, we owe them nothing!
[*Galaxy Commander Shen Drummond*]: Brothers! You are allowing your emotions to guide your actions, and spoil our language as if we are common thugs. The League we joined may be no more, but the Combine has done us no wrong. Severen Leroux guided us here today for a great purpose. We must be here now as we are, so that we may see that vision through! The storm is already upon us!
[*Oathmaster Minoru Novacat*]: Then it is too late for the raindrops to vote on the matter.
[*brief silence*]
[*Star Colonel Evelyn Morris*]: None of this double-talk! You are wrong, Shen Drummond! The Star League betrayed us when they did not muster us to fight the Ghost Bear. And now the Inner Sphere has betrayed us by disbanding the League. They have reduced us to mercenary whores, coaxed by sugar water so that they might destroy the Smoke Jaguar! The Spheroid *stravags* have betrayed us time and again, and now we are here with nothing to show for our sacrifices but the cast-off spawn of a barbarian House leader playing at being one of us! Damn these surats for making worthless all that we have lost to be here! Damn them all!

—Partial transcript of Nova Cat Clan Council emergency session, 31 December 3067

their enclaves even as their hosts fell under the guns of Blakist and insurgent attacks? And what was the reaction in the homeworlds, among the Clans who jealously watched the invaders in the Inner Sphere with covetous eyes?

WHISPERS AND RUMORS III

>>>STRANA/MERCH-CHAT/00-PUB#3<<27members>>
BriStein: So the Adders are denying that they hit Wolf82?
BanditBane: No, they just are not saying anything regarding the matter.
ShatterShark: How un-Adderlike. They usually crow all over the Chatterlink after every beatdown they give.
<<*SpiritWanderer has entered the conversation*>>
Plainsfox: Hey, SW. Smoke anything good lately?
SpiritWanderer: Have you heard?
Viperbait: Heard? Heard what?
SpiritWanderer: From the Council! It happened only minutes ago!
Tseng: What? What! Come on, you stupid Coyote, spill!
SpiritWanderer: The damnable audacity! It is…outrageous!
Plainsfox: Must be something juicy, then.
SpiritWanderer: The Cobra Khan, Kardaan, just declared that Khan Kufahl's Bloodhouse should be REAVED!
Plainsfox: No
Bloodpan: Impertinent *stravag*!
Devalis: Is he crazy?
CloisterCobra: About time
Plainsfox: What?
SpiritWanderer: Even more shocking, the Spirit Khans agreed! They seconded it! I just checked the feed myself.
Bloodpan: Two Clans interfering with the policies of another's Bloodhouse? Shameful!
BanditBane: Kerensky would be rolling in his grave….
SpiritWanderer: Kufahl declared a Grievance against Khan Kardaan on the spot. The Council adjourned so they could ready their 'Mechs.
ShatterShark: Feed line?
SpiritWanderer: In two hours, on the Plains of Kerensky. Vidline AA-310CE.
CloisterCobra: This will be interesting to watch…

—Excerpts from Clan Chatterweb chat logs, January 3068

TIME OF DELIBERATION

[*Khan Bjorn Jorgensson*]: What concerns me most are the preliminary reports out of Tukayyid describing huge casualties among the civilians caught in this war zone. Are these not Rasalhagians? Are they not blood to the Dominion castemen?
[*Loremaster Laurie Tseng*]: *Aff*! But is it right to interfere in what is obviously a Spheroid affair?
[*Star Captain Benjamin Snuka*]: Trothkin, while this bloodletting does appear to be restricted to the citizens of the Inner Sphere, should we just turn our backs? Withdraw into the snow while cousins of our newborn kin die in the fields, staining the ice with blood?
[*Khan Jorgensson*]: I tell you, it is not the Bear way. Nor the way of our Founders. To leave family to die?
[*Star Captain Sandra Tseng*]: But it is interference! We are Warden, pledged to protect the whole of the Inner Sphere from the outside, not from the judgments they bring upon themselves!
[*Star Colonel Sarah DelVillar*]: To step across the border and attack unprovoked is an ill action, indeed.
[*Star Colonel Douglas Silva*]: But we have an obligation to our new charges. It is only right that we protect them.
[*Khan Jorgensson*]: *Aff*, protect. Kin! I have here a request—nay, a demand!—that we open up negotiations with the remnants of the

TRIALS OF VICTORY

Republic to protect them from this plague of death brought by the ComStar rebels. You all know Star Colonel Ragnar, who is not present because he has not claimed a Bloodname.

[*Murmurs echo throughout the chamber.*]

[*Star Colonel Naiad Ortiz*]: *Aff*, and a worthier Spheroid of the blood of the Ghost Bear does not exist. Remember, trothkin, he was elected Prince-in-absentia by the Rasalhagians, which speaks volumes of his character. This request is worthy of consideration by this Council.

[*Galaxy Commander Rhen Devon*]: So we decide policy by the un-Blooded? Our founders would turn in their graves!

[*Galaxy Commander Gerrard Hambash*]: We need to move Ragnar into position to claim a Bloodname….

[*Sandra Tseng*]: Shame on you, Galaxy Commander! To suggest we manipulate our sacred traditions to the warped politics of the Inner Sphere—

[*Khan Jorgensson*]: Enough, trothkin. We must not deviate from our focus here.

[*saKhan Aletha Kabrinski*]: I motion we begin procedures to approach the Free Rasalhague Republic in the interest of protecting the population.

[*Star Captain Mical Devon*]: I second the motion…

—Partial transcript of Ghost Bear Clan Council session, 7 February 3068

WHISPERS AND RUMORS IV

>>>LUM/MERCH-CHAT/00-PUB#3<<31members>>

FalconSuperShipper: By the Founder's left armpit! Curse the rancid burrock excrement! May their arms rot off with a blight!

MetalMerchant: ?

OpaqueShark: Which blight are you referring to?

FalconSuperShipper: All of them, surat! That is the fourth time in a row I have been bumped for my refit! Four times! DAMN the Raven monopolist scum repositories!

RavenSkipper: Hey now!

FalconSuperShipper: Don't even start! I've been due for the 900,000 light-year overhaul of the K-F controller for almost 500 light-years now! I can't wait any longer! And then they bump my *Invader* and yet another Raven *Odyssey* gets ordered in before me. How is this fair?

RavenSkipper: Look, friend, are you frowning on my Clan for giving our own vessels priority at our own facilities? If your Clan had the shipyards available, you would not be crying in here now, would you?

<<*FalconSuperShipper has left the conversation*>>

JadeHeuristic: Disregarding my Clansman's hotheaded response to these events, surely you have noticed that several Trials of Possession have occurred recently for fairly routine maintenance, all because your vessels are disrupting agreed-upon schedules. Just yesterday, I saw a *Hunter* and an *Odyssey* challenge a *Comitatus* to a Trial. It was the weirdest thing. Like naval combat in slow motion. That is a bit extreme, *quiaff*?

RavenSkipper: *Aff*, but this is the way it is. Presumably, it will not be this way for much longer.

OpaqueShark: I heard you guys pulled out a number of JumpShips from the orbital Brian Caches around Circe. Moving it all to the Inner Sphere. Are you all going Ghost Bear on us, *quiaff*?

RavenSkipper: Ridiculous rumors. Between our recent acquisitions and our activities in the Inner Sphere, we merely have to put more demand on our fleets. Higher demand requires more maintenance. No more, no less.

MetalMerchant: Emitting broad statements that are truthful in any circumstance is not very informative.

RavenSkipper: Do you accuse me of lying?

MetalMerchant: I accuse you of nothing. You simply did not answer the question. But that is very Snow Raven of you.

<<*RavenSkipper has left the conversation*>>

MetalMerchant: Tiresome folk.

—Excerpts from Clan Chatterweb chat logs (Public), February 3068

GRUDGE MATCH

*****Clan Ghost Bear Advisory*****
To: All Dominion Units
From: Aletha Kabrinski, saKhan, Alshain
Date: 13 Feb 3068

Be advised that at 1730 (local time) on 12 February, a sizeable force bearing markings and colors of the Hell's Horses Clan attacked Rasalhague. The Horses unit, while currently unidentified, hit four different areas of the planet, absconding with war materiel, supplies and several key command personnel.

The Horses did not follow combat protocols upon arrival and landing, though they did abide by the ritual combat of *zellbrigen*. Unfortunately, Star Captain Jake Kabrinski lost his duel with an enemy *Thunder Stallion* and was taken along with several other members of his command staff. Their current status is unknown, though their codices have not been terminated.

All units of the Bear touman within four jumps of Rasalhague are to go to high alert and be prepared for other possible Horses strikes. Watch agents are being reassigned to assess this latest aggression from the Horses and where the Horses currently have their base of operations so that reprisals may be considered.

—saKhan Aletha Kabrinski

OUTREACH SURVIVORS?

[*WolfNet*]: I'm telling you, we need to pass this data along ASAP.

[*Watch*]: Tell me what you've got, then.

[*WolfNet*]: Two days ago we received a compacted datastream burst via HPG. It came from Outreach.

TRIALS OF VICTORY

[*Watch*]: Outreach?!
[*WolfNet*]: *Aff.* Apparently a ComStar ROM operative managed to penetrate the HPG compound and fire off this data packet we intercepted before the local HPG shut down or was destroyed. But the stream was incomplete. The pulse was cut off at the source. Since then, we have detected no transmissions from that system to any planet.
[*Watch*]: Interesting.
[*WolfNet*]: From what we've been able to glean, part of Epsilon Regiment is still active on Romulus, supported by fragments of several shattered commands. We've got a comm log packet from a running engagement outside the eastern Ridge, describing at least a Blakist division of troops. Remus is gone and there's a heavy blanket of radiation over the area. Harlech City is still standing, though apparently most of the Dragoons compounds and MRBC facilities were leveled. TempTown doesn't exist anymore except as rubble.
[*Watch*]: Civilians?
[*WolfNet*]: There's a small refugee camp about thirty klicks outside Harlech proper, probably numbering near a thousand. Right before the datastream gets interrupted, weather photos show at least three Blakist units headed that way.
[*Watch*]: So we have conclusive proof that there are Dragoons and civilians still on Outreach.
[*WolfNet*]: I'd stake my life on it.
[*Watch*]: I will notify the Khan at once.
[*WolfNet*]: WolfNet stands ready to help any way we can. It's time for some payback.

—Transcript log of discussions between an unidentified WolfNet intelligence agent and Wolf-in-Exile Watch officer, circa 20 February 3068

GUARDING THE FLANK

(18 March 3068)

Crimond [ARNN] – Crimond bids farewell today to the Third Lyran Guards, after a deployment of five months. Following days of preparations, the last Third Guards DropShip will lift off later this evening to begin its trip to the nadir jump point, where the rest of the Guards wait to begin their journey toward the Bolan front. Command of the defense of Crimond now rests with Star Colonel Jeremiah Straw of the Fourth Wolf Guardians, a situation made possible by the Arc-Royal Accords.

This redeployment comes after an announcement by General of the Armies Adam Steiner, in which he indicated the need to send more forces to deal with the ongoing crisis at Tharkad and the war with the Free World League. Margrave Steiner pointedly countered concerns that the redeployments occurring across the Melissia and Arc-Royal theaters would provoke Clan Jade Falcon to execute another incursion. According to the Margrave, Vlad Ward's Wolf Clan is currently engaged in a campaign against the Falcons, and the Falcons are unlikely to be in a position to strike our realm. General Thanom Hammerskjold expressed skepticism at reports of a Wolf-Jade Falcon war, cautioning against the redeployment. "We should not prosecute a foolish and ill-conceived war against the Free Worlds League. Instead, we should sue for peace on that border. We need our resources here, against Clan Jade Falcon. If they are truly occupied with the Wolf Clan, then we should return the favor of preying on an enemy during a moment of weakness!"

When asked to comment on Margrave Steiner's assessment that the Wolves-in-Exile were fully capable of deterring any predation by the Jade Falcon Clan, as they did during Operation Bulldog, General Hammerskjold remarked: "I would prefer to see the Exiles

JADE FALCON WATCH REPORT—ULTRA HIGH PRIORITY

To: Loremaster Kael Pershaw
From: Star Captain Brian Pryde
Re: Watch Report L-E299 Lyran Update
Send Date: 19 April 3068

Loremaster:

I have spent the past three weeks poring over communications logs from the Lyran Melissia Theater in order to present a clearer picture of the past few months regarding the Lyran High Command.

As you know, and as has been confirmed by agents in the Arc-Royal Theater, Tharkad was hit by a thermonuclear device launched from a Word of Blake WarShip. The Universe has a cruel sense of humor; apparently the vessel that launched the fatal blow on Tharkad was none other than the *Invincible*, a Lyran ship of some distinction believed lost more than two centuries ago.

Since that time, General of the Armies Adam Steiner has tried in vain to keep the LAAF together, but with several HPG relays off-line, coordination has been slow. Only in the Arc-Royal Theater does there seem to be some cohesion still, most likely from the Kells and their freebirth cur, Khan Phelan Kell.

In the past few weeks, I have noted an increase in traffic to several Alliance worlds bordering our OZ. Most of the vessels have been merchant shipping, but oddly enough our Watch agents report that garrison patrols are down and whole segments of units seem to be disappearing.

It is our guess that under the guise of merchant shipping, General Steiner is moving parts of the garrisoned units to assembly points deeper in the Alliance in order to bring together a task force to go after the Word of Blake in retaliation for hitting Tharkad. His paltry attempt to disguise these movements is the mark of a desperate man.

It is our recommendation that if the Khans wish to strike out and enlarge our holdings, now is the time to do it. Attached are the relevant files and what we determine to be appropriate targets for attacks.

>>file attached<<
>>Message ends<<

TRIALS OF VICTORY

take Lyran worlds back from the Falcons rather than just prevent them from taking more. At one point, they too contributed to our losing worlds to the Wolf Clan. It seems only fair that they work to reclaim those worlds."

RIGHTEOUS RAGE

Only in the most recent months have the Clans returned to menace the Inner Sphere, with the Snow Ravens and the Jade Falcons launching attacks against their respective Spheroid neighbors. But with the Falcon propensity for striking distracted enemies (as evidenced by their FedCom Civil War adventurism) and the Ravens' obvious lust for revenge over an alleged cowardly attack, are these assaults merely business as usual to these born-and-bred warriors, or the start of a growing trend toward Clan opportunism?

SHOWING RESTRAINT

Anne,

I, too, have not heard from our trothkin in several months. When last we spoke, Benjamin indicated to me that he was seeking approval to engage in the duels on Solaris, to prove that combat is for warriors while games are for children.

I have not learned of any action against him for such a request, nor have I received word of his death. Further, the Watch claims that technical difficulties are making communication with Solaris VII temporarily impossible.

If some of the news reports are to be believed, these difficulties actually stem from more warfare on Solaris. I do not fully understand who fights who on that world, but it strikes me as immaterial. We should just crush the stravag Spheroids and be done with the confusion. I am certain Benjamin would be pleased to see us.

What of it, Anne Iler? Shall we advance to Solaris?

Hal

Hal,

I often wonder how you and your kin ever have the patience to stay still long enough to rest. Clearly you must keep raging in tantrums until you are spent, and only then can sleep grasp you.

I, too, am concerned about Benjamin. But I am certain we will have our opportunity soon, very soon. From the sound of it, we will have a chance to face Phelan's bandit Wolves, too. I assume this pleases you?

Anne Iler

—Excerpted personal messages between Jade Falcon warriors, intercepted by ComStar observers on Colmar, circa 18 June 3068

WATCHING AND WAITING

Field Report SVAR-H98-Alpha (07-Sep-68)

Matters seem to be cooling down on Svarstaad. I now believe I need to modify my earlier reports of a troop buildup here. Indeed, though it is garrisoned by the Sixth Wolf Cavalry Cluster and the

VENGEANCE IN THE VOID

[Explorer]: "Snow Raven taskforce! This is the *Galedon Explorer*! You are trespassing on a Draconis Combine holding! You will shut down your engines and prepare to be boarded!"

[*Raven*]: "*Galedon Explorer*! Your foolish request is denied. We have come to exact vengeance for the *White Cloud*. Do you seek to oppose us?"

[Explorer]: "Yes. I am *Tai-sho* Amanda Scofield. I bid this vessel and its attendant craft in defense. What forces do you bid?"

[*Raven*]: "Bid? Bid? I bid the scuttling charges of your nadir recharge station! You may dock with that facility at will."

[Explorer]: "S-Say again, Snow Ravens? You seek to engage me with all *four* of your WarShips? Where is your honor?"

[*Raven*]: "In the Kazanka system, *stravag*! One does not *batchall* with bandits. One executes them!"

—Excerpted comm log intercepts made by the *Mammoth*-class DropShip *Black Star of India*, outbound from Galedon V, 14 July 3068

NLOADER v3.7

	SERVICE	*STATUS*
	[FSNS]	COMPLETED
	[FWNA]	DOWNLOADING
IERON"	[MERCNET]	ACCESSING

A SERVICE OF IRIAN NEWS INTERSTELLAR

TRIALS OF VICTORY

Blue Keshik, that currently appears to be the extent of Wolf deployment on this world. My early reports of an increase in troops by an additional Cluster are apparently related to a recent Conclave of the Bloodname House of Sradac. Galaxy Commander Shistu Sradac is apparently the Sradac House leader, and the conclave preceded a Trial of Bloodright here on Svarstaad that presumably concluded just a few days ago.

The only Clan forces currently present appear to be the Sixth Cavalry and the Blue Keshik. All additional Wolf warriors seem to have returned to their previous deployments.

I hope my prior reports concerning the possible implications of a Clan Wolf invasion of Clan Jade Falcon space did not aversely affect Command's ability to assess the local situation.

—Dirk Vermeer, Rho/Chi

CRY HAVOC

[*Martin*]: "I'm here live outside the command headquarters of the Twenty-third Arcturan Guard on Graus, where for the past day the unit has been preparing for the approaching Jade Falcon force that jumped in-system two days ago." [*looks off-camera*]

[*Martin*]: "Kommandant Bernhard—Kommandant!" [*The reporter grabs a tall LAAF officer's arm as he hurries by.*] "Andrew Martin, DBC. Why the sudden commotion? Have the Falcons responded?"

[*The kommandant glances off to his left.*]

[*Bernhard*]: "Responded?" [*His attention returns to the reporter.*] "Haven't you heard, man? The Falcons sure as hell have responded."

[*He grabs the lens, forcing its perspective up and to the east.*] "They're dropping 'Mechs on us as we speak! Get to the bunker and stay there!"

[*Kommandant Bernhard dashes off, shouting orders. The view refocuses, zooming in on several bright streaks in the sky.*]

[*Martin continues off-camera, voice slightly shaken*]: "It seems the Falcons have thrown standard Clan doctrine to the winds." [*The camera view snaps back to Martin, visibly pale.*] "They have not made a formal *batchall*, which is normally customary with this Clan."

[*A gigantic explosion occurs in the background. Martin flinches. He turns to look, pointing excitedly at the hilltop. The camera zooms in on five BattleMechs cresting the hill.*]

[*Martin, off-camera*]: "It appears some elements of the Falcons have already landed a short distance away. What you're seeing here is several lighter 'Mechs, probably a scout Star. The one in the front is an *Uller*, followed by a *Shadow Cat*, another *Uller* and two other designs I'm not familiar with."

[*Camera refocuses on Martin*.]

[*Martin*]: "The Falcons have come to Graus. Whether this is a raid or a prelude to invasion, we do not know. We're going to our safety bunker now and will report more when we get some solid information.

"From Graus, this is Andrew Martin, DBC Stellar News."

—Last known holovid broadcast by Andrew Martin, *DBC Stellar News*, Graus, 12 October 3068

ICE HELLION WATCH REPORT—KHAN'S EYES ONLY

To: Khan Raina Montose, saKhan Connor Rood
From: Loremaster Jonas Cage
Priority: Gamma-Red (Khans' Eyes Only)
Subject: State of Clan Hell's Horses
Transmit Date: 13-Sep-3068

My Khans,

Our Watch has noted far greater than normal Hell's Horses JumpShip travel above Niles, Tiber, Kirin, Strato Domingo and Tokasha. These efforts appear coordinated, and occur in concert with reports of considerable activity on Tiber, Strato Domingo and Tokasha. At the same time, we are noting decreased activity on Bearclaw and Hoard. The latter situation is especially peculiar, as the Horses have allowed the Montose Pact to expire. This will severely hamper the efforts of their lower castes to transport raw materials to the Iyaba smelter cluster, now that the Montose Valley has reverted to our full control.

—Jonas Cage

[*At times like these I wonder whether Jonas is still the best man for this Watch job. So much activity from the normally passive Horses can mean only one thing: they are gearing up for a major campaign, either against the Wolves here or toward the Bears or Wolves in the Inner Sphere. I suspect the latter, of course.*

This is the perfect opportunity you have been waiting for! The timing is a bit off, but if we do not act on this, it is not likely that a better option will open up later.

By your command, my Khan, I can be on my way to Niles in a few hours to speak with Khan Cobb. The Horses can always be expected to consider any alliance. —Connor Rood]

CELESTIAL CRISES

CELESTIAL CRISES

To: HIS servant and trusted representative, Kian Lih Sung

As distasteful as it may be to seemingly bend our necks as the Davion blade sweeps ever closer, we must continue to maintain our innocence and our right to a strong defense among our enemies and one-time allies. His Celestial Wisdom knew this, and his final directives were very much in accord with these priorities.

You will continue to act as the voice of our people and represent Capellan interests among the other nations. To the limit of your wartime powers, as strictly defined in the attached file, and in accordance with any direction you receive from me or this High Office, it remains your duty to engage those who might still listen to and be swayed by the truth.

In this dark time of crisis, we must all do our part to ensure the viability of the Capellan state. Our duty is clear, and our voice must be heard.

Respectfully,

Talon Zhan
Sang-jiang-jun, Military Regent

It took the Federated Suns' propaganda machine all of a day before they began to lay blame for the Star League's final dissolution at the Capellan doorstep. Barely a week into the chaos of Word of Blake attacks, the Davions—along with their lapdogs in the Lyran state, in the Combine and in ComStar—cast further aspersions on our people.

Collaborators, we were called. Opportunists. Betrayers. Witting accomplices to mass murder!

The rhetoric worsened as every day our worlds and our people were spared the insanity gripping other realms. We should stand accused for our foresight? We should be castigated, punished even, for escaping the destruction and death being visited on Tharkad and New Avalon?

We—victims of the Fourth Succession War, working only to restore to the Capellan nation what is rightfully ours—will stand for such a distortion of the truth no longer.

WITNESS: Yvonne and Peter Steiner-Davion! By their own words, they reaffirm our Chancellor's decision to quit the Star League sham and see to his own nation's welfare.

WITNESS: Our offers of aid and succor, refused by the same nation-states that later berate us for our lack of involvement.

WITNESS: The despicable, cowardly acts of the Federated Suns, to launch a new offensive now, of all times, in their ongoing attempt to subjugate the Capellan people! The very definition of opportunism! Visiting upon our nation, our people, the atrocities we were spared in those initial months of Word of Blake attacks. St. Ives overrun. Sian assaulted. Chancellor Sun-Tzu Liao lost and presumed dead.

All by a Hasek's hand! A Davion by any other name.

Not one hand have we raised against our neighbors. Not one moment have we offered support or relief to the enemies of humankind. After all the accusations, all the lies and half-truths that assailed us, now we will make the truth known about the extreme lengths to which other nations will go in order to victimize the Confederation, the Chancellor and the entire Capellan people.

You, who have given us no reason to cooperate except by threat of the sword, stand witness to the terrible depredations we now suffer.

The peace has been shattered and all trust lost between men and nations. Yet still we shall endeavor to do what is right by our citizens, and by the memory of Chancellor Liao. We provide the following information and reports, not because we must, but because we should—in order to demonstrate to the entire Inner Sphere that we are justified in the Chancellor's original action, in our steadfast declaration of innocence of collaboration with the Word of Blake, and in defense of our homeland.

It has fallen to me to undertake this task. To challenge the false testimony of the Davion propaganda machine, to bear true witness to events unfolding in and around the Capellan Confederation, and to ask that restraint and reason prevail even though throughout our history our neighbor states have afforded us little of either. To illuminate a path toward enlightenment—a task worthy of a bodhisattva, though it falls to a humble servant blessed only by the Chancellor's forgiving light.

By the Chancellor's will and the grace of the gods, let our voice be heard.

—Mandrinn Kian Lih Sung, Special Representative of the Celestial Wisdom, 20 October 3068

GATHERING SHADOWS

Considering the blame heaped on the Capellan Confederation for being the first to officially withdraw from the Star League, that the Word of Blake failed to assault Sian in the opening days of their holy war came as a tremendous surprise throughout the Inner Sphere. Speculation is endless as to why the Blakists spared the Confederation, and many have proclaimed it proof of complicity—a conspiracy by Sun-Tzu and the Blakists to bring humanity to its knees. Regardless, simply because a Blakist fleet failed to materialize over the Capellan capital in December of 3067 did not mean the Confederation could avoid the storms of war swirling across the Inner Sphere.

—Michael Bosworth, INN Special Correspondent

CELESTIAL WISDOM DEDICATES MEMORIAL

Victims of Black May Honored

(19 January 3068)

Sian [CNS] – Chancellor Sun-Tzu Liao appeared before more than 25,000 loyal Capellans in the Forbidden City today to dedicate a memorial to the thousands of devoted citizens who heroically

CELESTIAL CRISES

gave their lives in the tragic Black May attacks almost six years ago. The memorial is a simple black granite wall listing the names of all those who died in those terrible assaults, flanked by statues of the Celestial Wisdom clad in a resplendent armor, as if standing fast against any who would dare attempt similar cowardly assaults on the Confederation. Monuments like this one have been built on every world struck by the horror of Black May.

Addressing the citizens of the Confederation, the glorious Chancellor spoke these words. "Many times throughout history, our peace-loving nation has been assaulted by those who seek to murder or subjugate us. This memorial, and those like it on many other worlds, serve as a warning to all our enemies that we will not stand for such depraved assaults upon us."

In this time when the decadent civilizations of the Inner Sphere have brought war upon themselves, the Capellan Confederation stands alone in peace. The Celestial Wisdom will continue to direct us in harmony through these times and prove that our people and our way of life are the most righteous.

BLAKE'S WRATH TARGETS CAPELLAN PEOPLE

(4 May 3068)

Liao [CBS] – The Word of Blake continues to pursue its campaign of terror against Capellan worlds that threw off the bonds of Davion oppression in our 3057 War of Liberation. Staging their assaults from Terra and forward operating positions on Epsilon Eridani, the Blakists are attempting to broaden their sphere of influence into the Tikonov Commonality even as they prosecute a wider war against the infidel nations of the Inner Sphere.

Since declaring their own independence from ComStar some sixteen years ago, the followers of Blake have forged a path unlike any other. Part religious fanatic, part prophet and part salesman, the typical Blakist faithful has deluded himself into believing that the Word of Blake is the one and only answer to humanity's problems.

First they conquered Terra, using ComStar's ineptitude to secure humanity's birthplace. Then they began spreading into the Tikonov Commonality, targeting worlds not yet rid of the Davion influence that prevented their people from willingly returning to the Confederation. Mandrinn Goren Trahn, Deputy Information Minister for the Liao Commonality, released information about the attacks in late January.

"The Capellan people abhor violence," said Trahn, "but we will not tolerate such egregious assaults on our comrades, even if they lie beyond the borders secured by the Celestial Realm. The Word of Blake must realize that the presence of Davion sympathizers cannot justify an assault against Capellan citizens."

The indiscriminate Blakist assaults continue today, even as the Celestial Wisdom seeks a diplomatic solution to the crisis. Their targets include the homeworlds of the Davions, the Steiners and the Kuritas, delivering much-deserved destruction on each realm, but they also strike at Capellans on worlds like Epsilon Indi, Fletcher and Tall Trees—worlds left unprotected by ComStar's continued incompetence. Against still other targets, such as Outreach, the Blakists have even used nuclear weapons to eradicate all opposition, at an incredible toll in human lives.

TAURUS ABANDONED?

"…But not all unit commanders are so accepting of the reasons for the lack of Confederation support. Several TDF commanders, on condition of anonymity, revealed their resentment of their treatment.

"'We send troops over there to defend Sunny Boy's land whenever the Davions send a company over the border, but what happens when we get clobbered by regiments of Federated troops? Some nice-sounding words of commiseration for our plight, that's what,' a veteran brigadier confessed to us.

"'It's completely unfair to the Concordat. The Capellan Confederation is larger and more powerful, yet it feels like we're putting more resources and manpower into its defense than they are to ours,' claimed another brigadier. 'I mean, they're out taking over Chaos March worlds, using us to garrison their systems, while they can't spare even some reserves to deal with the Calderon Protectorate or pirates.'

"Though not the majority opinion yet, such sentiments are apparently gaining momentum among officers and the enlisted corps. Most seem to arise from troops coming back from tours protecting the Capellan borders or pacifying recently conquered Chaos March worlds. Such soldiers claim to be disgusted by the disparity of support their units receive when compared even with second-line Capellan regiments…'"

—Excerpted from "Taurus Abandoned?" *Free Concordat Journal*, Taurus Press, 20 June 3068

ST. IVES STRUCK

Duke Kai Missing, Hundreds Killed

(26 June 3068)

Capella [CBS] – Unknown marauders struck St. Ives today, killing and injuring more than a thousand. Among the missing and feared dead is Duke Kai Allard-Liao, cousin to the Celestial Wisdom.

Rebel separatists have long targeted the worlds of the St. Ives Commonality, seeking to undermine our government through riots and other acts of violence, including military raids conducted by Davion-supported insurgents. Even when the people of St. Ives chose to reunite with our Confederation five years ago, after surviving three decades of Davion oppression, rebels continued to strike out at government and military facilities, apparently in a futile attempt to turn the loyal citizens of St. Ives against their own nation.

While these rebel attacks have killed and wounded thousands of Capellan citizens, none have been so despicable as the one

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that assaulted St. Ives today. Mandrinn Quon Il-Peng, St. Ives Commonality Minister of Justice, witnessed the attack and relayed what he saw to investigators.

"The Davion green BattleMechs fell from the sky and began shooting in all directions. Their only intent was to kill as many citizens and destroy as many structures as they could."

Other reports from the scene confirm the minister's account. The unknown 'Mechs appeared to have completed what is known as a "combat jump"—literally a controlled fall from a DropShip in orbit—to land in a military cantonment that Duke Kai was touring. They proceeded to destroy everything and everyone in sight before moving on to the spaceport, leveling everything in their path, where they rendezvoused with their DropShip and left the world. St. Ives Space Traffic Control identified this DropShip as a civilian liner of Sarna registry, but could not track it when it left the world as the marauders had knocked out radar and other sensors.

To date, there are 307 confirmed deaths on the ground, with more than 700 wounded. Roughly 400 more remain missing, including Duke Kai. No one has yet claimed responsibility for this heinous act of murder.

ROYAL FAMILY KIDNAPPING!

Duke Kai Allard-Liao Snatched From St. Ives

(5 July 3068)

Sian [CBS] – Duke Kai Allard-Liao, cousin to Chancellor Sun-Tzu Liao, son of Duchess Candace Liao, heir to the St. Ives Duchy and currently second in line to the Celestial Throne, has been kidnapped by agents of the Federated Suns.

In an attack ten days ago, an assault force personally dispatched by George Hasek—the oppressor of billions of Capellans under the Davions' tyrannical thumb and key orchestrator of the civil war that murdered millions more of our people—captured Duke Kai and killed or injured more than a thousand citizens. Aided by traitors to all Capellans, these raiders slipped onto St. Ives, conducted a daylight assault and then escaped the world before facing anything more deadly than unarmed citizens.

Yesterday, the criminal Hasek confirmed that he ordered this deplorable assault on the Confederation. The attack is the first move in a war that the Davion pigs are bringing to the peace-loving Capellan people.

Ping Shuh, spokeswoman for the Ministry of Information, had this to say:

"The Federated Suns has declared war on the Capellan Confederation through this despicable act. They have murdered our citizens and kidnapped the Celestial Wisdom's cousin. There is no doubt this is a prelude to an invasion whose ultimate goal is to destroy the Capellan way of life and place a puppet upon the Celestial Throne."

She went on to say that the Maskirovka has already uncovered evidence of a body double created by Hasek for Duke Kai, apparently hoping to place a duplicate on the Celestial Throne. A similar attempt by Victor Davion to place a double in command of the Free Worlds League resulted in the sundering of the empire his father had built and ultimately the decimation of the Davion civilization and military.

"The Capellan nation cannot fall," said Shuh. "The strength and will of our people is too great. Once more we will stand against the Davions. We will free every Capellan enslaved by Hasek and we will once and for all crush our enemies."

WHO DEFEATED THE UNDEFEATABLE?

FatBastard: So what's up?
CC-hAtEr: Yo Fat Bastard! We're rapping about Kai.
Kalilover: Yeah. Kai finally got his ass kicked and vanished.
KiloFoxtrot: He's been greased. Dead…Dead…Dead.
FatBastard: Say what? When did this happen?
Puddentang: Hiya, FB. Two days ago if you believe CBS.
CC-hAtEr: CBS = Capellan Butt Suckers
Kalilover: CC, can it will you? Enough already.
Puddentang: Anyway, according to CBS Kai got taken down during his tour of the St. Ives Comp...er…Commonality. Rumor has it the deed was done by none other than the Bounty Hunter.
FatBastard: The Hunter? WTF! Who's this guy and what does he pilot?
KiloFoxtrot: You got to be kidding me. You've never heard of the BH?
FatBastard: Um…sorry, never heard of him or her.
Kalilover: Jeebus, did you grow up under a rock?
Puddentang: FB, the BH is a MechWarrior who goes after others for money, mostly other 'Mech jocks. He sometimes fights for the right price, too.
FatBastard: Sounds like a merc to me.
CC-hAtEr: This guy's no ordinary merc, FB. This same person dehorsed Nasty Kerensky and took her *Marauder* afterward.
FatBastard: Who?
KiloFoxtrot: Are you boneheaded or what? How old are you, FB?
Kalilover: That's it, KF. One more time and your ass is banned. :-(
FatBastard: Thanks, Kalilover. I'm only 13. So how did he take out Kai and with what?
** KiloFoxtrot nods and offers apology **
Puddentang: Word is he used a souped-up *Marauder II*, a Dragoons variant, and blasted Kai out of Yen-lo-wang and captured him.
FatBastard: OMG! Do they know where the BH took him?
CC-hAtEr: No
KiloFoxtrot: Assuming the rumors are true, of course. Otherwise, you go with the CBS line and say ol' Kai's "missing," and that the Davies got 'im. Which do you wanna believe?

—Excerpt from a St. Ives network chat room (monitored by the Maskirovka), 27 June 3068

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FLASHING SWORDS

"No generation has ever lived in the Capellan March that did not wish to draw swords against Sian." Paraphrased from the remarks of an ancient Terran leader, these words, recently attributed to Duke George Hasek of the Capellan March, rang truest of all when—instead of racing to defend the embattled FedSuns capital of New Avalon—Hasek instead announced the start of Operation Sovereign Justice, a military campaign aimed at the heart of his realm's ancient enemies.

CONFEDERATION UNDER ATTACK

"Wait—I've just been informed that a fleet of JumpShips has appeared at a nearby pirate point and has discharged a mix of assault and carrier DropShips, all bearing Federated Suns colors. They are approaching our position at a combat pace and it appears we are moving to engage the invaders. I say invaders instead of raiders because the officer in charge tells me it looks like the Davions have sent an entire Regimental Combat Team to attack the system.

"Thankfully, I am already strapped into my chair, or the gee-forces from our own DropShip's combat maneuvers would have thrown me around this bridge like a rag doll. We were also fortunate that our *Leopard CV* had all its fighters in space before the Davions appeared. Watching the tactical screens here, I can see our vessel is coming about, opening up on a pair of Davion heavy fighters. Wow! Looks like our weapon bays tore one up. The other seems to have survived. We are turning to face a Davion DropShip now…this one looks like an *Aven*—

[*Large explosion. Alarms wail.*]

"What's going on? My screens just went dead and the emergency lighting has kicked in. I think we've been hit by an enemy DropShip, or maybe a squadron of fighters…"

[*Indistinct, exciting muttering. Alarms cease abruptly.*]

"Oh, gods! I've been told the life-support system suffered critical damage and main power is out. We're dead in the water, adrift in space. To conserve power, I must end this report, and hope that—"

<<End of Transmission>>

—Veronica Sarine, Canopian field reporter onboard the CCAF DropShip *Starsword*, Necromo system, 28 June 3068

CAPELLANS UNITE!

(7 July 3068)

Sian [CNS] – "The lapdogs of the Davion empire have come barking at our door. Citizens of the Confederation, now is our time to rid the universe of their kind!"

Chancellor Liao spoke those words before more than 100,000 citizens gathered in the Forbidden City this morning, announcing to the entire Capellan Confederation that the Federated Suns had invaded the St. Ives Commonality.

Davion agents had been supporting criminal enterprises and anti-government rebels within that commonality since the Capellan Confederation liberated it from their oppressive grasp five years ago. Their actions directly flouted the orders of their leader, the benevolent Archon Katrina Steiner, with whom the Celestial Wisdom had negotiated a treaty that finally ended centuries of aggression by the Federated Suns. But the untrustworthy warriors of that nation could not abide such peace, and in response rose up in rebellion against the only peace-loving leader they had ever known. When they finally deposed Archon Katrina, placing a puppet princess in her place, the Davion oppressors once again began their campaign of terror and domination against the peaceful citizens of the Capellan Confederation.

"They have struck St. Ives," said the Chancellor of the Davion invasion, "as well as Warlock, Indicass, Texlos and Vestallas." The Celestial Wisdom did hasten to point out that Confederation military forces have surrounded the invaders on each of those worlds and will soon annihilate them. Meanwhile, the CCAF is strengthening those worlds' defenses, along with the rest of the worlds in the St. Ives Commonality, preparing them should the Davions attempt further invasions.

Chancellor Liao spoke clearly to the truth of the matter: "I call every true Capellan citizen to stand united against this immoral attack on our very civilization. Some unfortunate souls exist among us who have fallen under the spell of foreign influence and are now aiding our invaders. It is the duty of every Capellan to identify those poor folk so that we may help them overcome their

DUCHESS CANDACE ACCEPTS INVITATION TO SIAN

(8 July 3068)

Sian [CBS] – In response to the Davion aggression that has targeted her homeworld and her family, Candace Liao, Duchess and Prefect of St. Ives, leader of the St. Ives Commonality and beloved aunt to the Celestial Wisdom, has accepted the Chancellor's invitation to Sian.

Ministry of Information spokesman Ping Shuh gave this statement to the press: "Duchess Candace has had to endure many hardships in her life, not least of which were her years as a hostage to the Davion Prince as he subjugated her people. While she expressed her desire to stand by her subjects as they once again battle oppression, she saw the wisdom of the Chancellor's concerns for her safety and accepted his invitation to stay with him on Sian until this current conflict is concluded."

The duchess was touring the St. Ives Commonality when the Davions first struck and kidnapped her son, Duke Kai Allard-Liao. After brief consultation with the Celestial Wisdom, she made her way to Sian. For further protection, she was joined en route by bodyguards from Warrior House Imarra. She arrived on Sian earlier today, but was unavailable for comment.

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weaknesses, and destroy those who dare desecrate our worlds with their oppression."

When asked about the fact that the Federated Suns is holding Duke Kai Allard-Liao hostage, the Chancellor said: "The Capellan Confederation can not abide even one of its citizens being held against his will. My cousin knows firsthand the enemies who hold him captive. He will not bow to them before we can free him and make his captors pay for their crimes!"

LUCK OR FORESIGHT?

(15 July 3068)

Highspire [FCS]—Is the Chancellor merely lucky, or does he have a gift of foresight?

That persistent question has been asked more and more over the past year. It is, of course, not a new question. Many believe him prescient, and point to decisions he has made throughout his life that, on the surface, seemed odd but ultimately turned out for the best. But though the naysayers could ignore the evidence before, the events of the past year defy any other logical explanation.

When the Celestial Wisdom chose to back Victor Davion during the FedCom Civil War, many called it unconscionable that the Confederation gave aid to the Davions. But when House Dai Da Chi reclaimed Tikonov for the Chancellor, those same faithless individuals hailed the backing of Victor Davion as a stroke of genius.

Clearly it was more. How else can one explain the Chancellor's last-minute decision to remain on Sian instead of traveling to Tharkad to deliver his announcement to the Star League Council? With that decision, he deftly avoided the Word of Blake assault force *and* remained in exactly the right place to oversee the countering of the Davion invasion of our nation. What's more, the decision to pull out of the Star League foreshadowed its eventual dissolution.

If one desires more evidence, one need only contemplate the Chancellor's invitation for his aunt, Duchess Candace Liao, to join him on Sian. Delivered in the hours before Davion forces abducted her son from St. Ives, Candace saw the message for what it was—the truly celestial wisdom of Chancellor Sun-Tzu Liao.

RECLAIM YOUR DESTINY

Citizens of the St. Ives Compact, rise up against your oppressors. Throw off the yoke of slavery Sian has chained around your neck. Turn your weapons on the real threat: *Sun-Tzu Liao*.

THE CHANCELLOR IS LYING

[*CBS Anchor*]: "And now an update on the Capellan March invasion…"

*****Transmission Interrupted*****

[*A masked man stands in front of the Free Capellan banner*]

[*Man*]: "Wake up, St. Ivers! Sun-Tzu is lying to you. The Davion forces are moving unabated because the CCAF is hiding. Where's the vaunted Capellan military? Sun-Tzu is allowing Duke Hasek's forces to bleed our beloved St. Ives Cavalry dry. We are in danger of subjugation by the bloodthirsty FedSuns, just like what happened in the Fourth Succession War!

"Must we live through another invasion where tens of thousands of St. Ivers die because of greed and lust for power? We say no! Stand up and be counted! Take up arms against the dictators' hordes! Make them pay with their own blood! Long live the St. Ives Compact! Long live Free Capella!"

*****Transmission Terminated*****

—Capellan Broadcasting Service *Nightly News* report, St. Ives, 25 July 3068

FREEDOM!

Duke Kai Personally Overseeing Fight for St. Ives Independence

(26 July 3068)

St. Ives [SIFP]—The future of our people on this anniversary of St. Ives Founding Day looks bright, for Duke Kai Allard-Liao is personally leading the fight for our independence.

Nearly 900 years have passed since the first colonists set foot on this world, and in those nine centuries we have seen much hardship, but none as severe as we experienced under the Capellan thumb. Thankfully, we have leaders like Duke Kai and his mother, Duchess Candace, who are willing to fight for what is right. After months of secret negotiations with Duke George Hasek, Duke Kai left his Capellan "handlers" behind and joined Hasek on New Syrtis, where he is personally overseeing the military campaign that will once again win independence for the people of the St. Ives Compact. "The people of St. Ives will meet the challenges of the future," he said to a group of university graduates just a week before leaving for New Syrtis. "It is up to you to take control of your destiny."

Already, mercenary units in Duke Kai's employ have taken up position inside the Compact and laid siege to those who stand against our independence. Coordinating with the St. Ives Armored Cavalry and Janissary Brigades, these forces are fortifying our borders against the Capellan response that is already attempting to stop us from achieving the freedom we deserve.

Unlike the war we fought against the Confederation just five years ago, this time Sun-Tzu Liao doesn't have the army of the Star League to call on, or even his Word of Blake allies, who are embroiled in their own war. Neither does he have the help of a despotic ruler on the Davion throne; instead, we have the full force of the Armed Forces of the Federated Suns ready to support us.

Unfortunately, Sun-Tzu has Duchess Candace Liao in custody on Sian, to which he spirited her as soon as he learned of Duke Kai's journey to New Syrtis. Nevertheless, we must not allow her incarceration to turn us away from our path. "Freedom is dear and can never be taken for granted," she said almost four decades ago after declaring independence for St. Ives. "The cost of freedom is never too great unless it is freedom itself."

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For more than thirty years the Compact and the Federated Suns enjoyed a true friendship, a relationship sundered by Sun-Tzu's *Xin Sheng*. Do you, free Capellans of the St. Ives Compact, want to see this restored? Do you want to continue your lives under the oppressive Confederation regime? Rise up and reclaim your destiny! Join us and together we shall break Sun Tzu's chains of bondage and make St. Ives free again!

—From Davion propaganda pamphlets dropped over the capital city of Teng, July 3068

VICTORIOUS THEY VANQUISH!

Capellan Troops Bring Glory and Honor to the Confederation
(17 August 3068)

Ares [CNA] – Despite boasts to the contrary from all levels of the Davion government, the Capellan Confederation Armed Forces have halted the Federated Suns' invasion and are destroying the enemy everywhere they are encountered.

The invasion, begun just over a month ago, initially targeted worlds in the St. Ives Commonality. George Hasek, Duke of New Syrtis and leader of the Davion military forces along our border with the Federated Suns, justified this illegal and immoral action as military aid to an "independent" St. Ives—as led by a small group of rebels supported by Hasek himself.

Though the Davion onslaught initially overpowered the loyal citizens of St. Ives—an onslaught that killed, injured and left homeless countless thousands—our own glorious military responded swiftly and lethally. Staging counterattacks against the Davion troops in conjunction with true patriots on the besieged worlds, our military stunned the enemy, costing them their tenuous grasp on five worlds and forcing them to retreat to temporary fortifications they had constructed on six more, including St. Ives and Warlock.

Already, Strategic Military Director Talon Zahn is moving additional forces into the St. Ives Commonality and along the Federated Suns border to deal with what little opposition remains. Reliable sources on the few worlds still beset by the Davion blight report that enemy troops are surrendering wholesale, and those that do not stand down remain bottled up in their bases while Capellan citizens surround them and continuously subject them to sniper and bomb attacks.

"HASEK'S WAR"

August 24th, 3068

The so-called "Third Wave" has hit us here on New Westin. Most of our defensive lines are holding, but only by a hair; the Federated Suns troops are just too numerous for us to push off at the moment. They're drawing closer and closer to Sian, and we have fewer and fewer systems to use as a buffer.

I still cannot believe we are fighting this pointless conflict. The Star League disbanded of its own accord, and Hasek's capital system of New Avalon lay under siege. His once-sister capital no longer exists. Taurian guerillas bent on reclaiming their lands still plague his Periphery border worlds, and most of the planets he claims to be "liberating" would rather not be. And yet he presses harder and deeper into Confederation territory. Why?

I can only come up with two theories. The first is that with New Avalon weakened and in a precarious position, Hasek believes he can carve out his own fiefdom, making himself more powerful than a mere March Lord. Perhaps he wants a new Successor State, a House Hasek. With the Federated Suns too weak to oppose him and the Capellan Confederation shattered, he could easily absorb Crucis March worlds and declare his newly expanded realm an independent state. Of course, all this hinges on defeating the Confederation, as well as a long drawn-out fight between Yvonne Steiner-Davion and the Word of Blake.

My second theory is that he has gone insane. Of course, those two theories aren't necessarily mutually exclusive.

—Last personal journal entry of *Si-ben-bing* Sergei Pin, CCAF, (KIA on New Westin, 25 August 3068).

FORTRESS OF DETERMINATION

Brave Confederation Troops Hold Tikonov
(6 September 3068)

[Pris Khoji]: And now for a special report from Kollin Wade, currently on assignment to Tikonov.

[Wade]: Tikonov was once a shining pearl of the Confederation, a commonality capital and an industrial giant. Snatched away during Hanse Davion's murderous rampage some forty years ago and forced to live under his dictatorial regime until its people said, "No more!", this world stood up against the very government that oppressed it for all those long decades. But can it hold out? The people of Tikonov say, "Yes!" and the Capellan Confederation stands behind its citizens. With me is *Gao-shiao-zhang* Fah Li Shei, leader of House Dai Da Chi. Thank you for giving us your time, *Shiao-zhang*.

[Shei]: You are most welcome.

[Wade]: Tell our viewers about the current situation on Tikonov.

[Shei]: The Celestial Wisdom tasked House Dai Da Chi with the defense of Tikonov, an assignment we have carried out continuously and without fail. Even when the mercenary Dragoons abandoned this world, our warriors willingly shouldered the burden of preventing the Davions from returning here with their oppressor armies.

[Wade]: But that's not the whole story, is it? What of the naval blockade?

[Shei]: When the people of Tikonov stood as one to throw off the bonds of Davion oppression and called on the Chancellor's favor, the murderer Hasek, who even now is prosecuting a war against our nation, sent his WarShips to cut off Tikonov from the rest of

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the Inner Sphere. He ordered the seizure or destruction of every inbound and outbound DropShip, but his fleet could not stand against the strength of the Confederation. After several titanic battles, the Davions retreated. Now they satisfy themselves with destroying shipments of food and medicines coming in to this world, and taking prisoner Tikonov students and workers bound for opportunities in the rest of the Confederation.

[Wade]: What about the reports of fighting around the planet?

[Shei]: When we destroyed the Davion garrison here a year ago, many enemy soldiers fled into the countryside and began a guerrilla war against the rightful government of Tikonov. We have caught or killed many hundreds of these criminals, but after almost forty years of occupation, the world is full of Davion sympathizers and agents. With the help of the people of Tikonov, we believe we will find the last of these criminals shortly.

[Wade]: So the Federated Suns hasn't made any attempts to recapture Tikonov by landing troops?

[Shei]: No, they haven't. And even if they tried, they could never succeed, which they know. The will of the people and of the Celestial Wisdom simply will not allow it.

[Wade]: Thank you, *Gao-shiao-zhang* Fah Li Shei. This has been Kollin Wade, reporting for Confederation News Associates from Tikonov.

DAVIONS SUE FOR PEACE

(3 October 3068)

Capella [CNA]—No longer able to justify their assault on the Capellan Confederation, the people of the Federated Suns are calling on their leaders to end the illegal war and finally accept Chancellor Liao's lasting peace proposal.

When the Davion criminal George Hasek, oppressor of billions of Capellan citizens in the Federated Suns' so-called Capellan March, launched his unprovoked and unjustified invasion of the St. Ives Commonality, he doubtless intended to conquer the same worlds his grandfather did just four decades earlier, this time adding them to his own realm. But the people of St. Ives long ago had enough of Davion subjugation, and despite the puppet "government in exile" that Hasek propped up in front of holocameras, stood fast against the invasion.

Hasek sent all his military power into the St. Ives Commonality, but could claim only defeat. Try as he might, he could not keep the truth from his own people: his kidnapping of Duke Kai Allard-Liao, his complete inability to gain control of even one Capellan world, the thousands of dead sons and daughters he sent back to their parents, the tens of thousands of prisoners or war our own valiant *janshi* have captured and the countless Davion troops who deserted their posts rather than feel the wrath of the mighty Capellan armed forces.

Since the beginning of this war, time and again we have seen civilian demonstrations against it erupting across the Federated Suns. We have also seen how Hasek brutally put down those demonstrations, killing and imprisoning at last count more than a million of his own citizens. News of his criminal actions has spread throughout the Federated Suns, so much so that even the Davion princess can no longer stomach his renegade behavior.

"George, stop this invasion at once!" she told Hasek in a message obtained by Capellan agents working in the Federated Suns. "We can no longer afford a war against the Capellan Confederation."

Nevertheless, Hasek continues to pursue his criminal enterprise. Even though his troops have been halted, even though his people continue to oppose this war and plead for its end, even though his princess has ordered him to cease this violent demonstration, Hasek continues to wage a war he cannot possibly win.

Chancellor Liao has pledged to end this violent and illegal assault on Capellan sovereignty peacefully if possible, militarily if necessary. So far, Hasek has forced the latter.

FALLING SKIES

In October of 3068, the war between Duke Hasek and the Capellan Confederation took a drastic turn. Succeeding against all odds, the AFFS forces stood just one jump away from Sian, with much of the St. Ives territories liberated behind them—willingly or otherwise. Though both sides tell a different version of events, the dramatic assault that struck the Celestial Throne sent shockwaves throughout the region and beyond.

SIAN STRUCK!

[Wen-Long]: My…my god. This is Peter Wen-Long. For those of you just joining us, Sian…has been attacked. The reports are confused and are…are just pouring in. What? I'm told we have a live feed from military command channels. Let's listen in.

[Unknown #1]: …have an ID yet?

[Unknown #2]: No. Sat comms are down and we've got multiple inbound unknowns on uncontrolled reentry paths. Damn thing must have blown everything nearby out of the sky.

[Unknown #1]: Sensor profile?

[Unknown #2]: Wideband EM interference. I can't even tell you how many damn ships there are! *Di bian*! Heat spike! It's firing!

[Unknown #1]: Wha… Where?

[Unknown #2]: Working.

[Unknown #3]: This is Sian Space Traffic Control. We've…We've lost the Forbidden City.

[Unknown #1]: What do you mean you've lost the Forbidden City? That's imposs—

[Unknown #3]: Every feed we had from the spaceport and its satellite locations just dropped, and our screens…There's a fifty-kilometer wide sensor hole around the Forbidden City.

[Unknown #2]: Confirmed. Every base in the city just dropped off-line and…Wireless communications are impossible, we've even

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lost the landlines. It's like…*by Buddha*…there aren't that many…I mean, a nuclear—

[Unknown #1]: Don't say that! We don't know it was a nuke yet. Could just be jamming…

[Wen-Long]: Can we get some confirmation of what's going on?

[Unknown #4]: …fire, buildings disinte… [*static*] …on fire. Alert every… [*static*]

[Unknown #1]: What was that?

[Unknown #2]: Forbidden City emergency channel. Just barely coming in.

[Unknown #4]: …allions three, four and five, respond to sector one. Call in…call in everyone. What th— [*static*]

[Unknown #2]: Another heat spike!

[Unknown #1]: Send to all stations: Sian under attack. All military forces on high alert for immediate response and civil defense. Wu, get me some damn eyes in the sky!

[Unknown #2]: Getting something. Bounced through about five relays.

[Unknown #1]: Give it to me! Blake's Blood…

[Wen-Long]: We're getting a visual feed from an outlying station. I…I don't know if you can see this, but… it…it's incredible. The Forbidden City is on fire. The whole city is burning. Beams of light, what must be lasers, are cutting through the smoke leaving a trail…A trail of fire hundreds, thousands of meters high. How…? Who could possibly…?

—*CBS News Special Report*, Sian, 7 October 3068

NOT AGAIN!

"It is said that if we are not careful, history will come full circle and repeat itself. Apparently, and in the darkest way possible, this has finally happened to the Capellan Confederation.

"It was one of our darkest moments. In August of 2367, Confederation troops raised from Sarna and St. Ives naval forces, supported by hastily armed merchants, engaged a flotilla of Davion "peacekeepers" above Capella, led by then-Chancellor Franco Liao. Though our troops were outnumbered and outclassed, the epic battle shattered three Davion regiments…at the horrific cost of two thousand Capellan civilians and the obliteration of our capital city on Capella.

"In the aftermath, the Confederation moved its capital permanently to Sian and the black border was added to the official Capellan triangle, to commemorate the valiant sacrifices of those citizens who died to prove that the Confederation would never yield to a foreign aggressor. The Davion regiments destroyed on Capella never re-formed, a testimony to Capellan mettle.

"Flash forward to the present, to a disturbingly familiar scene that echoes in the hearts and minds of a new generation of Confederation citizens. Just over ten days ago, one or more Davion WarShips committed a heinous act of aggression against Sian, destroying the Celestial Palace and most of the capital city. Murdering millions—including our beloved Duchess, Candace Liao, and perhaps even the Celestial Wisdom himself—the brutal attack has left our people reeling with shock, grief and anger.

"Though the FedSuns news agencies repeatedly deny their involvement, the fact that Davion troops stand an easy jump away from Sian is not to be overlooked, nor are the centuries of hostility the Davion realm has always directed toward our nation. Theories of alternate attackers abound, accusing everyone from the Free Worlds League to the Word of Blake, and questions swirl in minds across the Confederation as to where our own WarShips were on this fateful day. But none can overpower the obvious, imminent threat of Duke George Hasek's naked aggression. No culprit could be more obvious than the Davion invaders.

"We do know known for certain the pain, the loss, the horror and—above all else—the determination that followed. Just as on that fateful August day seven hundred years ago, the people of the Capellan Confederation everywhere have grown united and resolved. We have stood on the precipice before. Never will we do so again.

"For KDBR, I am Robert Sung-Li. Good night."

—*News 2 Commentary*, KDBR News (a CBS affiliate), Denbar, 10 October 3068

"INTO THE BREACH"

…However, my sources at TMI informed me that out of the sixteen Davion WarShips left from the FedCom Civil War, only five are in deployable condition. Of those five, only one Davion WarShip known to be operational condition is likewise known to be near our borders. It is currently stationed over Tikonov, renewing the Davion blockade of that world. Unless Hasek sent a partially crippled ship (entirely possible, given his recent power craving) to Sian, he has no resources to have carried out the attack.

But if the Davions are too weak and spread too thin to conduct such an operation, then who did it? Whoever carried it out must have enough covert operations resources to take down Sian's defense grid, sneak a WarShip into orbit, do the hideous deed and escape.

Such a group would need a nearby WarShip fleet, as well as access to the Confederation's defense grid to shut it down. The attack went off flawlessly, so the perpetrators must be skilled WarShip operators with a competent intelligence agency. The three most likely suspects are House Marik, Word of Blake or turncoats in Confederation—elements of Free Capella, blindly seeking revenge for their past defeats.

But the Free Worlds League is not known for committing such heinous acts, and it is unlikely that even Free Capella would fire on the Celestial Palace, especially with St. Ives' Duchess Candace Liao in attendance. That leaves one major suspect beyond the Davions. Could Blake's wrath finally have come to Sian?

—Excerpt from *Truth and Lies*, a Confederation-wide syndicated column, 18 October 3068

CELESTIAL CRISES

UNION OF SWORD AND SPIRIT

(12 October 3068)

Sian [CNA]—In the aftermath of the terrible assault on Sian five days ago, Strategic Military Director Talon Zahn addressed the Capellan people from a grassy hill overlooking the still-burning Forbidden City.

"Five days ago, the Capellan Confederation was assaulted by its enemies in a way never before thought possible. In a cowardly move, those enemies struck the heart of the Confederation—Sian—with an anonymous WarShip attack. First they crippled our communications and planetary defense satellites, then they attacked the Celestial Throne. They directed their weapons on the Forbidden City, with the obvious intent of completely destroying our capital, and jumped away before our armed forces could respond to this unconscionable assault on our sovereignty.

"That assault did not completely destroy the Forbidden City. Thanks to the valiant combined efforts of every firefighter, police officer, soldier and citizen, the fires our enemies ignited with their weapon blasts did not spread to consume the entire city. Nevertheless, those strikes devastated much of the capital. The city burns yet, as you can see behind me.

"At this time, we do not know how many martyrs perished in this craven assault, but we do know its target: the Celestial Palace. The majority of the strikes were targeted there, and there the greatest devastation lies. Firefighters and rescue teams could not reach the palace until just two days ago. What they found was disheartening.

"Candace Liao, aunt to the Chancellor and Duchess of the St. Ives Commonality, is among the dead. Worse still, the Celestial Wisdom is missing. While we hold out hope against hope, we must also face reality. No survivors have been found amid the ruins of the palace, even in the bunkers designed to withstand direct nuclear assaults.

"My heart is heavy for having to report this, but the Chancellor, the Celestial Wisdom, the leader of the Capellan people, Sun-Tzu Liao, is lost to us.

"As much as we might want to grieve over these terrible losses, we must put aside our emotions and instead direct those energies against our enemies. The perpetrators of this atrocity are clear—the Davions. They have kidnapped our citizens, tainted our worlds with their assaults time and again, and now murdered countless numbers of our fellow Capellans in hopes of preventing us from destroying them. But they did not take into account the spirit of the Capellan people. We may have lost our Celestial Wisdom, but our sorrow will not dissuade us from doing what we must. We must avenge our Chancellor, and we must avenge Duchess Candace!

"Clearly the criminal George Hasek-Davion seeks not only to claim the St. Ives Commonality for himself, but to place a puppet on the Celestial Throne. His abduction of Duke Kai was merely his first step. Now that the Celestial Wisdom has been lost, he believes he can launch his final solution. We will not allow that!

"People of the Confederation, your duty is clear. Peace with the Davions is possible now only through their destruction! We must make them pay for their crimes. We will make their rivers and lakes and oceans run red with blood! We will destroy their armies and crush their will. We will free the Capellan citizens still under their yoke, and we will free their own people from the Davion legacy of tyranny. And though we will lose many lives in the process, we can no longer stand idly by.

"When we are through with the Davions, the Inner Sphere will rejoice and sing, for the Confederation will have delivered them from evil once and for all!"

"THE THIN LINE"

"We of the Free Capella Movement hereby deny any involvement in or knowledge of the 'Day of Death' orbital attacks on Sian. We do not condone or promote such terrorist operations and would never consider participating in one. We strive to promote the freedom and safety of Confederation citizens through legitimate means. Though those may include military means at times, never would they include such a reckless attack.

"Many may wish Sun-Tzu Liao dead, even us at times. However, we would never consider the deaths of tens of thousands of others in the same attack to be acceptable 'collateral damage'. For our onetime benefactors, the Federated Suns, to do so is outrageous and unwarranted.

"From this day forth, Free Capella repudiates any affiliation or peaceful relations with the Federated Suns. From this day forth, we will fight side by side with the official government and military of the Capellan Confederation to push back the Federated Suns invasion of the Xin Sheng province. We will fight as always to preserve our fellow citizens' freedom and safety, only now against a different foe, House Davion.

"There is a thin line between acceptable military operations and monstrous acts. George Hasek, you have just crossed that line and will pay dearly for that mistake."

—Colonel Warner Doles, CO of the Blackwind Lancers (Free Capella), 12 October 3068

TOO FAR!

(17 October 3068)

St. Ives [SINS] – "The Federated Suns has gone too far in its misguided attempts to fight for the independence of the St. Ives Commonality."

Salentine Liao, close advisor to Duchess Candace Liao and a senior minister on St. Ives, gave that statement just days after confirmation that the duchess was killed on Sian. "St. Ives has a long history of peaceful relations with the rest of the Inner Sphere, as it has since the first days of the St. Ives Mercantile Association. But

CELESTIAL CRISES

CANOPUS GOES SILENT

(18 October 3068)

Joppa [CSN] – Word of Blake officials have confirmed earlier speculation that contact with the HPG on Canopus has been lost. As of October 16th, no messages have been received from Canopus IV, or from any of the worlds within a fifty light-year radius of that planet. The affected worlds include: Adherlwin, Borgan's Rift, Farnardir, Gallis, Lockton, Magarez and Royal Foxx in the Magistracy of Canopus, as well as Aspropirgos, Butzfletz, Gouderak and Umka in the Free Worlds League.

The Word of Blake has not commented on the likely cause of a HPG shutdown on this scale, which is unprecedented since the Terran Hegemony's collapse after the fall of the first Star League. Blakist representatives likewise did not offer any estimates on when service is likely to resume.

With the Federated Suns' vicious attack on Sian only two weeks old, one cannot help but draw a parallel. Has the Federated Suns struck at Canopus to isolate one of the Confederation's most powerful allies? If so, what lies in store for Taurus?

With the communications breakdown, Magestrix Emma Centrella could not be reached for comment. Her daughter and heiress-apparent, Naomi Centrella, remains on tour with the Third Canopian Fusiliers in Capellan space.

we can no longer stand by as George Hasek and the Armed Forces of the Federated Suns prosecute a war of liberation, murdering our citizens and our beloved leaders, in our name. This stops now!"

Speaking to more than a quarter of a million St. Ives citizens, who gathered to mourn the deaths of Duchess Liao and the Chancellor, she took the opportunity to echo Capellan Strategic Military Director Talon Zahn's impassioned speech to the Confederation five days earlier. "We must end this rebellion against our brothers and sisters and stand as one Capellan people. The Davions are not our allies, and they do not fight for our best interests. And now they have murdered the greatest among us! We cannot allow their slaying of Duchess Candace to go unpunished! It is up to us to lead the strike on New Syrtis to free Duke Kai and punish the murderer, George Hasek!"

Liao, who broke down in tears at the foot of a 30-meter tall mural of the slain duchess at the end of her address, returned to the duchess' palace, but not before urging the people of the St. Ives Commonality once more to oppose the Federated Suns' invasion.

"Their legacy of oppression ends now! For Candace!"

NEWS DOWNLOADER v3.7

DATE & TITLE	*SERVICE*	*STATUS*
(20-APR-68) "AS WAR SPREADS, IE EMERGES AS UNLIKELY EMPLOYER"	[MERCNET]	COMPLETED
(05-JUL-68) "BLAKIST FORCES EMPLOY WMDS ON ALTAIR, YORII"	[INN]	DOWNLOADING
(08-JUL-68) "DAVION TROOPS PILLAGE WMD CEMETERY ON TSINGTAO"	[CBS]	ACCESSING

A SERVICE OF IRIAN NEWS INTERSTELLAR

AFTERSHOCKS

AFTERSHOCKS

[Camera fades in on a room decorated in white panels with gray marble trim. In the middle of the room stands a U-shaped table with a black marble top, behind the center of which sits INN Special Correspondent Michael Bosworth. Four men and one woman occupy other seats at the table, with three to Bosworth's left and two to his right.]

[Bosworth]: "Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. I'm Michael Bosworth, and this is a special edition of 'Stellar Pulse Today'. Tonight, our topic: Jihad, the Word of Blake's ever-widening war on the Inner Sphere. Let's meet tonight's panel, joining us in our INN studios here on Orestes…

"To my immediate right, Mandrinn Kian Lih Sung, special representative for the Capellan Confederation, and aide to the late Chancellor Sun-Tzu Liao."

[Sung—a man of obvious Asian ancestry, with dark almond eyes, a well-trimmed and slightly drooping moustache (shaved clean under his nose) and dressed in a black Nehru suit with a close-necked mandarin collar—nods silently to Bosworth.]

[Bosworth]: "Beside him, James Graham, our resident expert on the culture and politics of the Free Worlds League and chairman of the Free Worlds Parliamentary Archives. Thank you for coming, James."

[Graham is portly, obviously not a warrior, but is well turned out. His long dark hair reaches to his collar and he sports a thin mustache. His charcoal suit is well tailored, but he seems slightly uncomfortable with the high collar of his starched white shirt.]

[Graham]: "Thank you for having me, Michael."
[Bosworth]: "And to my immediate left, speaking on behalf of the Federated Suns, is Countess Ariel Simms…"

HIDDEN ARMIES

(7 July 3068)

Arc-Royal [INN] – In the face of massive destruction wrought by the Word of Blake, people everywhere are asking the same questions. How could this happen? Why didn't our governments see it coming? Everyone wants to know where to point the finger of blame for a catastrophic intelligence failure.

The truth is, the Inner Sphere's intelligence community did not "fail" at all.

Following the fall of Terra to the Word of Blake, the community had known of the Blakists' Deep Periphery training camps. Likewise, the Blakists' acquisition of so many new BattleMechs—from the Terran factories they reactivated and from sources across the Inner Sphere—led analysts to postulate (correctly) that the Word of Blake had more troops than they officially acknowledged. The elaborate shell game the Blakists played by expanding their existing divisions while duplicating designations of existing Level IIIs to hide the paper trail generated by those new formations succeeded in hiding their location, but not their existence.

On the WarShip front, the Word of Blake helped the Free Worlds League salvage Star League-era WarShips. That they kept the best ships for themselves—a *McKenna*-class battleship, for example—should surprise no one. The Blakists' ability to kick-start the Free Worlds League's WarShip program, and that of the Capellan Confederation, pointed to access to unknown manufacturing plants, or perhaps a large cache of components. We now have a name for that source, even if the precise location of the "Ruins of Gabriel" remains elusive.

So much for the men and materiel.

As to intent, the intelligence community (again, correctly) judged that these forces would safeguard Blakist holdings. William Blane's diplomatic initiatives in the Chaos March back in the early 3060s were taken as a strong indication that the Word of Blake wanted to establish a buffer zone, finally resulting in the formation of the Word of Blake Protectorate. Relations between the Dragoons and the former ComStar were never good. To anyone who could read a map, the Blakist conquest of Terra set the two groups on a collision course. The Blakist-sponsored violence on Outreach was shocking, but unsurprising in light of the veiled declaration of war represented by the formation of the Allied Mercenary Command.

The rest of the Inner Sphere was not oblivious to all of this, but they were in no position to take action against a probationary member-state of the Star League over dealings with a non-aligned state. If challenged over their actions, the Blakists could have argued that the whole affair lay outside the jurisdiction of the Star League council—or even called on the Star League to come to their aid.

The intelligence community is only "guilty" of failing to predict how the Word of Blake would react to a situation that did not yet exist. Not knowing that the Star League would not survive the fourth Whitting Conference, they had no way to guess what was coming.

*****Transmission Altered*****
"As was foretold, the spirit of blessed Blake blinded the heretics and unbelievers to our preparations for the glory of the Third Transfer."
*****Alteration Ended*****

AFTERSHOCKS

[Simms, a 30-something woman of means, her raven hair pulled back into a single pony tail and wearing a conservative Avalonian-cut suit decorated simply with a sword-and-sun lapel pin, shakes Bosworth's hand.]

[Simms]: "Michael."

[Bosworth]: "…with Mister Bertram Habeas, acting editor-in-chief of the former Chekswa School of Literature on Donegal, sitting beside her…"

[Habeas—a nervous-looking man in his mid-20s, with short-cropped, dark brown hair and green eyes that constantly shift between the other guests, Bosworth, and the camera—keeps his hands entwined on the table before him. His off-the-rack business suit is slate gray, and a silver-and-blue enameled Steiner fist serves as a pin for his black tie. His thumbs tap the table in a random pattern.]

[Habeas]: "Pleased to be here, Michael."

[Bosworth]: "…And, last but not least, Mister Mishcha Kurosawa on the far left, representing the people of the Draconis Combine."

[Kurosawa, short and thin, with an oval face and wheat-colored skin, flashes an open smile filled with brilliant white teeth. His dark eyes are enigmatic, as though the friendly manner can be switched off and on at will. Surprisingly, he isn't wearing traditional Combine clothing, but instead a signature charcoal-gray silk Kirisuki one-suit, with a hint of a dragon woven in iridescent thread across the torso. He bows his head to the gathering.]

[Kurosawa]: "*Arigato*. I'm pleased to be here."

[Bosworth]: "Right. So, let's begin by addressing the biggest concern—Tharkad. Mr. Habeas, can you give us any new information on just what happened there? And, more importantly, where is the Archon?"

[Habeas jumps slightly and takes a moment to compose himself, obviously unprepared to field the first question.] "Ah, well, the evidence on Tharkad pretty much speaks for itself. I've heard, of course, that the Word of Blake insists they did not set off a nuclear device, but they don't deny firing on the capital city. And they didn't hesitate to use the same means to…pacify Outreach, nor in their recent attack on Donegal. Numerous witnesses and satellite footage in and around Tharkad City clearly witnessed the explosion and mushroom cloud, and a blanket of radioactive waste has rendered everything within fifty kilometers of ground zero completely uninhabitable. Casualty estimates are horrendous, in the millions, with hundreds more dead every day.

[Slightly more emotional now]: "I mean, whether or not the bombardment had anything to do with it or whether the city reactor—as some are saying—simply chose that moment to suffer a catastrophic meltdown, the Blakists' role in it can't be denied. *They* were the ones who fired on a civilian population center without warning. *They* were the ones who landed troops afterward and began shooting anything that moved. *They* were the ones who blockaded the system—and are still there, even now—to block any form of communication or humanitarian aid. Only the fact that LAAF troops managed to secure a foothold, and that some information has leaked through the blockade, makes it possible to grasp the extent of the damage."

[Bosworth]: "So, who's in charge right now? Where is the Archon in all of this?"

[Habeas]: "The Archon? Um, rest assured that, despite the initial reports and the loss of HPG contact on Tharkad, we managed to determine that he is, in fact, alive and well. I've seen some reports saying he was injured at first, and that even the people on Tharkad weren't sure for a few months as to his condition, but some footage smuggled through the blockade proves that Archon Peter is most certainly alive, and in command of the local resistance—er, not only that, but he's also aware of affairs beyond Tharkad."

[Sung, after a slight pause]: "From everything Mr. Habeas says, and chooses not say, it seems that the Word of Blake is still in charge of Tharkad."

[Habeas, flustered]: "The Archon is *absolutely* in charge, and looks forward to convening a new Estates General as soon as the current crisis on Tharkad is resolved. Militarily, of course, he is being assisted by Margrave Adam Steiner for Alliance-wide defense matters." *[turns to face Sung]* "And one could as easily ask who is in charge on Sian, considering the *tragic* loss of your own 'Celestial Wisdom'."

[Bosworth]: "Gentlemen, please. There will be time enough for rebuttal later in our program. Our viewers want facts, not a Solaran pre-game show." *[turns to Habeas]* "Getting back on track. Mr. Habeas, is this self-prosecuted war against the Free Worlds League by your own Duke Kelswa legitimate? Does the Estates General approve of such an obviously uncharacteristic action? The precedent set by the Duke of Skye is rather disturbing, to say the least."

[Habeas]: "Well, um"—*[nervous glance at James Graham]*—"I think that, without getting into some of the rhetoric that some local leaders may have used to justify the current conflict, I have to admit that, as the invading nation here, one might see our actions as unjustified, but considering the obvious ties between the League and the Word of Blake, Duke Kelswa-Steiner of Skye and Duke Umayr of Bolan have a right to assume an…*aggressive* stance here, to proactively defend the Alliance against possible aggression by Blakist allies. You have to admit that, in the moments after the Tharkad attack, the natural assumption had to be that the League would act in support of its friends. The Alliance has suffered quite enough lately."

AFTERSHOCKS

[Graham, eyes narrowing]: "Having had their fill of fighting each other, they now seek… other diversions. The Free Worlds is no Capellan Confederation, however." *[A thin smile crosses his lips as he tips his head toward Sung.]*

[Sung]: "Of all the—"

[Habeas, face reddening]: "Now, wait just one *verdammt*—"

[Bosworth]: "Mr. Graham, we will get to you." *[returns to Bertram Habeas]* "So Mr. Habeas, in your opinion, how is the population of the Alliance handling the loss of Tharkad and the rumored bombardments of Donegal, Skye and Coventry? Is there anything you wish to say to Lyran viewers out there, especially the ones away from home?"

[Habeas, flustered, and glaring at Graham]: "The people of the Alliance remain strong, despite the *very real* attacks on Tharkad, Donegal and elsewhere. To the people of the Lyran Alliance, I would say that we have suffered much these past few years, and these latest indignities are the worst. But at the end of the day, even weapons of mass destruction and the ambitions of a few terrorists have failed to break our nation. As long as we stick together, we will always be here." *[shoots another scathing look Graham's way]* "*Terror* cannot prevail against any nation whose people remain united."

[Bosworth]: "Thank you, Mr. Habeas, for your insightful answers. I'm sure many Lyrans in our audience will feel comforted by your reassurances." *[to the camera]* "As many of our Federated Suns viewers know, within hours of the horrific attack on Tharkad City, New Avalon—the capital of the Suns—was struck in similar fashion from space. Countess, can you tell us what happened in the New Avalon system and what is the status of Avalon City?"

[Simms]: "What happened? I'll tell you what happened! The Word of Blake launched an unprovoked assault on the people of the Federated Suns! Jumping into pirate points around our capital, their WarShips opened fire without warning, killing *millions* in the first few minutes. And when the people of New Avalon refused to roll over, the bloody Blakists tried to take by force what they couldn't take through fear and intimidation. But that didn't get them any further. The only parts of Avalon City they've set foot in are sections they destroyed from orbit just so they could claim that much.

"The Blakists have tried three times to take Avalon City, and each time we've beaten them back. The only thing that's saved their asses to this point is that they haven't used nuclear weapons on our citizens. But we know what they've done to Tharkad and to Outreach. And they've taken the lives of millions of innocents who will be avenged. When all is said and done, there will be no dark place they can hide!"

[Bosworth]: "What of the First Princess? Conflicting reports have come from the Chaos March, where Blakist propaganda says a jump incident destroyed the transport she was on. However, the Avalon Press continues to maintain that the First Princess has arrived on New Avalon and is safe from harm. Can you confirm either report?"

MEDUSANS INTERCEPT TAURIAN WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION

(13 August 3068)

New Syrtis [FSNS] – Rear Admiral Harwood has reported successfully intercepting yet another Taurian supply convoy as it attempted to resupply the Concordat troops still maintaining a foothold on Electra in the Pleiades Cluster.

Last month Admiral Harwood's Hydra Assault Squadron caught a flotilla of Concordat military transports attempting to sneak in from one of the system's many pirate points. After a short but spirited engagement led by the Admiral's flagship, the *Fortress*-Class *Ajax*, the interlopers were driven off with two DropShips and seven fighters destroyed and a third DropShip crippled. The Hydras lost three fighters, but two of the pilots were later recovered.

Most disturbing is the report that the marines from *Ajax* discovered two nuclear devices aboard the crippled *TCS Jamestown.* The Taurian Concordat holds the dubious distinction of being the only government to refuse to sign the Ares Conventions. The Word of Blake's willingness to use weapons of mass destruction, combined with the desperate situation the Pleiades invaders now face, may have persuaded the Concordat to unleash its nuclear arsenal on the battlefield for the first time in almost three centuries.

Duke Hasek has yet to comment on this disturbing development, but mercenary troops currently involved in holding off the Taurian threat have called for any Taurian force that dares unleash such weapons to be declared war criminals.

This is the third time Admiral Harwood's Hydra Assault Squadron has encountered Taurian ships since assuming station in the Pleiades Cluster earlier this year. The Hydras' parent unit, the Medusans, are a mercenary DropShip force under contract to March Lord Hasek since 3061. The Basilisk Squadron—the Medusans' second assault DropShip squadron—is expected to relieve Harwood's command in the new year.

*****Transmission Altered*****

"The Taurian Concordat has seen a glimmer of the truth! Those who betrayed all humankind are a cancer that must be burned from the body of humanity."

*****Alteration Ended*****

AFTERSHOCKS

[Simms]: "The *Princess Regent* remains in an undisclosed location and is in constant contact with her senior military and government leaders. She wasn't killed, no matter what the rumors say. In fact, she appeared on a broadcast to the entire nation just a few days ago, though I'm sure some crackpot out there will say that her tri-vid message was some elaborate phony produced by the same people that faked Hanse Davion's death and are keeping our relations with extra-galactic aliens a secret.

"No matter what you might hear or believe, the simple reason for all this cloak-and-dagger is her security. She did have some close calls as she made her way back home from Tharkad, and we're not about to publish her itinerary just so the Blakists can take a shot at her. The people of the Federated Suns understand that."

[Bosworth]: "As, I'm sure, do our viewers. Moving on, then. The most recent reports coming out of the Suns lately, especially from the Capellan March, suggest that Duke Hasek has begun to prosecute his own war against the Confederation, defying the will of the Office of the First Princess. Could you comment on this, Countess?"

[Simms]: "Seems to me the people of the St. Ives Compact have chosen to throw off the bonds of Capellan oppression once and for all. Duke Hasek is only doing what the Federated Suns' treaties with the Compact demand—defending St. Ives' sovereignty from an aggressor looking to suck it dry and let its people rot in repayment for three decades of honest-to-God freedom! And Lord knows they need the help! The Capellans may not be able to suborn the Star League to fight their wars this time, but news of Blakist activity within the Confederation is conspicuous by its absence…"

[Sung]: "Oh yes! Well and good to play the strident victim, cowering before the Word of Blake, but when confronted with their own aggression we see the Federated Suns preferring to deceive, incite and obfuscate. There is no…"

[Simms]: "The truth speaks for itself, Mandrinn, as do the blatant lies you're spewing."

[Sung]: "There *is no* Compact, and has not been one since Candace Liao *chose* to return her realm to the womb of the Confederation. And no act of aggression, either, in the four years since Focht's 'Truce of Sian' save George Hasek's recent and *unprovoked invasion* of Capellan space!"

[Simms]: "Get your facts straight, Mandrinn! The oppressed peoples of the St. Ives Compact are finally fighting for their freedom, and now that you don't have the Star League to do your dirty work, you cry foul!"

[Sung]: "Strange that we do not see the crest of the St. Ives Lancers *or* Free Capella on these battlefields! But, in fact, regiment after regiment under the imperialistic sword and sun of House Davion? Or is it now House Hasek?

DARING RESCUE

(16 August 3068)

Orestes [INN] – Earlier this month, the CSS *Bordeaux* penetrated the Word of Blake cordon around besieged Tukayyid. Demonstrating great skill and courage, Precentor Forrest Cole, commander of the *Bordeaux*, successfully lured both of the Blakist WarShips in the Tukayyid system out of their position close to the planet. Using his frigate's superior acceleration, Cole exploited the narrow window of opportunity thus created, landing an expeditionary force on Tukayyid despite tenacious opposition from the Blakists' remaining aerospace assets. These forces, comprised of elements from the Com Guards' 104th Division, subsequently extracted Primus Mori and several senior Com Guards personnel, who had been trapped on-world under enemy fire for more than six months.

Though dogged by Blakist naval and aerospace forces all the way to a pirate jump point, the *Bordeaux* successfully escaped to Orestes. Making planetfall last week, Primus Mori was full of praise for "the heroic efforts of the Com Guards in stemming the evil tide unleashed upon the Inner Sphere." Meanwhile, Com Guards officials report that while the *Bordeaux* suffered only superficial damage, she inflicted "heavy damage" on the Blakist forces she encountered.

First Precentor Gavin Dow spoke at length of his joy at Primus Mori's survival. "I cannot sufficiently express my gratitude to Anastasias Focht for masterminding the operation that returned our beloved Primus to us. Were it not for the foresight of our former Precentor Martial, I would probably have been charged with the burden of leading ComStar through this current crisis."

*****Transmission Altered*****

"Though he is retired, Focht still plays the puppet master—jerking the strings of his puppet Primus to pull her from our grasp. Do not let his age or apparent lack of position fool you. Focht is a power of which to be wary. But at what cost did his tool survive? Fully half the Com Guards that struck Tukayyid will stay there permanently, and the damage to their precious WarShip—one of so few remaining—was far greater than they admit. What cost, Focht? Gavin Dow cannot be happy to see your puppet return. And what action did he take to rescue Mori? He could throw whole divisions against blessed Terra, yet could spare nothing to rescue his Primus. Ambition, greed and corruption! This is the new shape into which Focht and his puppet have forged the golden dreams of the blessed Blake. We must open the eyes of our misguided brethren. We must illuminate the truth with a dazzling ray of light."

*****Alteration Ended*****

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[Bosworth]: "Countess! Mandrinn Sung! We will address the ills of the Confederation shortly, so please extend some courtesy to your peers and allow them to speak without interruption." *[back to Simms]* "Countess, since we seem to be speaking of St. Ives and in particular, the late Candace Liao's family, can you confirm the rumor that Kai Allard-Liao is in Duke Hasek's protective custody?"

[Sung]: "Protective custody…ha! That would be the latest Davionista euphemism for a prisoner of war?"

[Bosworth, throwing Sung a dirty look]: "Mandrinn Sung–" *[Bosworth is interrupted as the Countess grabs the commentator's arm, pushes him back slightly and looks directly at Sung.]*

[Simms]: "Bold words coming from a nation who felt so beholden to the people of St. Ives that they had to kill 7.4 million of them just to *free* them. Hardly a—"

[Sung]: "*That* may be the fiction you teach on worlds of the Davion outback, but it will not hold water in this court. *And if* we are comparing the price in lives the Federated Suns places on freedoms, shall we look at the cost of the Fourth Succession War, then? Where Hanse Davion's righteousness 'liberated' more than 100 million Confederation citizens from their mortal coil for no other reason than to annex some of our most productive worlds?"

[Simms]: "Worlds that tasted freedom for the first time four decades ago, worlds whose populations and economies grew by magnitudes under the Federated Commonwealth!"

[Sung]: "Duke Hasek is nothing more than—"

[Simms]: "Duke Hasek responded to a request from Duke Allard-Liao himself, who is Hasek's personal guest on New Syrtis. He and his family are free to travel as they like. He's met with representatives from St. Ives as well as his sisters, both of whom are taking an active part in aiding the St. Ives people with their bid for freedom."

[Sung]: "*Wang-ba-dan!* The person of St. Ives truly in need of his freedom is Kai Allard-Liao himself. His sisters, of course, have been 'invited' to New Syrtis, but will take no part in delivering more hostages into Hasek's greedy hands.

"Or are you saying Duke Kai *asked* for a military extraction, taking no aides and no bona fides from the Duchess, in order to meet behind her back and plot against her efforts to successfully and peacefully reintegrate the people of St. Ives with their Capellan family? I cannot believe he would so betray his mother, or, now, her memory!"

[Bosworth]: "Countess! Mandrinn! *Enough*! This is *not* a forum to discuss the ills and errors of the Federated Suns *or* the Capellan Confederation! This is a forum to present what information each of us knows to better assess the common threat of the Word of Blake! Or have you forgotten what they did to your nations only a few short months ago?!"

[Silence for a few heartbeats]

[Bosworth]: "Now, Countess, can you tell us how the Office of the First Princess assesses the total situation? What's the state of affairs as she sees it?"

[Simms]: "You mean, what's going on? The Inner Sphere is going to hell in a handbasket, that's what's going on! We've got the Blakists prosecuting a war against pretty much all of humanity because they've got some delusions of grandeur. Those crazy sonsabitches think they can destroy civilization as we know it by targeting a few capital worlds and suborning others so they can swoop in like some kind of saviors. Well, we already had one ComStar, and you see where that got us. Two hundred years of war and nearly a new dark age while they spent the profits building their own army. That's not going to happen again!"

[Bosworth]: "Indeed. Thank you, Countess, for your insightful and passionate responses. We will now turn our attention to our esteemed representative from the Draconis Combine, Mister Mishcha Kurosawa. Thank you for joining us, Mister Kurosawa."

[Kurosawa, leaning back as though staying out of the debate, flashes a too-knowing smile toward the rest of the participants.] "I'm glad to have accepted your invitation to this… discussion."

[Bosworth]: "The first thing we need to address is the status of the Coordinator. We've heard reports that he was suffering from everything ranging from a mild sickness to a stroke to fatigue. We've also heard rumors that the Coordinator—on his way to a secret base in the Benjamin District—has hand-delivered plans to Warlords Petroff and Kurita to invade the Draconis March. So just what is going on in the Combine? Can you set the record straight for our viewers, Mr. Kurosawa?

[Kurosawa]: "While we cannot deny that the weight of the universe has unduly pressed upon the Dragon's shoulders, his health is not in question. As for hand-delivering messages, the Dragon does not need such constraints with *his* Warlords. The Dragon has no plans to invade the Draconis March."

[Simms]: "Only because he's on a respirator. His Warlords, on the other hand…"

[Kurosawa, teeth showing through a brilliant smile, voice almost happy, eyes pinning Simms]: "When the time comes, the Dragon will die honorably, as did his great father before him. Not drowning in his own drool after a heart attack, following the receipt of a message from a Capellan pup."

[Bosworth]: "Please, Mr. Kurosawa. We are here to talk about recent events, not ancient history. Getting back to the status of the Combine family, can you tell us about the Coordinator's son, Hohiro Kurita?"

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[Kurosawa]: "The Dragon's Heir, as during the Clan invasion and as the Dragon did before him during the Fourth Succession War, is taking the war directly to the Blakists."

[Bosworth]: "Very good. Now, we've had several conflicting reports regarding the status of your capital, Luthien. Pirate transmissions indicate that the Black Pearl has fallen to the same fate as Tharkad, but up until recently, official reports from your government indicated that Luthien was simply undergoing an HPG upgrade. Both of these reports conflict with a subsequent Voice-approved statement that a major rebellion was underway by rogue groups, including—or even led by—the so-called Black Dragon Society, and that the Blakists' arrival there occurred only after the initial coup had been launched. So where does the truth lie? Has Luthien truly fallen to the Word of Blake and its dark allies?"

[Kurosawa]: "Luthien was indeed undergoing an HPG upgrade. It was simply bad karma that terrible events should unfold during this scheduled communications blackout. But let me be very clear. Luthien was not, nor can it be, lost to the Blakists." *[Eyes flick to Habeas, who scowls.]* "They, like some"—*[gaze flicking to Simms]*—"are scavengers and bottom feeders, leaping at rumors of 'internal issues' to achieve their own aims. As for these alleged rebellions and internal dissensions, what does that have to do with the Word of Blake? If such is occurring, it is an internal matter, which will be dealt with."

[Simms]: "Luthien's gone dark, Kurosawa-san. Sounds like a little more than an internal issue. Or perhaps the Black Dragons finally managed to overthrow the Coordinator? They *did* kill his wife a few years ago."

[Kurosawa's smile falters, his voice becoming slightly rough]: "*Tai-sho* Sakade absolved all shame in *seppuku*. The Dragon will not brook the soiling of her name or memory." *[smile returns with visible effort]*

[Bosworth]: "Other troubling reports indicate that the Clans are taking advantage of these attacks and have hit worlds along your border with the Ghost Bears. Comments?"

[Kurosawa]: "The Clans are warriors and are forever active. As for complicity in the Jihad, do not be ridiculous. The idea of the Clans aiding the Blakists is akin to describing the fallen Star League as effectual."

[Bosworth]: "Granted. However, can you confirm that yet another Clan from their homeworlds has arrived on your border with the Outworlds Alliance and been involved in attacks there, again coinciding suspiciously with the Blakist war?"

[Kurosawa]: "There are always rumors. Sorting through the chaff for the wheat is what we are about, is it not?" *[glances around at the other guests]* "There are rumors of black 'Mechs bearing the Hell's Horses logo operating in the near Periphery. Also rumors of a new Clan, with a twisted snake against a star, moving subtly along multiple borders, including the Dragon's. But the rumor I assume you are referring to concerns Clan Snow Raven. That Clan is indeed in the Periphery and already working closely with the Outworlds Alliance. They have apparently cleansed the pirate worlds of Rezak's Hole and Farstar; a feat we are more than willing to applaud. One or two incidents have occurred between us." *[waves a hand casually]* "It is being dealt with."

WORD OF BLAKE. WHY DO THEY DO IT?

(23 August 3068)

Arcturus [TBC] – The Word of Blake has unleashed terror and horror on a scale unprecedented since the early Succession Wars. But in the midst of the death and destruction, one question goes unanswered. Why do they do it? Not their leaders, but the rank and file. Surely, some of them must stop and wonder why they are using nuclear weapons like firecrackers, or just why it is necessary to bathe whole worlds in a chemical and biological Armageddon.

Of course, the answer (like the question) is not that simple.

First, it is necessary to wonder if they actually *know* what is going on. The Word of Blake is just as bad as ComStar was under Primus Myndo Waterly. With complete control over all interstellar communications between the worlds where they hold sway, it is highly unlikely that the Blakists' adherents are in a position to grasp what is actually happening. At best, any rumors that filter through can easily be dismissed as "enemy propaganda."

Second, when one looks at individual instances where weapons of mass destruction have been unleashed, one may see that such worlds were heavily fortified against any assault. Would any soldier really object to eliminating the enemy wholesale, when faced with the alternative of dying in a costly ground action? With the choice of dying for "the cause" or pressing a button to make the other man die for his, the nuclear option starts to look pretty good. Certainly our forefathers thought so on numerous occasions during the Succession Wars.

*****Transmission Altered*****

"True warriors of Blake go into battle willingly, knowing that through their courageous efforts we may yet gain victory for all humankind. And what of propaganda? The corrupt leaders of the Inner Sphere are fast enough to spread their lies. What of Tharkad? They were quick enough to lay the blame for this so-called nuclear attack at our feet. What of the guilt for all the other crimes they try to foist upon us? How could we have been so wrong, to think that such as these could help us usher in the golden age the blessed Blake foretold?"

*****Alteration Ended*****

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[Simms]: "Oh, for Christ's sake! They've *invaded* the Outworlds Alliance, and now you've got various factions inside that nation alternately fighting them off and inviting them in. This is a danger that threatens both our nations…"

[Bosworth]: "I'm sure the situation is indeed well in hand. Thank you for your candor, Mr. Kurosawa." *[pause]* "Before we move on to Mandrinn Sung and the Confederation, I'd like to remind our panel that we are here to gather information to help our viewers—and ourselves—to sort out the events of the past few months. So, please, I ask one last time that you refrain from interrupting your colleagues." *[looks pointedly at Countess Simms]* "There will be time enough for panel interaction later in our program. Save your energy until then so we can proceed. Understood?"

[Nods and murmurs of assent from the various members.]

[Bosworth]: "Mandrinn Sung, what does the Confederation have to say about the apparently obvious signs that your nation is in league with the Blakists' self-proclaimed jihad? The inflammatory remarks made by the late Sun-Tzu Liao, which forced the disbanding of the Star League, certainly set in motion the horrific events—perpetrated by the Blakists—that have touched every major Inner Sphere realm save yours and that of your Free Worlds League neighbors. Of course, the Free Worlds has its hands full defending itself from the Lyran juggernaut along the border, in possible response to more devious League actions."

[Habeas winces and seems ready to say something, but doesn't.]

[Bosworth]: "With the Confederation, however, it seems suspicious that your nation has remained relatively unscathed during all of this. Recent polls taken on random worlds indicate that almost sixty percent of the Inner Sphere population believes Sun-Tzu Liao was in collusion with the Word of Blake, and that the Confederation is still following that path even after his loss on Sian. What do you have to say about that?"

[Sung]: "'Apparently obvious'? *Shí-fēn gǎn-xiè*! I expect such prejudice from a Federated Suns mouthpiece, not our 'impartial' moderator! Earlier, you alluded to some of the early Word of Blake attacks on a few of our border worlds, and now you speak as if those Capellan citizens did not actually bleed and suffer and die. While *at the same time*, you seem to excuse any possible—possible!—collusion by the Free Worlds League because they happen to be involved in a border clash?

"Need I remind you, Mr. Bosworth, that we are suffering a great deal at the moment from Davion depredations? And that no one yet knows the status of our staunch Canopian allies, with all communications severed? We are very certainly 'scathed'.

"Why is it, *sir*, that a Capellan life is worth so much less in your mind than those of other nationalities?"

WHERE IS KATHERINE?

(12 September 3068)

Donegal [DBC] – It was a classic story of (stylish and tasteful) rags to riches. Katherine (or Katrina, as she preferred to be called) Steiner-Davion's rise from obscure member of the Federated Commonwealth court to (almost) undisputed ruler of not one, but two nations!

We'll let the historians bicker over the details of who did what (and to whom, and when), and dodge the legal wrangling over whether Katherine (or should that be Katrina?) should have been able to take the throne of the Federated Commonwealth (or is it the Federated Suns?). Neither will we delve into the actions her big (figuratively speaking) brother took to remove her from power.

Instead, the burning question is: where is Katrina (or Katherine?) now? What with all these incidental nuclear strikes, orbital bombardments, and chemical and biological attacks, the disappearance of the glamorous Katherine (or whatever) went largely unnoticed and unremarked, except by those in the Inner Sphere fashion industries.

Well, now we at DBC can reveal that our beautiful heroine (or should that be evil usurper?) has run off and joined the Wolf Clan (no, not that one, the *other* Wolf Clan). Yes! No less a personage than Khan Vlad "the Barbarian" Ward apparently spirited the (still stylishly attired) Katherine off Arc-Royal and into the Clan Occupation Zone, for reasons the lecherous and lascivious among us can only hope to guess at.

Must fashion houses across the Inner Sphere now accept that their winter collections could become a legitimate target for a Clan Trial of Possession?

*****Transmission Altered*****

"Was that where we made our mistake? Thinking Victor was the more likely of the two to ensure that the prophecy would be fulfilled? Certainly we had to be wary of Katherine's motivations. Already she had led the Lyran half of the Federated Commonwealth to secede, then made another grab for power while her brother's back was turned. Should we have aided Katherine instead? Or would her greed for power have been just as big a stumbling block as Victor's corruption at the hands of the heretic Focht and his puppet Primus? Ah! Yes! Mori! We know your secrets now, and when the time is right we will use them to shatter the abomination you and Focht corrupted all the blessed Blake's labors to build. Your lies blinded so many of our brothers and sisters. But now, Mori! But now, Focht! Now they will learn the truth! They will flock to join us. They are the key we will turn to unlock the glorious future that awaits humankind. Take heart! Blessed Blake's will be done!"

*****Alteration Ended*****

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[Bosworth]: "Capellan lives are of equal worth to any other human life across the human-occupied sphere. How dare you suggest that a loyal member of the ComStar media would assume otherwise?"*—[holds up a hand to stem Sung's reply]—*"*However*, when your own government *appears* to be acting in collusion with the worst evil we have ever known—worse than Amaris and his atrocities!—then we, the other human citizens in this universe, have every right to make the assumption that your government is helping them, even if you have border disputes with rogue March lords. We all remember the late Chancellor's double-blinds and his flagrant abuse of the office of First Lord in St. Ives. Because of his own prior history, it is easy to make the logical leap that the Confederation puts up a brave front against the 'Davionistas' to avert suspicion of collaboration with the Blakists on other fronts. Witness the fact that you and the Free Worlds League have yet to terminate your HPG contracts with the terrorists, for starters. And if this deception proves true—and I say '*if*' most strongly, Mandrinn—then I feel sorry for the average Capellan citizen who has to bear the shame of the late Sun-Tzu Liao's actions. Because your nation, along with the Free Worlds League, would then be reviled in history as dark allies of the most truly evil organization humanity has ever known.

"Please, Mandrinn. Prove us all wrong. That is why we invited you two"*—[gestures towards Graham and Sung]—*"to give your nations the opportunity to correct our assumptions.

"Are you willing to do that? Or would you care to prove that what we assume is correct?

[Sung]: "It is not what you 'assume' that I take issue with, *moderator*, but what you believe! This myth of ComStar's supposed impartiality notwithstanding, the pro-Davion bias in your rebuttal just now might as well have been scripted by the Federated Suns' ministry of propaganda and disinformation! What you coin as a 'flagrant abuse of the office of First Lord' was, in point of fact, a restrained response to an unprovoked and unwarranted assault against Hustaing, its people and the person of the Chancellor. And your suggestion, that the Confederation's need for working HPGs is superceded by any requirement to demonstrate our innocence—which is what *should be* assumed until proven otherwise!—is disingenuous at best. You wish for us to suffer additionally under the burdens of a voluntary communications interdiction? To put ourselves fully at the mercy of George Hasek's warmongering? Has it not occurred to you, to any of you, that the Confederation is effectively held hostage until and unless we can solve this problem?

"When I believe I am talking to an open-minded man, I shall make every effort to prove our case. Until that time, *I* must assume we were invited here, Mr. Graham and myself, to be publicly scourged in a further attempt to vilify any nation that dares stand up to the Davion machine.

IMMORTAL SPIRIT SIGHTING

(20 October 3068)

New Syrtis [INN] – The master of the *Merchant*-class JumpShip *Atlantia* reports recently sighting the *WBS Immortal Spirit* in the Hobson system, just one jump from New Syrtis. Unfortunately, analysis of the *Atlantia's* sensor data was inconclusive.

The *Aegis*-class heavy cruiser started life as the *THS E. Presley,* launching from the Greenock shipyards over Terra in 2382. Mothballed in 2531, she was reactivated in 2582 and refitted extensively for service in the new Star League Defense Force. The *Presley* remained in distinguished service with the League for close to two hundred years, until the start of the Amaris Civil War, when she was presumed destroyed over Epsilon Indi along with the rest of Admiral Amanda Braso's 568th Armed Transport Flotilla.

However, the *E. Presley* was only disabled, not destroyed, and her lifeless hulk was left adrift in a long elliptical orbit from which the Word of Blake presumably recovered her in 3059. Refitted and re-christened the *Immortal Spirit,* she was scheduled to launch from the Titan Yards in 3064. However, rumor has it that she may actually have launched some time in 3063. The vessel subsequently vanished, originally thought destroyed by a catastrophic engineering casualty related to her rushed deployment.

There have since been numerous unconfirmed sightings of the *Spirit*, ranging from Hazeldean to Memphis. Many expected the elusive *Spirit* to appear among Blakist naval elements unleashed across the Inner Sphere, but while the fanatics have deployed perhaps a dozen WarShips of all classes beyond Terra, the *Immortal Spirit* has yet to make an appearance.

*****Transmission Altered*****

"The affront of those unbelievers! Their blasphemy called for swift action. In the blessed Blake's very words, 'The spirit of justice is immortal'. Sure and terrible was the justice visited upon those who would misuse the name of the one foretold. Even though it jeopardized everything we had worked for, such a great risk still had to be taken. And it worked! Never before had we gone so far! Where once we had only employed JumpShips, now in a brief moment of glory a WarShip proved the truth of Blake's words! We have unlocked Blake's wisdom! We have been shown the way! Not even the Ruins of Gabriel can compare to the strength Blake's words give us. A great and terrible duty has been laid upon us. We must use our might against the very people it was supposed to serve—and in so doing we shall save them from the darkness. Was this how it was for Kerensky? Choose between fighting to save something from the ruins, or walk away? Would he have stayed to fight had he known what was to come, had he known how the Clans would twist and corrupt everything he believed in? But unlike Kerensky, our path—the path laid before us by blessed Blake—is clear. These so-called Successor Lords had their chance to aid us. They rejected what we offered and betrayed us all. Now they must pay."

*****Alteration Ended*****

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"And you may keep your pity, Mr. Bosworth. The average Capellan citizen lives with a great deal of shame, but little for the Chancellor or his actions. Pro-Capellan fervor is higher than it has been in the past several decades, ever since our rape by the Federated Suns. You cannot fight the lessons of history!"

[Bosworth]: "A simple and direct question then, without any possible bias—perceived or otherwise. Why did Chancellor Liao not attend the Star League Conference on Tharkad?"

[Sung]: "For the very argument he put forth before the Star League Council in his holo-address. Which you earlier called 'inflammatory remarks,' but which Peter and Yvonne Steiner-Davion seconded when they heard the truth of the Chancellor's wisdom.

"Simply put, the Star League had served its purpose, which was never to serve as a unifying and all-encompassing government, but merely as an alliance of convenience through which the Inner Sphere ended the Clan threat—a vital goal that First Lord Liao saw through to its final conclusion. As the past two terms have proven, the office has now become the brass ring of small-minded leaders and savage tyrants. It took Victor Davion's impassioned plea to stop the near-acclamation of Katherine Steiner-Davion to the office, and one can only imagine the terror such stewardship might have brought on the Inner Sphere.

"In the end, without a pressing mandate for the Star League's continuance, Chancellor Liao made the decision to serve his own people rather than continue to drain away resources better spent on domestic issues. Any attempt to demonize him for such priorities will paint the Federated Suns and the Lyran Alliance with the same brush!"

[Simms]: "Or more accurately put, Sun-Tzu is done raping the Star League for all it's worth, so now it's time to get back to pillaging the other members of this Trinity Alliance. I keep hearing about how wonderful that alliance is, but it seems to me you got the troops you needed to conquer the St. Ives Compact, and the only thing the Taurian Concordat got out of it was dead sons, a weakened government on the verge of collapse and the loss of a quarter of their worlds to revolution."

[Sung]: "The choice of local military commanders to refuse the *lawful* ascension of Protector Grover Shraplen to their seat of government has nothing to do with the Capellan Confederation. We would consider rendering assistance in this matter, but the simple truth is that *we have not been asked*. Not that I expect a Federated Suns' *fù-nü-gŏu* to understand anything about sovereign borders."

FORGOTTEN WARRIORS

(25 October 3068)

Orestes [INN] – To the mournful wail of pipes, the flag of the Star League and the banner of the Royal Black Watch Regiment were lowered on Orestes for the final time last week. Surrounded by chaos and destruction, the Black Watch remained in the Free Rasalhague Republic at the invitation of Elected Prince Regent Christian Månsdottir. Recently, however, Colonel Neil Campbell announced that he is pulling his troops out of the Republic. Not surprisingly, Black Watch warriors have remained tight-lipped about their intended destination, but speculation on Orestes is that the regiment will try to break through to Northwind or link up with Precentor Martial Davion's forces.

With the presumed destruction of the First Royal BattleMech, the 21st Striker and the 19th Cavalry regiments on Dieron, and no word from the 71st Light Horse on Huntress, the Black Watch and the 151st Light Horse are the only SLDF troops remaining in the Inner Sphere. Whether they will pledge their loyalty to an Inner Sphere government, become mercenary commands once more or even join the Com Guards remains to be seen.

*****Transmission Altered*****

"We can never trust any mercenary who refuses our coin. The Dragoons proved that. From the moment they arrived in the Inner Sphere, they began to obstruct us in executing our duty to carry out Blake's will. Like the pebble that starts an avalanche, they disrupted the delicate balance of power. They treated us with disturbing disdain from the start, an attitude that spread to far too many other mercenaries. We should have moved against them when they announced their Clan origins, rallying the Successor States against the spies in our midst. But all too soon the battle of Tukayyid came upon us, and then Focht and Mori murdered Myndo Waterly. Ah! Primus Waterly, your Operation Scorpion was a stroke a genius! If not for the traitors in out midst, the Inner Sphere would have come under our stewardship. But the time had not yet arrived! As Blake foretold, the Inner Sphere could only enter a new golden era through three transfers of power. It fell to the faithful who recognized the evil of Focht and Mori to reclaim the birthplace of humanity from the heretics. Mori! Your time grows short! And then blessed Terra lay once more in the hands of the true followers of Blake. But always the Dragoons were there! Sitting on Outreach, they were a thorn in our side. Always interfering as we worked to fulfill the blessed Blake's vision for the worlds around Terra. At last we were forced to take steps to put Wolf and his Dragoons in their place. They retaliated, but we thought we were ready for them. Then they attacked Mars! How did they know exactly where to strike? Clearly the Dragoons posed an even greater threat to Blake's vision than we thought. We had no choice but to burn out their den. Their fate awaits all who oppose the will of Blake!"

*****Alteration Ended*****

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[Bosworth]: "Please! Countess!" *[pause]* "Mandrinn Sung, certainly it is not a crime for leaders to take care of their people first over the needs and wants of those outside their influence. So no, we will not demonize the late Chancellor Liao or his choices.

"But neither will we deify him as others have done. Speaking of which, what *is* the current status of the Confederation government? After the accident on Sian earlier this month, we haven't heard much out of Sian except—"

[Sung]: "Accident? Accident!? As much as the Kentares Massacre was a civil debate, perhaps! *Zi-jin Chéng*, our capital city, was struck from orbit in a cowardly, unprovoked assault meant to assassinate the Eternal Light of the Confederation and leave the Capellan people bereft of leadership. The Celestial Palace is no more! Pounded beneath a WarShip's guns. Tens of thousands are dead from this one demonic act, which you call an accident. We call it an atrocity against the Capellan people!

"Fortunately, *Sang-jiang-jun* Talon Zahn moved quickly to assume interim control as this crisis was thrust upon us. In consultation with House Master Ion Rush and several political leaders within the Confederation and outside it, he worked to strengthen our borders and oversee the massive humanitarian efforts to search for survivors and identify bodies. He has kept the Capellan state alive.

"How easy it is to decry the Word of Blake for their treatment of New Avalon, which has been horrendous, we agree! But to then stand by while the butcher Hasek employs the same tactics against a neighbor state that has only endeavored to defend itself is unconscionable!"

[Simms]: "You and your Confederation are just like any delusional paranoid. You're quick to place the blame on the Federated Suns without a *shred of proof*, without a *single bit of logic* to back up your psychotic rants—"

[Sung]: "Sensor logs! Video! Reports of the invading battle tactics! How much more—?"

[*Simms*]: "Let me make this absolutely, positively clear—neither Duke Hasek nor the Federated Suns is responsible for this attack on Sian, a fact supported and confirmed by every other major power in the Inner Sphere. I think it's more likely that Sun-Tzu tried to go his own way when the Blakists refused to help him put down St. Ives' bid for freedom, and found his homeworld scoured by the wrath of Blake in response. The rest of the Confederation must be so compromised by Blakist agents that the Word of Blake hasn't had to launch any further attacks."

[Sung]: "From one side, the Confederation is accused of working hand-in-fist with the Blakists. Now you suggest that we have been compromised. Do you think no one can see the hypocrisy in such conflicting statements? The Word of Blake needs neither our complicity nor any great conspiracy to undermine our defenses. Not with George Hasek as their willing ally of convenience."

[Bosworth, incredulous]: "Mandrinn Sung! You're suggesting that Duke Hasek is in league with the Word of Blake, inciting border terror actions to divert attention away from their other activities? It is true that several worlds near Terra have been captured by Blakist forces…do you really think a Davion lord would ally himself with the most murderous group the Inner Sphere has ever known? Where is your proof, sir?"

[Sung]: "*Where is hers?* You demand proof that the Confederation has not entered into a devil's pact, even though we have crossed *no* borders nor shown *one measure of support* for the Word of Blake's actions. And in the same hand, you blithely accept this *wang-ba-dan* Davionista's claim to have evidence from *all other* Inner Sphere powers that they were not involved in the terror attack on our capital! What evidence?! Does the Draconis Combine monitor every WarShip under Hasek's thumb? When did ComStar offer such a statement of support? It must be missing from our files!"

"Has House Steiner offered such credit?" *[Looks at Habeas, who fidgets as if to respond.]*

"Has the Free Worlds League?" *[looks at Graham]*

"*Now* we see the bias inherent in the system! A deliberate and concerted effort to forever paint the Confederation with a black brush, ignoring four decades of evidence that we fight only to reclaim what is ours, taken from us by force against the overwhelming will of the Capellan people who take pride in their Chancellor and their nation, and who will forever resist any effort by outside terrorists—whether cloaked in the robes of nobility *or* neutrality—to divide us against each other for no other reason than a political smokescreen for aggressive military action that benefits only—"

[On a gesture from Bosworth, audio is cut. Sung, his voice now an incoherent mumble, tries to continue for a few seconds, then stops. Simms' attempt to respond is likewise a mumble. Sung kicks back his chair, glowers past Bosworth, pulls his jacket straight and exits the room.]

[Simms, voice muffled but picked up through Bosworth's mike]: "As I said, the truth speaks for itself."

[Bosworth]: "Well now, I want to apologize to our audience. Such behavior from our panel is regrettable, though considering the issue at hand, understandable." *[turns partway to face Graham]* "We need to turn our attention now to the Free Worlds League, which seems to be exempt from all this madness. Mr. Graham, could you please inform our audience and us why the League appears to have escaped the heinous atrocities that have plagued the rest of the Inner Sphere?"

[Graham]: "One can hardly call the Lyran Alliance's unprovoked assault on our territory 'exemption from the madness', though the foolhardy nature of that endeavor has become apparent to the Steiners." *[Nods at Habeas, whose expression quickly darkens.]* "As for why we

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have been spared other assaults—perhaps the perpetrators realize that the League is the one Inner Sphere state not weakened by years of war and internal strife. For once in its history the League stands united."

[Habeas, scornful]: "*Lächerlich*! Hardly foolhardy, nor unprovoked! Unprovoked is what *your friends* did to Tharkad! Foolhardy is what *your ships* did to Skye! A-and don't try explaining *that* away as some 'rogue element,' either, after that line of pig waste you just spouted about having a 'united' League!"

[Graham]: "And to think I used to respect you as an historian… but here I am seeing you in your true light, a propagandist in the same mold as Misha Auburn. Apply Occam's Razor here: who has the most to gain from the Alliance-League conflict? The statesman who has, for three decades, promoted justice and sought the peaceful path, or the opportunist regional duke seeking self-aggrandizement after his schemes failed in the civil war? Was it or was it not agents of Robert Kelswa who murdered Helen Thrall in an effort to precipitate war? What evidence has the duke—who, it is alleged, murdered his way to power in Skye—provided for this? Claims of 'Mechs painted in Sirian Lancer colors? Very reliable. Like Sarna or New Avalon for those of us old enough to remember those masquerades in the Steiner-Davion war of aggression."

[Habeas, red-faced again]: "Justice and the peaceful path? To punish one man for an admittedly serious lapse in judgment, your Captain-General and the Capellan Chancellor launched a war against the entire Terran Corridor, taking advantage of a political rift in perhaps the greatest check on Clan ambitions we had at the time? You could have simply withheld war materiel, cut trade, publicly called the Archon-Prince to account, approached the matter like civilized men for whom the lives of billions are entrusted, but instead you sent troops across the borders in the name of wounded pride!" *[blusters on, oblivious to any attempts to interject]* "And as to the murder of Helen Thrall, a known opponent of your own *esteemed* ruler, don't you *dare* try to pin that on us while your allies rain nuclear fire on Tharkad and Donegal. Duke Kelswa-Steiner at least provided undeniable holographic and material evidence of who attacked Skye, while *your* agents simply claimed that General Thrall's killers—never caught, from what I've been told—'may have been' Free Skye, or 'may have been' Loki! Who *does* profit from this conflict indeed, when even Duke Kelswa-Steiner had to know his troops were outgunned on the border, but could not let another League aggression—a historical imperative of House Marik since the days of the Age of War—go unanswered, even with Tharkad under fire?"

[Graham]: "Once again you forget historical fundamentals. It was a war of aggression, *launched by Hanse Davion on his own wedding day because of his personal vendetta against the Liaos*, that led to the illegal occupation of League and Capellan worlds. Operation Guerrero merely restored to the Free Worlds and the Capellan Confederation territories that belonged to them by historical right and interstellar law. A limited war fought for limited gains, not the hundred million dead and six hundred million wounded by Hanse Davion's efforts

WILLIAM BLANE MISSING?

(25 October 3068)

Orestes [INN] – Largely through Primus William Blane's tireless efforts, the Word of Blake gradually managed to shed its popular image of religious fanaticism. Yet so much has happened since that day on Tharkad, and nobody has commented on Primus Blane's absence from the last fateful Whitting Conference. Indeed, neither Blane nor may other members of the Conclave have been heard from since the Blakists launched their first devastating attacks all over the Inner Sphere. Has Precentor Martial Cameron St. Jamais done away with the Conclave and seized power? As a member of the Toyama sect, the Precentor Martial has the support of Precentor ROM Alexander Kernoff (a fellow Toyama), making such a power play a distinct possibility.

If so, this would not be the first time a member of the Blakist hierarchy has been conveniently removed. When ROM discovered that Klaus Hettig was a ComStar agent, it eliminated the influential Expatriates sect and robbed William Blane of his primary brake on Toyama influence. To this day, ComStar denies that Klaus Hettig was one of their agents. The truth will probably never be known, as Hettig was conveniently "shot while trying to escape" before he could be brought before the Conclave to answer the charges in person.

Has Primus William Blane met a similar fate?

*****Transmission Altered*****

"Lies! All lies! The evidence convicted the heretic Hettig beyond all doubt! Armed with the wisdom of Blake, ROM saw through Focht's clumsy attempt to insert an agent into the highest echelons of our organization. Rest assured, the other agents Hettig attempted to infiltrate into our ranks were identified and dealt with. As for William Blane, the light of Blake's prophecy has been revealed to him! Blane has chosen to relinquish his office and retire from public life to write his memoirs. Now the challenge of bringing the blessed Blake's work to fruition falls to us. Heed the call! Raise the blade of Blake's wrath and smite those who would deny humanity the future Blake foresaw! Strike them! Strike them now! "

*****Alteration Ended*****

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to assuage his ego. The same man who, remember, used a sick child to blackmail the Free Worlds into providing military support. A sick child whose death was covered up—and may have been ordered—by Victor Davion for political expediency."

[Simms, microphone reactivated]: "Bold words from a nation too afraid to send its own sons and daughters to defend all of humanity against the Clan invasion, yet more than happy to sell arms to the Federated Commonwealth so that *its* sons and daughters could die. Remind me, how much did your economy grow thanks to the contracts Thomas Marik negotiated with Hanse Davion?"

[Graham, under his breath]: "And how likely are the Lyrans or Fedrats ever to pay?"

[Habeas]: "—Or what about Marik not even risking League troops against the Lyran state—which had already declared its neutrality upon Katherine's secession—and instead left the job of carrying out his act of personal revenge to mercenaries, a profession both he and your Blakist friends claim to disdain?"

[Graham, with a dismissive gesture toward Habeas]: "Let's not forget it was your own 'darling Kate' who sundered the vaunted Federated Commonwealth, not Thomas Marik or Chancellor Liao, no matter how much you'd like to blame outsiders for your problems. Katherine Steiner-Davion was by all accounts a matricide, which Duke Kelswa's father allegedly facilitated before his own rather convenient removal from the political scene by an assassin's bullet. And not six months ago your present Archon slew his own great-aunt to clear his path to power. And I thought the Marik family had their problems."

[Habeas, snarling]: "No, they're just the ones who raised fratricide to an art for—"

[Graham, sighing]: "As for your 'incontrovertible' evidence, that can be replicated by any holostudio on Solaris, or Skye for that matter. Where is the incontrovertible proof he's been promising all this time—?"

[Habeas, raising his voice]: "We have—!"

[Graham, barreling on]: "If it's so damning why hasn't he produced it rather than claiming the attackers were so skilled that they left not a shred of evidence behind them—?"

[Habeas, louder]: "Plenty of salvage was ta—!"

[Graham, ignoring Habeas]: "Is it not *more* likely that he has *no evidence*, but finds it more convenient for himself and what passes for his military commanders in the Alliance to let this misguided war rage out of some misplaced desire to find a 'common cause' to reunite the Alliance after five years of civil strife?"

[Habeas slams both hands down on the table, shouting]: "If you would *shut up* and listen for once, *Vollidiot*, you may realize that this is not the floor of the Marik Parliament! You can't get your way by filibustering away the facts here! And the *fact* is that we have half a regiment of dead Sirian Lancer BattleMechs and the corpses of their warriors—all killed in battle or dead by their own hand when their avenues of escape closed—lying on Skye, just waiting to be extradited home! We also have numerous blast craters there, caused by naval weapons fire that I'm sure any ballistics expert—even those in that Blake-run bureaucracy you call a nation—could tell you are authentic!

"And *then*, while you're at it, why don't *you* visit the mass graves caused by those same attacks, and be sure to stop by on Donegal to see what's *left* of Chekswa, where your *friends* saw fit to raze a city and an institute of higher learning—all of no military value whatsoever—with a five-kiloton nuclear weapon, killing more than a hundred thousand innocent men, women and children in that strike alone!

"And while you're at *that*, Mr. Graham, why don't you visit Tharkad and have a personal chat with your Captain-General's fanatical bedfellows, the same *Schweinehunde* who now busily bomb planets across the Inner Sphere—*except*, of course, for those where their wondrous 'Primus-in-Exile' waves his banner!"

[Graham, narrowing his eyes at Habeas but speaking calmly]: "I am reminded of the Season of Saint Bartholomew. You know it? An ancient historical episode in which the rulers of a nation beset by religious strife sought to bring harmony by eliminating the heretics who wished to plunge the nation into war with its neighbors. The season began with a series of sanctioned—if brutal—acts, but though its goals were limited, matters quickly ran out of control and a widespread massacre took place, part religious intolerance and part political opportunism, blackening the name of the original perpetrators. Now, I'm not justifying the Blakist action in any way, far from it, but from a historical perspective a lot of what has happened recently is opportunism."

[Simms]: "Opportunism? Opportunism?! That's like saying the Amaris Civil War was a minor hiccup in the market. Would you like to say that to the families of the millions…"

[Habeas]: "*Um Gottes Willen*! It's also a virtual admission of guilt from where I sit! By your example, the Blakists are carrying out such 'sanctioned attacks' against us all, to purge us 'heretics' from the Inner Sphere, just because we don't worship their goals or proclaim them our saviors—and *your rulers* are the ones doing the sanctioning!"

[Graham, sighing]: "You hear what you want to hear, don't you? I said it reminded me, not that I approved. Surely you understand the difference. I can understand their reasoning, twisted as it may be, but a lot of what followed cannot be laid at the Blakists' door.

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Others have chosen to exploit the chaos for their own ends. After the failure of his gambit in your civil war, Kelswa is itching for a new cause, and the Blakist outrage gives him just the excuse he needs."

[Habeas]: "'*Exc y se'— S?*"

[Editor]: "Um, sir? We're getting something strange on the 'Stellar Pulse Today' transcript feed…"

[Bosworth, interru x ng]: "So then, Mr. Graham, K you don't mind, explain to 1s—*especially* to our viewers in y h K Province—just why a Free J t R p WarShip, bearing Free Worlds h i Q, jumped into the Skye system and committed such butchery in the span of y H days? Are you seriously suggesting that Duke e R w staged the whole thing, killed his own g U z?"

[Producer]: "Oh? More cute Blakist 'factoids' I presume, like the one last month?"

[Editor]: "Not exactly. Take a look; we're in the last quarter of the broadcast… here…"

[Habeas glares expe b antly at Graham.]

[Producer]: "What the—? Is this some kind of transmission noise?"

[Editor]: "I thought so at first, but it builds rapidly, and it's garbling the video as well. Turns to pure static and noise in minutes, in the transcript and the transmission. I think it's corrupting the HPG feeds as well. We're transmitting to the affiliates like this."

[Producer]: "Crap, we can't have this now! I'll tell Programming if it doesn't let up in a minute. Meantime, get ready to pull it and we'll see if we can't get Mike and the others to reschedule."

[Graham]: "I K e heard the same reports i 0 1 and can offer no exp c K e a M e l what happened at Skye m H e a L z m ed by the reported loss of c u T e a v E v l ehe LCCC authorized no l Y k e d X cion against our… associates in the Alliance. That someone T u y a Cto point the finger of blame at L A d T e v m W is perhaps testament to the political situation. Unlike our neighbors, we are a easy military target, and so they have chosen to divide and conquer."

[Bosworth]: "So you j H a l M eLM Involvement in the attack on Skye? A y A ou swear categorically that the Sirian Lancers are sitting at home, waiting on the c Y e a M a N e z's orders? That this is all some grand conspiracy to c R a T the Free Worlds?"

[Camera focuses on Graham, who makes no response.]

[Habeas]: "q A w g F *Graham*? Cat got your S k H g Guilty conscience, perhaps?"

[Editor]: "It's definitely not *clearing…"*

[Producer]: "I know! I know! What is this? Feedback from the HPG uplink, maybe?"

[Editor]: "Checking now…"

[Graham, speaking softly; the microphone struggles to catch the response]: "i 0 l Z Command issued I orders."

[Bosworth]: "T c D l k M s question, D n Graham. Whe c E the Lance c? K z M n E z a K p I *Percival*? D n S a r p m Z d w Q innocent of the o I u e N a a k p 0 a d Captain-General produced c g F m A n U i o Robert is engineering matters, y T e a K r a b no FWL troops l A e M z h G a m E b counterattack?"

[Producer]: "We're losing it…"

[Editor]: "Ah, shi—"

[Graham closes his eyes and seems lost in thought for a moment]: "No, I cannot. The Captain-General's security det—"

[Habeas slams his hands down on the table again and half-rises from his chair]: Lügner! Filthy liar! M S d V a l k J e r q x C c V d k J o I m e l e T v E you E e e N e V l d D d M e v *we* T try and bury us V k J m e W n S z V l ø P o I a J n Ü n a Z m N Blake E V E l k n m e J H b N e I o N E E n W n N l K d E d

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o f l e L N c x j y a X G c R c L o n g L i v e W o B s h K y q j j h g j Y B R o D D L 0 R G N m v M
a u U Y P T s x G d L T X H d t f S b R H q 0 Q N h h U M j y e M r p j R 0 n z u J c D q s X D a F B
n A g o k i m g S M a Y r w S B p P l V 0 m N z h 0 Z X K I m p 0 s t E r r u m d h V v K s a u x u f
a C Y m E x a I I n t e R d i C T C a n o P u S l a s Y R C w b d C P k Q x T s p a q x A x X K X Z B
K o x R G r e o L n T j C P Z Z s w L d o T T P f q W M Z T y l R u X p j z u W G q M r n m M L o v b
n W R a W l r U z N a I t n o i t A t I p A c E d S n 0 a T E q H J p m Y B Y F z U m p D j J i g d B
T c M b s Z D N M T C K i z 0 b v j E W s j L l F k u G H V z G t 0 G D W J J m a r s d e f e n d e d
J x U I Q t e s U p k t r 0 y R N b Q H u K U r z c M w o 0 G N Z g r Q b S V h c D F W a x z U g s e
C g H w C C n p L v i C i r V C i a 0 S U b e h E W r a t h 0 f B l a k e q T D F W E U T x t z b W p
H r N U I l i T z B N E p a a s g F i i B a t I r C T s h l q w r V s d j W k c 0 E F i h f w I R I K
c z y X w h r b p W s P S t D g v o Z p B L v a I i n d F q n m C x R f L J B m y N R C t V x n E z r
g x D D m M e X f G h j l S x o d c c R p o A D z b m Y U w x t q f g Y y q u c S A F r 0 Z 0 v D t o
T I D E A C v p M G A B a m a R C h n P v g n B N S U G u h B i b k f b I s h l o o H y W q W i e S k
l v L R p K l b B s d K t o D m L t B H P o f H p n w a d r a e l c u n A U g E E b P s o k Q n e Q 0
i I t D Q U o t z B o j r C c U K I l L F P V Z W T w B T F u 0 m F H r X r n X R G G r L g P c s L u
s U V u X H W M F b w Y o Y t G S s m w U v P f 0 0 G 0 g d y y c K B F U E N K o t v Q f c n i B V Y
a M q E f R v b W e n J m 0 q e b F y R p U r J c M T 0 U E G R c j N V a I w G h R L W k C M b I G X
r m R C q y z I S G P s m R v k n r z r L W i u d o t w i u x B l a k i s t H e g e m o n y D l b T e
d D e T a L o S i f d F I T P i q e H t y C m B Y T F D e B q M e U Q i s R P V C G q o N q K e h H q
g k T f V x r L a A R e H S i r B d g i M J u u v j S c z t I B e t w c q I v x V h j e d l L P Q x z
g y C I c 0 X c n H R b Z E y t g r L r v i s B X b Y t Z S e r i m b a s e s o p e r a t i o n a l l
Y E I c m z o G X 0 q m E D w S R i y 0 V K M b 0 B I e e P L L b g A r N t s d r o W e h T t s u r T
q G W u p D P a I r r H e R e t i c l T m T o p a q j M 0 R K v S m q J h W n d b u C h b A W A c d F
e 0 P J N q K n y e d k g 0 u E p k v N f I r C x R q E U n L e a s H t H e m a N e i D 0 m i N i a N
E W s d e E t t J D u o U Z x u g S U V a D i q l f E a s 0 P T T e n C h R G k R i B s a h P H 0 L z
y p u q n i b F n t x Z j z E J p t S o F o i a x v y l P V Z x g I Z j S t z r q L v G a g y X U G S
V D n b a g H B t U z o M 0 X c E e R Z T o s z b f m T T q v H J w H R o x H a s s S Y b P Q Z S n i
s n i n U r z k K e G K n j f X d i g c A b A v E n G E z W Y F i j f I t H a h n Y t W w v c b E K A
N q o x f v i x x s g d c f l Z t n r m s I K B 0 A a R u o a s t c R S q N k T A B b z a I Y M v p a
y B j T p L m L y d T Z Z F I H F e C s Y o u R V w P d j B Z L T c U w B E n D M V l e d i f n i T x
L D s o N f V n R a N X F h r p h r K 0 Y e r o a 0 u D n i h h J j r e H T c C R H F i a q G Z L K a
x K r P S w g h S Y D b U y k q e j z A B e i i a u p j c s p j U z A n e h f U C R a m x C o G Q i 0
X 0 e h f U L i K T o s R G v R V W N i r T t o k p s s V M n L N y F C R o t i A R T B o T R m Y t V
S Y h f f w J P r E x R a l B u l Q d E q a a 0 a R h g i o i p G K q k K m j v W 0 C d c t J L m t J
P s t Y K d T N X m P U b e J Y A A Y A r v S H a M E d c t Z W k R b U g a a S m d 0 R l r N h V e V
R k o R u Z g i o h N 0 x i k F r J Q r r K p W Q h z S t h h S q w u M u s t 0 B M v f Y o r L I r M
C y r N f R d R g U h S b r J o i Z C t V 0 y x Z e x L o e y h B F V d X M x V l a N W Q p a M W y L
k 0 b J P w R p b h p i p b l H v e H h X c p E K F z h r r v K P f a k r a J c M k V W y e c j I t c
F s n E s I f P e Y j a M a q Y A m C u Y v g i G i j t i D F k d P N h c r P P L e l B H R R K I g X
d A e P c W w k u D c r I G y e b o a r r q e M j v V l s V g d N D a E E i d u A T Z S A Y i D p Y o
U M l n e X w M 0 M G R N Q e Q G U Q L J A M w H e V j d p t I h m o h J k m H r h W J B l x f b d b
m t l o e W M s d n e e h t o t u Q J i A H v S K W q W e r C D C N y w p I n U e e G u U r j Z T u X
G l a l m o g w J w c T a T j Q q P C v o u E T I o j E a z p K L c L i k s z i Q m B e Q E L p m k k
u a f a V 0 C i p B D G J o X k o j S e C Z d w E r F R d i d a B S Z f w A X R e P i M E t y R a v N
E c P v a S Q v P D K z L T c B J S G s f K u Y h l X L w B o f i G 0 v T F E s j a r M d A M t X U q
e l L A m e h T L L i K h N H d r y j j n I M 0 0 d Y N M p W A J w E K W a w o j y B b y w u w v S j
f k S w w r i X b E f i C r n z c k K 0 K L W e L s s u r b s j m S W o L k Z W f a a b k Y R x t q I
t x U e l p W t N e i h t u L p J l R b S A C s J a r d i n e j I U l J q e p D T X B G Q h U C J d R
r u M N x i i i A j Z X V B M l K S H j t R c d s e T i G T K p v E M z S j q Y c T H t d H o l C v c
b W c d g 0 l T L E K e J N h F G T z g a z M P A D U Q E e q d T R a i T o r S s h A L l S u F f e R
g E x p g u w x p a S s e m a l F n I n r u B E U I m k w f N c r T L m r i P I A f k X R q W D I i V
I E K P C S U G T T H e N Y T u F u A J X Q x o Y V S a M y A w n A J d j x L I u d l F X D c u f N U
v Y F P X X d J a x b g v i i p p Y a T s d X J k J I S Z d D m h I Q o F U l w l v T K r L 0 p u j x
e S M s e v i l r e t s a m x T N P a a d s W t N F l z Z j t C s c e w T T x U n F m q w W V J b S F
H s p R F y N w r Q V a U Y m m S D s d N d R M G K C U k T X h F o J o i n T h e C a u s e w o K N A
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>>>Transmission terminated.<<<

CHAOS UNBOUND

CHAOS UNBOUND

The information presented in this section can be used to create scenarios for *Classic BattleTech*, *AeroTech or Classic BattleTech RPG* games set during the Jihad.

Players should possess the core rulebooks for each type of game system they wish to play—*BattleTech Master Rules*, *Revised (BMR); AeroTech 2, Revised (AT2)*; and *Classic BattleTech RPG* (*CBT: RPG*; also known as *MechWarrior Third Edition*), all published by FASA Corporation and/or FanPro, LLC—in addition to any other add-on products they may want to use. Complete record sheets for all BattleMechs, vehicles and aerospace craft that players can use to recreate Jihad scenarios appear in *BattleTech Record Sheets: 3025 & 3026*, *3050*, *3055 & 3058*, *3060*, *Upgrades*, *3067* and *AeroTech 2: Record Sheets* (all published by FASA Corporation and/or FanPro, LLC). Illustrations and game statistics for most of these units appear in the various *BattleTech Technical Readouts* (published by FASA Corporation and/or FanPro, LLC.) For those interested in running *Classic BattleTech RPG* games, the *Classic BattleTech Companion* (*CBTComp*, published by FanPro, LLC) includes details about factions, life paths and skills that can apply to Jihad-era campaigns with minimal adaptation.

Finally, players and gamemasters may use *HeavyMetal Pro*, *HeavyMetal Vee*, *HeavyMetal Lite* and *HeavyMetal Plus* software packages (available from RCW Enterprises) to print their own *BattleTech* record sheets. The *HeavyMetal Aero* package allows players to print their own *AeroTech* record sheets, while the *HeavyMetal Battle Armor* package allows players to print battle armor record sheets.

As always, the following rules supplement existing rules. They add variety to and enhance game play, but should not give unfair advantage, and so gamemasters and players should all agree on any supplemental rules before using them in play. Similarly, players should feel free to modify any rule that seems inappropriate for their campaign and/or for the era. All of these rules are considered Level 3 and may not be used in tournament play.

Mapsheet Terrain: When a terrain type such as Urban, Wooded or Mountain is mentioned in these rules, the reference is to the Terrain-Specific Mapsheet Tables (see p. 107, *BMR*). If a rule specifies Urban Terrain, for example, it specifically means the maps in Table 7: Urban Terrain Table on p. 107, *BMR*. Alternatively, players may use the expanded Random Terrain Table on p. 82 of *Combat Operations*.

Unless specifically stated otherwise in a track, the number of maps used in play is up to the players involved. However, in general it is recommended that players use a ratio of one map per four units.

Terminology: The following rules use the term *unit* as it is used in the *BMR*, to refer to a single battlefield unit such as a 'Mech or vehicle. *Force* denotes a large combat formation such as a regiment.

Types of Scenarios: When these rules mention a scenario type such as Breakthrough, Hold The Line or Hide and Seek, they refer specifically to the various types of scenarios in *Creating Scenarios* (see p. 104, *BMR*). For example, if a rule states, "use the Breakthrough scenario," it means the scenario on p. 105 of the *BMR*.

CHAOS UNBOUND: DAWN OF THE JIHAD

CHAOS UNBOUND: DAWN OF THE JIHAD

Chaos Unbound is an open-ended campaign setting using the breaking events of the Jihad as its basis. As players progress through the whole campaign arc—with one arc per Jihad sourcebook—they discover information that relates to events unfolding around them. *Chaos Unbound* allows the players to experience the Jihad in a fashion unlike fiction or a sourcebook. They can experience it firsthand, as participants.

Because *Unbound* is open-ended, it is flexible enough for any faction, force, era or even setting. Though the campaign's primary focus is to bring a player group's force through the opening stages of the Jihad, the events depicted in the tracks could just as easily occur during the days of the original Star League, the Third Succession War, or even during the Great Refusal. With some ingenuity and manipulation, gamemasters can adapt the core of each track to fit whatever setting their homegrown force prefers.

Players may bring an existing force (or part of one) into the campaign. If the players don't have a force, they can create one using the *Creating a Mercenary Force* rules from *Field Manual: Mercenaries, Revised* (beginning on p. 137); using a listed unit from any published sourcebook; or by using the Force Faction Tables from *Combat Operations* (beginning on p. 106 of that book). How thoroughly players flesh out their force is entirely up to them; this campaign works as easily with generic units as with highly detailed ones.

Piloting and Gunnery Skills: Forces generated by randomly selecting units should begin *Chaos Unbound: Dawn of the Jihad* with Piloting Skill 5, Gunnery Skill 4.

Note: The Warchest Point System (see p. 135) allows for incremental advancement of skills. While it is possible to balance opposing forces by using force ratings similar to those of the players, it may be more enjoyable watch player characters advance in skill over time. In that case, limit the number of Veteran/Elite pilots in the player group.

CHAOS UNBOUND: DAWN OF THE JIHAD

HOW TO USE THIS SECTION

Chaos Unbound provides an open-ended campaign framework that easily allows gamemasters and players to run through it in its entirety using forces of their own creation. Each track provides a backstory that fits into the overall campaign plot. Likewise, each track is set up as a general framework to assist gamemasters and players in creating the opposing forces and adding other battlefield effects specific to that track. In addition, using the new Warchest Point System, player groups may choose what direction the campaign takes and may even switch between various rule sets, such as *AeroTech 2*, *Classic BattleTech RPG* and the standard *Classic BattleTech* rules.

Because the player group decides which route to take between tracks, this campaign can be replayed often, with different tracks, forces and even outcomes every time. Gamemasters and players decide how much detail they wish to go into and may use the Linked Scenario system beginning on p. 78 of *Combat Operations* to create sub-campaigns within the track framework. Ultimately, the route, game play and depth of detail are up to each group of players.

TRACKS

Each track in *Chaos Unbound: Dawn of the Jihad* has a fully developed plot line centered on a single event, but with the opportunity for additional sub-events as players and gamemasters deem necessary. Additional rules allow each event to be run as a stand-alone scenario or as part of a full-fledged and flexible mini-campaign. Together, the tracks presented here cover the first year of the Jihad.

The *Warchest Point System* section (see p. 136) describes in detail how many Warchest Points a track costs, additional bonus options that may be used to add difficulty (and as a result, more WP) and optional objectives that net the players additional WP if attained. Bonuses only accrue if the bonus option is applied to the track and players attain at least a Partial Victory.

The *Additional Hooks* section describes possible side plots and adventures in addition to the core event. Based loosely on the *Combat Operations* linked scenario system, these hooks can provide ideas for additional scenarios that can add as much or as little depth to a given track as desired. The *Aftermath* section shows additional goings-on as an end result of the track. Finally, the *Next Track* section indicates the next track options from which the players may choose.

Using the Tracks

Chaos Unbound: Dawn of the Jihad essentially follows the standard *Classic BattleTech* scenario format. It outlines the main event for each track with a brief fictional introduction, *Game Set-Up* (with subsections for each rule set) and *Special Rules*.

Each track defines the force opposing the players based on a percentage of the players' force. This percentage must be applied to whatever system the gamemaster uses to balance the forces. We recommend the Battle Value System (see p. 152, *BMR*), but gamemasters should feel free to use any system they prefer, such as balancing based on tonnage, C-bill cost and so on. We also recommend using the appropriate Random Unit Assignment Tables published in various sourcebooks to assist in designating forces, though no gamemaster should feel restricted to that medium. More detailed recommendations and guidelines on force selection may be included in each track.

Random Unit Assignment Tables appear on pages 111–114 of the *BattleTech Master Rules, Revised*; pages 206-231 of *Classic BattleTech Field Manual: Updates;* and pages 94–96 of *AeroTech 2, Revised*. Additional assignment tables for a given faction can be found in the appropriate *Field Manual*.

Player Force Size

Though this campaign is designed primarily with company-sized or smaller forces in mind, forces of any size and composition should find it equally challenging. The Base Force Size Multipiler, used when calculating the support points a player's force receives from its Warchest between tracks (see p. 137), will adjust for forces of any size. In addition, the plot of *Chaos Unbound: Dawn of Jihad* assumes that the players are a mercenary force. However, with some manipulation by the gamemaster, any type of force—House, Clan, pirate or even corporate security—can participate in the campaign.

Because *Chaos Unbound* is designed to be flexible, players may use any type of group in lieu of a mercenary force if they so desire. For example, if the players choose to use a House force, that particular force might be detached from its parent command to serve as a ready reaction force. Or Clan players can detach forces from standard commands to assist the Clan Watch in intelligence-gathering efforts. Ultimately, gamemasters and players decide the details. Once the players have determined their force's origins, the gamemaster need only spend a little time adjusting various elements to tailor each track to the players' campaign, such as the setting, the identity of the opposing forces and even the time frame.

Opposing Forces

Most tracks list the players' force and the opposition in terms of percentages as opposed to a specific roster. This allows individual campaigns flexibility and keeps each track fair and balanced within the story line. When determining percentages from the players' group, the deployed force should represent a percentage of the total force the players have on hand. The players' total force encompasses all units at the players' disposal, whether 'Mechs, vehicles, aircraft, battle armor or infantry platoons, not counting supplemental forces assigned by an employer or granted in the scenario rules unless specifically stated otherwise. All tracks base their percentages on this total pool when determining how large a force the players may bring into a scenario. The listed percentage the players may deploy is the

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maximum component of the players' total force that should be used in a given scenario. Players may elect to take fewer forces at their own discretion.

Gamemasters should always calculate the size of opposing forces using the players' deployed force, never the total force the players have at hand.

Assigning Units

The specific makes and models of most units a given force may field—whether supplemental forces provided by the scenario or the opposing force—may be determined using the appropriate Random Assignment Tables provided in the appropriate faction's *Field Manual* (or *Field Manual: Updates*). Players lacking access to these sources may alternatively use the standard Random Assignment Tables starting on p. 111 of the *BMR*.

In setting up forces for the track Another Day, Another C-Bill, the players determine that their total force comprises twelve 'Mechs totaling 20,000 BV (not counting Piloting skills) and worth 10 million C-bills. The gamemaster decides to use BV as the standard for building the players' force, meaning that the players may not exceed 5,000 BV in selecting their units. Alternatively, if the gamemaster decides to use a numerical standard, then the players may select up to three units from their entire force. If the gamemaster instead uses C-bills as a standard, then the total value of the players' force may not exceed 2.5 million C-bills.

Once the players' force is determined, the gamemaster figures out the attacking force's composition. If he used the BV system for the players, he must also use BV for the attacking force. The track states that the Attacker must not exceed 75 percent of the Defender (players' force), and so the opposing force cannot exceed 3,750 BV (or as close as can be made). Because the gamemaster did not account for Piloting skills in the players' force selection, those skills also will not factor into the composition of the attacking force. The gamemaster sees that the 51st Panzers are a Veteran unit, and so assigns each attacking unit a Veteran skill set using the tables on p. 114 of the BMR, Revised.

Maps

Unless otherwise described in a track, use a number of mapsheets equal to the number of sub-forces (the Base Force Size) the players will deploy. This is accomplished by calculating how many lances, Stars or other sub-forces the players can make using their preferred organization method. Round fractions up. For purposes of this calculation, a platoon is considered equal to a lance.

You decide to deploy 10 'Mechs in Another Day, Another C-Bill. You prefer to organize in lances, so your Base Force Size is 2.5, rounded up to 3. This means the players will use three mapsheets in the track. If the player had preferred to organize by Star, his Base Force Size would have been 2, and he would be using two mapsheets instead during the track.

CAMPAIGN SPECIAL RULES

The *Special Rules* section of each track indicates which special rules, if any, apply in that track. The gamemaster may use any of the following rules in addition to those given for a track if he believes they will add flavor and depth to the campaign.

Force Special Abilities

If players opt to use an existing force previously published in a *Field Manual*, they may use that force's special abilities (if any) throughout the campaign at the gamemaster's discretion.

Forced Withdrawal

Under the Forced Withdrawal rule, crippled units must retreat from the battlefield (when damage has rendered them useless or they are in imminent danger of being destroyed; see *Crippling Damage*, below). A unit making a forced withdrawal must move toward the edge of the map board designated for the scenario. However, a unit need not spend Running, Flanking or Maximum Thrust MP; it can move backward if the controlling player wishes. Also, a unit equipped with MASC need not engage that system when forced to withdraw.

Withdrawing units may not directly engage an enemy unit, though they may add their firepower to help cut it down. Any enemy unit that closes within range of a weapon or physical attack by a withdrawing unit may be targeted as well. The following guidelines cover the many circumstances that may occur; within these guidelines, the gamemaster's decision is final.

Crippling Damage: Any non-player unit that suffers crippling damage must withdraw from the map board. (Clan units must follow any Clan honor rules that apply.) Unless otherwise stated in the *Special Rules* section, crippling damage is defined as follows:

- A BattleMech or OmniMech is considered crippled when a side torso location is destroyed; the 'Mech takes two engine critical hits; one gyro and one engine critical hit; or loses the use of its sensors. Internal structure damage in three or more limbs and/or two or more torsos, or four or more pilot hits, also renders a 'Mech crippled, as do the loss of all the 'Mech's weapons to damage or ammunition depletion. If all of a 'Mech's weapons are destroyed and it can no longer move, the 'Mech is considered destroyed. The pilot of a destroyed 'Mech may eject normally.
- With the exception of infantry, all of a unit's weapons are considered destroyed if it loses all weapons with a range greater than five hexes or if it can no longer cause more than 5 points of combined weapons damage.

- A ProtoMech is considered crippled if all its weapons are lost to damage or ammunition depletion, or if the pilot suffers four or more hits. A ProtoMech Point will not begin to withdraw until three or more of its component ProtoMechs are either crippled or destroyed, at which point the entire Point must withdraw.
- A vehicle is considered crippled if it loses all its armor in a single location or if all its weapons are destroyed.
- An aerospace unit is considered crippled if it suffers a critical hit to its engine or fuel tank; if all its weapons are destroyed; if the unit loses more than half its original Structural Integrity; or if its pilot/crew suffers four or more hits.
- An infantry platoon is considered crippled if it loses 21 or more troops (16 or more for jump platoons). If deploying infantry squads, a squad is considered crippled if it loses 5 or more troops.
- A battle armor unit (Point or squad) is considered crippled if it loses half or more of its members.
- Vehicles and BattleMechs that are immobilized—usually through motive, leg or gyro damage—are shut down and typically abandoned (though abandonment places the crew at the mercy of the battlefield). Only the most fanatical crews or those in dire circumstances will continue to fight. Likewise, only orders from the highest possible source will prompt an immobilized element not to withdraw from combat.

Salvage

Salvage is the taking of destroyed/crippled equipment remaining on the battlefield at the end of a track. Use the *Scavenging* rules from page 90 of the *BMR*. In linked scenarios, salvage may not occur until the end of the mini-campaign, given the fast and fluid battles outlined in *Chaos Unbound: Dawn of the Jihad*.

In general, and unless a track's special rules state otherwise, players who achieve at least a Partial Victory in a track may claim all battlefield salvage in any area where their units participated. Players may not claim salvage after battles in which they did not participate.

Salvage may be sold at half the unit's normal list price. Alternatively, vehicles, 'Mechs and other salvaged units may be repaired using the Warchest system, or by converting Support Points to C-bills and using the appropriate rule set to buy such repairs by spending the C-bill cost of all repaired or replaced equipment.

WARCHEST POINT SYSTEM

The *Warchest Point System* is an abstraction of the rewards and opportunities that arise out of combat. More than merely a monetary concept, the Warchest also represents factors such as renown, contacts and being at the right place at the right time. It represents opportunities, whether to participate in a particular battle, fight under certain environmental modifiers or acquire a BattleMech.

Note: The War Chest nomenclature also appears in *Field Manual: Mercenaries, Revised* when generating a mercenary force. However, that system does not affect the *Warchest Point System* in *Chaos Unbound*.

GETTING STARTED

Regardless of how the group comes to the table, the players' force begins the *Chaos Unbound* campaign with 1,000 Warchest Points (WP).

Warchest and Tracks

Each track has a WP cost that covers the transportation, incidental costs, connections and reputation required to participate in that track. This cost appears in the Warchest section of each track and must be paid before beginning the track. In addition, all tracks have objectives with a WP value listed in parentheses. Players gain (or lose, if the WP value is negative) those points if they complete that objective.

Finally, each track includes a set of optional bonuses with a WP value listed in parentheses. Players gain those points if they choose to subject themselves to the listed environmental or operational situations. A player may elect to use all, none or some of the listed optional bonuses. Players only gain WP from optional bonuses if they attain at least a Partial Victory for the track.

All these points go in the Warchest. Between tracks, players may use their WP to increase personnel experience, repair and rearm, and purchase other group abilities or equipment. All WP expenditures must occur before the beginning of the next track. Players may not spend WP during a track, even if it is split into a mini-campaign. Keep in mind that the next track must also be paid for from the Warchest.

Warchest Debt

If the players lack enough WP to purchase any tracks available to them, they may go into Warchest debt in order to participate in the next scenario. Players may NOT purchase services and equipment on Warchest debt.

As the players gain WP during the track, they can use these points to pay off the debt until the Warchest rises to a positive number. If debt still exists after that scenario, players must sell off assets until the force can purchase its next scenario. Players may not go into Warchest debt twice in a row.

If a force is so far in debt that it cannot pay for a new track, the gamemaster may decide that the force is too damaged to maintain fighting cohesiveness. That force is then "retired" for the remainder of the story arc in *Chaos Unbound: Dawn of the Jihad* (but may be brought back for additional story arcs in future Jihad-appropriate sourcebooks). Another option is to have the force spend a large amount of time repairing and refitting, forfeiting an entire track in order to carry out the necessary repairs. If a gamemaster decides

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on this course of action, the players may re-enter the current campaign arc at a point beyond the track where they got stuck. To do this, choose a track from the options presented under the Next Path guidelines for the track the players would have carried out. In addition, the gamemaster will select one of the optional bonuses listed in the *Warchest* section and apply it to the track, but the players will not receive the bonus WP. If the players or gamemaster select additional options, the players receive WP for them as normal.

WARCHEST POINTS BETWEEN TRACKS

In order to use WP between tracks, players must convert them to Support Points (SP). To do this, first determine the Base Force Size Modifier. This modifier remains constant throughout the campaign, even as the players' force expands or decreases in number. To find the modifier, players should calculate how many sub-forces they can make using their preferred organization method (lances, Stars, or Level IIs). Round fractions up.

A player force contains thirteen 'Mechs and prefers to organize in Stars. Its Base Force Size Modifier is 3 (5 units per Star, 2.6 Stars in the force, rounded up). A player force of thirteen Mechs and twelve battle armor Points, would have a Base Force Size Modifier of 5.

Next, determine the force's Technology Rating Modifier as shown in the Tech Rating Modifier Table. Round fractions to the nearest whole number. Players who do not know their force's rating can determine it using the Technology Rating rules on p. 155, *Field Manual: Mercenaries, Revised*. Alternatively, they can assume a D rating for purposes of determining Support Points.

Finally, multiply the available WP by the Base Force Size Modifier and then by the Technology Rating Modifier to determine how many Support Points the players have available.

A B-rated mercenary unit has a Base Force Size Modifier of 5. You wish to convert 100 WP into Support Points. Multiply 100 by 5 and then by 1.5, which equals 750 Support Points.

If desired, players can then convert these points to C-bills for use with more detailed systems of record keeping and support. The Warchest system is intended as a quick and easy way for players to track their logistics, rather than attempting to encompass all possibilities in the *BattleTech* universe. Players interested in using units or possibilities not covered by the Warchest system are encouraged to convert Support Points to C-bills and use the various rule sets to provide the level of detail they desire.

When converting Support Points to C-bills, multiply the Support Point total by 10,000. Likewise, C-bills can be converted to Support Points (divide the total C-bills by 10,000). Players in turn can convert Support Points to WP; simply divide the total Support Points by the Technology Rating Modifier and then by the Base Force Size Modifier.

Purchasing

Players can use Support Points to make repairs and to purchase new units or personnel. When repairing or purchasing units, use SP Activity Cost Table 1. For personnel, use SP Activity Cost

TECHNOLOGY RATING MODIFIER TABLE

Equipment Rating	Technology Rating Modifier
A	2.0
B	1.5
C	1.25
D	1.0
F	.5
Clan Front-line	2.0
Clan Second-line	1.5

SP ACTIVITY COST TABLE 1

Activity	Support Point Cost
Repair 'Mech or aerospace fighter*	= Tonnage
Repair vehicle*	= Tonnage/2
Reconfigure OmniMech, -Vehicle, or -Fighter	= Tonnage/4
Purchase 'Mech (Level 1)	= Tonnage x 10
Purchase 'Mech (Level 2)	= Tonnage x 20
Purchase ProtoMech Point	= Tonnage x 5
Purchase Vehicle (Level 1)	= Tonnage x 5
Purchase Vehicle (Level 2)	= Tonnage x 10
Purchase Battle Armor	= No. of suits x 50
Rearm Unit (Level 1 ammo)	= 5
Rearm Unit (Level 2 ammo)	= 10
Rearm Unit (Level 3 ammo)	= 50

*Players can only repair 'Mechs, vehicles and aerospace fighters that have not been *Truly Destroyed* (see p. 88, *BMR* and p. 57, *AT2*, respectively).

SP ACTIVITY COST TABLE 2

Activity	Support Point Cost
Hire new MechWarrior*	= 3
Hire new aerospace pilot*	= 3
Hire new vehicle crew*	= 6
Hire new battle armor squad/Point	= 10
Hire new foot infantry platoon	= 100
Hire new motorized infantry platoon	= 200
Hire new jump infantry platoon	= 300

* Does not come equipped with weaponry, vehicles or equipment. These must be purchased separately.

Table 2. All new personnel are considered Green.

Support Points can also be converted to C-bills to allow for the purchase of other components not expressly covered by these rules, such as DropShips, JumpShips, support vehicles and their attendant crews.

SKILL ADVANCEMENT

Between scenarios, personnel that participated in the last scenario may advance their skills. Those that did not participate in the last scenario may also advance their skills, but at twice the Support Point cost.

Personnel may only advance each skill set one level at a time. For example, a MechWarrior can improve his Gunnery or Piloting skills by one level, or improve both his Gunnery and Piloting by one level, but he may not advance either skill by two or more levels. For skill advancement between scenarios, use the Skill Advancement Table.

When using *CBT: RPG*, ignore the Skill Advancement Table and instead convert Support Points to Experience Points (XP). Each SP is equal to 1 XP. Assign Experience Points to personnel as the gamemaster deems appropriate. Then use the rules on page 210, *CBT: RPG*, to determine the character's skill advancement.

SKILL ADVANCEMENT TABLE

Activity	Support Point Cost
MechWarrior/ProtoMech Gunnery Skill	= 10
MechWarrior/ProtoMech Piloting Skill	= 8
Aerospace/Aircraft Pilot Gunnery Skill	= 8
Aerospace/Aircraft Pilot Piloting Skill	= 10
Vehicle/Support Vehicle Crew Gunnery Skill	= 10
Vehicle/Support Vehicle Crew Piloting Skill	= 5
DropShip/JumpShip Crew Gunnery Skill	= 10
DropShip/JumpShip Crew Piloting Skill	= 12
Battle Armor Squad/Point Gunnery Skill	= 8
Infantry Platoon Gunnery Skill	= 10

ENDING THE CAMPAIGN

Once a player group has completed the campaign, they may follow the directions described in the final *Aftermath* section. Now all they need to do is wait for the next Jihad-related sourcebook!

Alternatively, gamemasters may create additional scenarios or plots based on information gained during the campaign and proceed with the players from there, returning to the next arc whenever they feel ready to do so. Each arc can be run as a stand-alone campaign, but the real fun happens when the players go through the entire *Chaos Unbound* story as future material is released.

CHAOS UNBOUND: THE SETUP

Interstellar Expeditions is a private organization devoted to historical research and interstellar archaeology. Technically not a corporation, IE is a closely aligned federation of interdependent groups, some professional and some part-time hobbyists. These groups hire out their services to private individuals and organizations. Services include research into family trees and family history, research on and discovery of lost settlements, special stellar and terrain cartography services, archaeological expeditions and surveys, and anthropological and archaeological analyses of artifacts. Various IE groups provide additional service related to archaeological and historical research and discovery, including setting up expeditions and managing and operating dig sites. IE operates within local laws and the guidelines set down by the Interstellar Archaeological and Anthropological Society. IE is a for-profit organization that uses its proceeds to fund its own expeditions and operations, as defined by its senior leadership.

Interstellar Expeditions hired your mercenary force to perform a broad range of tasks, including escort, security consulting, investigation and various opportunities that may present themselves. Your force essentially acts as a troubleshooter for IE. The details of this contract will be provided as they become relevant in a track.

IE frequently hires mercenary commands to do a variety of tasks for them as well as for many members of the IE council, often without informing other council members. Transportation is provided and salaries are paid through a ComStar-approved bank on Capolla. The contract covers all incidental costs, including standard non-military supplies, salaries, fuel, taxes and port fees. In return, the mercenary command agrees to go wherever IE needs them.

Structured into the contract is mercenary command's right to accept short-term contracts that may work in conjunction with IE or its hiring member's requirements: for example, a planetary militia may need training or a planetary government may hire the mercenaries ad-hoc to defend a world against a pirate raid. As long as the mercenary command covers the requirements of the IE contract, the council usually turns a blind eye to the mercenaries' other activities, provided they do nothing criminal. Contract termination is swift if the council finds proof of criminal activities or piracy.

Players may begin *Chaos Unbound: Dawn of the Jihad* at one of three starting tracks: *Look Who's Coming to Dinner*, *FUBAR* or *Another Day, Another C-bill*. The players may then progress as they see fit, provided they select only one of the options given in *Next Track*.

LOOK WHO'S COMING TO DINNER

It was business as usual. Go in on the DropShip, pay the port bribes, dispatch a quick raiding force and blow the crap out of the target warehouse complex. Bing, bang, boom.

If only contracts survived contact with reality.

We arrived, nothing went wrong. We disembarked, hardly anyone said anything. We showed up overlooking the warehouse lot and got jumped. How were we supposed to know two Demolishers were just sitting there, waiting for us?

Who sold us out? Because we're going to take it outta their hide, that's for damn sure.

SITUATION

Keid Interplanetary DropPort
Keid, Chaos March
29 September 3067

IE's first job for your unit requires you to conduct a stealthy raid on some warehouses owned by Kallon Industries. A retributive strike for some incident in the Periphery…like you care. Money is money. The only thing that worries you is that Keid is a Word of Blake world—but IE assured you that the Blakists would look the other way as long as you didn't destroy anything beyond the target area.

Everything goes smoothly up until you approach the warehouse block. As your force starts targeting the long, flat buildings, several tanks burst through the walls and catch you at point-blank range.

Time to include some payback on that paycheck.

LOOK WHO'S COMING TO DINNER

GAME SET-UP

CBT: Use Urban Terrain maps. Place ten medium Level 1 buildings (CF 25) across the battlefield, with the Defender secretly designating four of them as the target warehouses. The buildings must be at least five hexes apart and at least four hexes from any map edge.

AT2: Lay out a minimum 1 x 2 map grid using Urban Terrain maps (Heavy Urban/Coastal if using *Combat Operations*). Place ten medium Level 1 buildings (CF 25) across the battlefield, with the Defender secretly designating four of them as the target warehouses. The buildings must be at least five hexes apart and at least four hexes from any map edge. It is recommended that players use the *Low Altitude Operations* rules (see p. 33, *AT2*) and *Aerospace Units and BattleTech* (see p. 40, *AT2*) rules for this track.

RPG: Gamemasters should set up an enclosed warehouse area with minimal security measures. Each building is of Medium construction (CF 25) and one level high. Roll for Encounters using the Industrial Modifier (see p. 221, *CBTComp*) every game hour.

Attacker

The Attacker is the players' deployed force, which consists of no more than 25 percent of the players' total force.

Defender

The Defender is a small mercenary security force hired by Kallon to foil an expected attack on the warehouse yard. The Defender's force equals 75 percent of the players' deployed force and includes only vehicles and infantry units. Forces may be rolled from any Mercenary Random Assignment Table and are considered Green.

WARCHEST

Track Cost: 300 WP

Optional Bonuses (all bonuses cumulative):

+100 Blizzard: Per rules on p. 153, *CBTComp*

+100 Electrical Storm: Add a +1 modifier to all rolls involving electronic systems (including all Piloting, Gunnery, Sensor Operations, bioware and so on).

+150 Overwhelming Force: Change the Defender's force to equal 125 percent of the players' deployed force.

Victory Bonuses (bonuses not cumulative):

+150 Partial Victory: Completing one objective

+200 Total Victory: Completing both objectives

OBJECTIVES

1. Fulfill the contract. Destroy all four target warehouses (designated by the Defender at the beginning of the track).

2. Claim some payback. Destroy or drive off all opposing forces defending the warehouses.

LOOK WHO'S COMING TO DINNER

SPECIAL RULES

In this track, the Defender's force operates under the *Forced Withdrawal* rules (see p. 135).

AFTERMATH

After the sound of the last shot fades over the smoldering remains of the Kallon warehouses, you pick up the wail of sirens. Lots of them. Scanning the area quickly, you notice that some of the nearby buildings caught fire from an explosion. Your contract mandates staying out of view as much as possible, so you fade back toward the DropShip as the multi-story office buildings burn in the settling twilight. You hope fervently that the occupants got out when they realized a firefight was raging under their noses. It may be business, but it's still ugly when bystanders get hurt.

ADDITIONAL HOOKS

Kallon sets plans in motion to find out who blew up their warehouse facility, especially considering that some less-than-legal hardware had been stored there. The company will want retribution (all under the table, of course) and may show up to harass the players at another time.

Expansion Ideas

Gamemasters can pursue the players using any remaining forces in a Chase or Gauntlet scenario. A Defend scenario can be used if the player group decides to make a stand against Kallon's retribution, or against other pursuers such as planetary security or any on-world mercenary garrison forces. For a challenge, run the retreating players through a Chase scenario in Urban Terrain (Heavy Urban if using *Combat Operations*) with reinforcements attempting to intercept the fleeing mercenaries.

NEXT TRACK

Vacationing in the Wasteland, *The Skye is Falling!*, *Payback*

ANOTHER DAY, ANOTHER C-BILL

ANOTHER DAY, ANOTHER C-BILL

Shells fell all around the stately Mercantile Building as the Avanti hoverlimo slid into the underground parking entrance. The attack from TempTown was in full swing, hard-luck mercenaries striking out at the Dragoons and other allies in a desperate bid to join up with Waco's Rangers, just outside of North Sticks.

Unfortunately, the Mercantile Building stood in the mercenaries' way.

Four uniformed security guards hustled their charge into the waiting limousine. Dameon Guillome, Vice President of Blackwell Industries, had picked the wrong time for a meeting with the Spaceport Guild over wage issues regarding Blackwell's commercial shipping and storage.

Slapping the side of the limo, two of the guards stepped back, allowing the secured vehicle to move out. Two Badgers joined the Avanti as it cleared the West Boulevard exit, taking standard escort positions with one ahead and one behind. The battlefront hadn't rolled fully into the downtown district yet, but it was only a matter of time, if the military comm bands were correct. The only decision now was whether the small convoy should head overland to Blackwell's complex or try for the DropPort and fly out instead.

Either way, it promised to be a tense ride back to the office….

SITUATION

Colchiss and High Streets
Downtown Harlech
Outreach, Chaos March
15 October 3067

The Vice-President of GM Blackwell Corporation needs to get back to the security of the company's Outreach offices. Your force happened to be on hand, finishing some business for your employer in the mercantile district, when fighting broke out near TempTown. Reacting quickly, Blackwell hired you on a short-term contract to escort their VIP back to his office. Since extra cash is always good and it didn't interfere with your current contract, you took the job.

ANOTHER DAY, ANOTHER C-BILL

GAME SET-UP

CBT: Use Urban Terrain maps in a Chase format.

AT2: Use any number of terrain maps (except Urban) laid out in a Chase format. The *Low Altitude Operations* rules (see p. 33, *AT2*) are in effect for this track. In addition, because of heavy dog fighting above Harlech and the surrounding area, all units are restricted to Altitude 4 or lower. Units going above Altitude 4 are considered destroyed and removed from the game. Also, Dragoons Air Code #532-A restricts all air traffic over Harlech to Velocity 6 or less, to avoid the possible collateral damage such passage can do to the surrounding buildings. GM Blackwell has an image to protect and even in the heat of battle will obey the Air Code for the sake of civilians.

RPG: Gamemasters should prepare a chase-style game through downtown Harlech. For information on Harlech, use the information provided in *Field Manual: Mercenaries, Revised* or the *Chaos March* sourcebook.

Attacker

The Attacker's total force consists of elements of the 51st Dark Panzer Jaegers mercenary command and should equal 125 percent of the Defender's deployed force, not including the Blackwell contingent. The Jaegers are out to capture the VIP first, or kill him if necessary. Equipment ratings should be on the D or F columns of the Mercenary Random Assignment Table (see p. 122, *Field Manual: Mercenaries, Revised*). The rampaging mercenaries are considered Regular.

Place the Attacker's units in the first quarter of the playing area opposite the Defender's starting edge.

Defender

The players' deployed force may not exceed 25 percent of its total force composition, representing the sudden nature of the contract. Depending on the game system used, place the VIP in the following unit with listed escorts. This force is considered the Blackwell contingent.

CBT: Heavy Hover APC, escorted by two Badger A vehicles.

AT2: KR-61 Long Range Shuttle, escorted by two TR-7 *Thrush*es

RPG: Depending on whether the group chooses to go via air or ground, use the appropriate force listed above. In addition, the players may instead to decide to go on foot, in which case use the minor NPC Soldier statistics for the bodyguards (see p. 207, *CBT: RPG*).

WARCHEST

Track Cost: 325 WP

Optional Bonuses (all bonuses cumulative):

+50 Rainfall: Per rules on p. 153, *CBTComp*

+50 High Winds: Per rules on p. 153, *CBTComp*

+150 Hasty Departure: To represent the suddenness of this contract, reduce ammo loads for all ballistic and missile systems (including personal weapons) by 75 percent with a minimum of one round.

Victory Bonuses (bonuses not cumulative):

–200 Total Defeat: Completing none of the objectives.

–100 Partial Defeat: Mr. Guillome is killed. This bonus can be combined with Partial or Total Victory conditions.

+175 Partial Victory: Completing one objective.

+400 Total Victory: Completing all objectives.

OBJECTIVES

1. Safety first! Get Mr. Guillome to safety by making sure he exits the opposite end of the map. (Gamemasters running the RPG will need to keep a map handy with a delineated finish point for this objective, or set a fixed number of kilometers—no less than 10—the players must traverse).

2. No quarter. Destroy all opposing forces so they cannot link up with Waco's Rangers.

3. Watch the paint! At least two units of the Blackwell contingent must survive the track.

SPECIAL RULES

The following rules are in effect for this track:

Committed

None of the attacking forces will withdraw from the field, but will continue their attempt to capture or kill Guillome. The Blackwell contingent likewise will not withdraw until Guillome is safely away.

Capture

The VP of Blackwell Corporation is considered captured if his vehicle is crippled or trapped and an enemy force can extract him (represented by placing an enemy unit in the same hex as the VP's vehicle and keeping it there for one full turn).

AFTERMATH

The fighting in TempTown grew worse, with several down-and-out mercenary companies and "lone wolf" pilots eventually tracking through downtown to join up with Colonel Waco and his allies in North Sticks. Shortly after nightfall, the Dragoons Beta Regiment responded to the threat and began hammering the ad-hoc mercenary commands, with a brutal block-by-block penetration that raged on even as your DropShip lifted from Harlech.

Seems your mercenary brothers are getting desperate for work. Or suicidal.

ADDITIONAL HOOKS

Now that you're with Blackwell for the moment, would you care to return to the DropPort escorting some valuable equipment? We don't want it falling into disreputable hands….

ANOTHER DAY, ANOTHER C-BILL

While the battle rages in TempTown, someone wants to know what the hell happened to start this conflagration. A down-and-dirty covert mission may yield some clues.

Expansion Ideas

A long, multi-part Chase mini-campaign can extend this track, with enemy reinforcements converging on the car chase. Balancing out the defenders with additional forces from the players' supply can extend this mini-campaign for two or three Chase-style scenarios. Alternatively, the players can be hired to escort Mr. Guillome the rest of the way to the Blackwell complex through the badlands, moving the chase from the city to the rocky hills surrounding Harlech proper.

NEXT TRACK

Payback, *The Skye is Falling!*, *Running from the Devil*

FUBAR!

FUBAR!

"Get a move on, Berry Three, we don't want to lose you out here."
"Roger that, Lead."
"Captain, something strange is going on over the milband. Switch to Channel Four-Tango."
>>[click] …again? There's been a strike from where?<<
>>Orbit. Don't know what yet, all comms to the Den have been severed. Civvie bands reporting major power loss in Avalon City.<<
>>Mobilize! Mobilize! Incoming raiders! All units, report to auxiliary command posts!<<
"All right, people. Change of plans. Come about to nav point Charlie, we'll be going around the long way."
"Lead? This is Berry Two. I'm getting sensor readings up ahead. No IFF tags and their active fire control is hot. Orders?"

SITUATION

Rural Route 92, Fox Province
New Avalon, Federated Suns
5 December 3067

It was supposed to be a routine outing; get the new guys accustomed to their gear and scope out the lay of the land. IE sent you here to help straighten out the local yokels so they don't go shooting cattle if a raid ever does make it to the heart of the Davion empire. When you heard the brief chatter on the military band, you knew your command needed to get the sheep back, but you wanted to stick around to see if you could help. Anything that wiped out Avalon City's comm grid was big enough to need it.

Those blasted cadets should've known better, floundering around out there without proper ID codes. Mistaking your cargo carriers for terrorist bombs might be understandable. If *your* homeworld had been surprised like the Feddies were, you'd have been ready to shoot the mail carrier, too. You're just glad you didn't kill the whole lot of them, not with all those DropShip drive flares appearing in the dawn sky.

FUBAR!

GAME SET-UP

CBT: Use Hills or Forest Terrain maps, set up lengthwise.

AT2: Use Hills or Forest Terrain maps, set up lengthwise. One randomly determined sheet should represent the convoy's start position. Use the *Low-Altitude Operations* rules (see p. 33, *AT2*)

RPG: Hilly Terrain outside a large industrial complex. The gamemaster should have a delineated combat zone and a general layout of the complex handy, if necessary. All troopers use statistics for the minor NPC Soldier (see p. 207, *CBT: RPG*).

Attacker

The Attacker consists of air and ground elements of the Second NAIS Cadre in the middle of deploying to a preset rally point. Coming across what they believe are unknown forces near Avalon City's major industrial complex, they open fire.

The Attacker's total force should equal no more than 75 percent of the Defender's deployed force. At least one junior commander should be present, with the relevant skills (Gunnery 3, Piloting 3 for *CBT*/*AT2* forces, or follow the *Secondary NPC Template Table* on p. 218, *CBTComp*, for RPG scenarios). Roll for the Attacker's equipment on the Federated Suns Random Assignment Table (Tech Level C).

The Attacker enters from the map edge opposite the Defender. The Attacker's objective is to keep the Defender from exiting the Attacker's home edge while trying to re-establish communications with their superiors.

Defender

The Defender consists of elements of the players' mercenary force and the Micron security cadre they are currently training. The Defender's deployed force should consist of no more than 25 percent of the players' total force complement, accompanied by twice that number of Micron security cadre personnel. The security forces are Green; roll for appropriate equipment on a Federated Suns Random Assignment Table (Tech Level B). The Defender enters from a map edge of the players' choosing.

In addition, depending on the game type, equip the players with the following materiel. The forces listed below do not count toward the Defender's deployed force. Each unit is considered Regular. All of the listed vehicles are company property, on loan for training purposes.

CBT: One Maxim Hovercraft and two tracked APCs.

AT2: One Yellow Jacket gunship and two Karnov UR transports.

RPG: Depending on the type of game, use at least one light escort vehicle and one heavier transport vehicle.

WARCHEST

Track Cost: 275

Optional Bonuses (all bonuses cumulative):

+100 Fog: Per rules on p. 153, *CBTComp*. For *AT2* games, Fog equates to low-level clouds that affect units at Altitudes 1 and 2.

+100 High Winds: Per rules on p. 153, *CBTComp.*

+150 Buzz Bombs: A pair of FedSuns conventional fighters or VTOLs enters after 1D6 turns from the start of the track. Pilots of these craft are veterans of the recent FedCom Civil War and will automatically attack the Defender's force. The Defender may choose any two conventional fighter designs from *Record Sheets: AeroTech 2* or select two VTOLs on any Federated Suns Random Assignment Table.

Victory Bonuses (bonuses not cumulative):

–150 Total Defeat: Completing no objectives.

+225 Partial Victory: Completing two objectives.

+300 Total Victory: Completing all objectives.

OBJECTIVES

1. Defend yourselves and your charges. The players' deployed force should suffer no more than 50 percent casualties. A unit is considered a casualty if it is crippled, wounded or destroyed at the end of the track. Units may safely leave the battlefield and are not considered destroyed if they exit the Attacker's home edge after Turn 8 (they are in training, after all!). Units withdrawing under the *Forced Withdrawal* rules are not considered destroyed for purposes of determining objectives.

2. "Try not to kill the Davions; they're only following orders." Destroy no more than 25 percent of the Attacker's force.

3. Protect your cargo haulers from destruction. Lose no more than one transport vehicle.

4. Training, training, training. This is "real-world experience" for your charges. Each unit of the security cadre must make at least three successful attacks.

SPECIAL RULES

The following rules are in effect for this track:

Forced Withdrawal

The Micron security forces and the Second NAIS Cadre are unused to heavy fire. Both of these forces follow the *Forced Withdrawal* rules (see p. 135).

Time Limit

Beginning with the End Phase of Turn 12 (or 24 Combat Turns in the RPG), the Attacker rolls 2D6. On a result of 9 or greater, communications with the Attacker's commanding officer are re-established and the Second NAIS is informed of "friends" in the area. The Second begins to withdraw and cease firing as the higher-level commanders sort out the mess. Once communications are re-established, the track ends. Make this roll during the End Phase of every turn after Turn 12 until it is successful.

AFTERMATH

Sorting out the paperwork for the mishap took longer than the firefight, apparently. Soon, however, your group was released

FUBAR!

from duty at the complex and told to mount up, as the next job was only days away. IE planned on keeping you hopping, but for what they pay, it would be worth it.

Of course, the extra bonus payments from the NAIS Review Board certainly didn't hurt.

ADDITIONAL HOOKS

Micron is suitably impressed with your tactics and defense of their employees (assuming the players won!), and wondered if you'd like to carry out a little side operation to derail a competitor….

Expansion Ideas

Gamemasters can make this track a protracted fight through the hills surrounding Micron, maybe even into the industrial complex. Use the Recon Raid or Probe scenarios, followed up with a Chase and possibly a Stand-up Fight scenario. Players should keep track of running damage and expenditures for any linked scenarios, as there will be little time for repair and rearming. Salvage may occur only at the end of the track.

NEXT TRACK

Vacationing In the Wasteland, *The Skye is Falling!*, *Running from the Devil*

PAYBACK

PAYBACK

Earthwerks, Ltd. Corporate Complex
Grand Base, Sian Commonality
Capellan Confederation
14 May 3067

The quiet night was shattered as Engine Line Building No. 4 went up in a fireball, the new GM assembly line destroyed beyond repair. Fire sirens went off in surrounding neighborhoods, calling volunteer rescue workers out of their beds to battle the inferno.

Eighteen hours later, the fire was finally extinguished. Twenty plant employees were dead or missing, thirty-two more had varying degrees of injury. The most grievous harm, however, was the total destruction of Earthwerks Ltd.'s improved GM 280 VOX assembly plant, which would further delay the already behind-schedule production and shipment of new CTF-4L Cataphracts *to front-line Capellan forces.*

It took five months, but the highly trained ex-Maskirovka Special Investigative Team finally discovered the perpetrators of the sabotage. They launched plans to exact retribution…and to help put other, more important wheels in motion.

SITUATION

Zenith Point
Styk, Styk Protectorate
Capellan Confederation
18 December 3067

Earthwerks, Ltd.'s Special Investigation Team finally discovered who engineered the destruction of an Earthwerks GM assembly plant on Grand Base. Apparently, Styk-based Tao Mechworks hoped to delay Earthwerks' production of CTF-4L *Cataphracts* enough that the CCAF Strategios might reassign the contract to Tao. Tao has an established success record with its new line of CDR-7L "stealth" *Crusaders* and would like to court more CCAF business. Your employers have assigned you to carry out Earthwerks' retaliation strike on Tao's research and development center—Building TM-834X-C, located on Fire Island. The secured corporate complex lies outside the planetary capital of Styk.

PAYBACK

GAME SET-UP

CBT: Use Urban Terrain maps (Light Urban, Heavy Urban or Coastal if using *Combat Operations*).

AT2: Use rules for *Low Altitude Operations* (see pp. 33-44, *AT2*). The gamemaster must designate one hex as the target hex. This hex contains the buildings that are the players' objective and must lie within 3 hexes of the Defender's starting edge.

RPG: Player characters should expect to infiltrate a small, secure complex to carry out their objectives.

Attacker

The Attacker is up to 50 percent of the players' total force. The Attacker enters from the north.

Defender

The defending force is made up primarily of Tao Mechworks security, with a small percentage from the Syn Hussars, a Capellan unit currently serving as Styk's garrison. The Defender's total force should equal the Attacker's deployed force, 75 percent corporate security and 25 percent Hussars. Roll for Tao security forces on the FedSuns and/or Capellan Random Assignment Tables using B-rated equipment; roll for the garrison using the C column of the Capellan Random Assignment Table. The Defender's force is Regular.

The R&D center is a heavy Level 2 (CF 75) building. The complex has one hardpoint for defense in addition to the well-equipped security force. Examples of appropriate hardpoints are an LRM-10 missile turret (for *CBT/AT2* games) or a security guard tower with four support machine guns (for an RPG game).

When using *CBT/AT2* game rules, the Defender places his forces first, locating all the corporate security units within five hexes of the objective building. The Hussar units are placed within three hexes of the east map edge. The hardpoint should be located north of the objective building and at least two hexes away from the nearest building hex. A communications array tower (light Level 4 building, CF 15) should be located within ten hexes and to the east of the objective building. In addition, place at least two other Level 2 buildings (any CF) within one hex of the objective building.

WARCHEST

Track Cost: 500 WP

Optional Bonuses (all bonuses cumulative):

+250 Dusk/Dawn Combat: Per rules on p. 152, *CBTComp*

+250 Rainfall: Per rules on p. 153, *CBTComp*

+300 Overwhelming Force: Defender adds Capellan troops equal to 25 percent of the Attacker's deployed force strength.

Victory Bonuses (bonuses not cumulative):

+500 Partial Victory: Completing one objective

+650 Total Victory: Completing all objectives

OBJECTIVES

1. Destroy the R&D building. Completed if done without causing damage to the surrounding buildings (not including the communications array).

2. Spare the Hussars. Do not cripple or destroy any Hussars forces present.

3. Cut them off! Destroy the communications array.

SPECIAL RULES

The Capellan forces will not fight to the death for a company facility, and so the *Forced Withdrawal* rule (see p. 135) applies to the Syn Hussars.

AFTERMATH

Forty-five minutes later, your communications officer begins receiving scattered reports of civilian unrest in downtown Styk near the Capitol building. Apparently, People For Freedom—an underground pro-Davion group—has staged a demonstration on the Capitol steps. Their appearance shows that not all is well on Styk, contrary to the official Capellan line. On the encrypted frequency used by the Syn Hussars, you note increased radio chatter, and you see elements of the force you just faced down in the R&D complex move off toward the downtown area.

Soon afterward, you catch news reports of heated clashes between the Liao militia and the civilian protesters. At least three police officers were injured and the crowd is growing hostile. Three Hussar 'Mechs appear, which only inflames the crowd to the boiling point. The largest concentration of protestors is milling around the Word of Blake HPG compound, where they scale the fence and rush the installation. Civilian police fail to stem the tide of humanity and the 'Mechs seem reluctant to step in as the mob begins to burn the compound and the nearby Ministry of Labor complex.

Several hours later, as your DropShip begins its outward trajectory, you hear scattered reports of explosions in downtown Styk. The news reports are disjointed, but it sounds as if several hundred civilians are dead and a raging firefight has consumed the government complex.

Looks like you got out of there just in time.

ADDITIONAL HOOKS

What else is in the Tao facility—anything you can sell on the black market and score some bonus cash? Or sell to the highest bidder? You know the Feddies are in the market for that sort of knowledge.

Expansion Ideas

Any type of scenario can work as a preamble to this one, using more of the Syn Hussars and their standard patrol routes. The gamemaster can use additional scenarios such as Probe, Chase or Extraction as the players move to leave Styk.

NEXT TRACK

Running From the Devil, *Vacationing In the Wasteland*

VACATIONING IN THE WASTELAND

***5 January 3068**: Garrison duty. Not a bad thing after the past few weeks. Get in, get out. We've taken moderate damage so far, but enough that our employer decided we needed to spend a month or two on this godforsaken rock guarding a hole in the ground. Not the ideal vacation, but we heard a Canopian Pleasure Circus is in the area. Maybe they'll have mercy on us and swing by.*

***8 January 3068**: Heard today from planetary control of an unknown force inbound; should hit dirtside in less than a day. Don't know if they're headed this way, but it's probably best to get the boys and girls ready for a party.*

At least it's something to do….

SITUATION

Middle of Nowhere, Contard Mining Property
Acamar, Federated Suns
8 January 3068

The bosses upstairs decided you needed a break from the intense fighting lately and sent you to Acamar. The local mines are important—so they say—and they're paying you, so you really have no complaints. It's just hard to create diversions, especially in the frozen tundra.

All that changed with an alert about pirates inbound on a raid, projecting a course right near the Contard facility where you happen to be sitting. Rather than wait for them to approach, you've decided to ambush the pirates and turn them back before they hit the facility. The question is, do you hit them before they land or after they disembark?

VACATIONING IN THE WASTELAND

GAME SET-UP

CBT: Use the Badlands/Hill Terrain tables. The gamemaster must designate one heavy Level 2 (CF 75) building as the objective. The building must lie within three hexes of the Defender's starting edge.

AT2: Use the Space maps or the white hexmaps found on the back of most *CBT* mapsheets.

RPG: Gamemasters should be prepared for the player group to strike the pirates before landfall or as they disembark, or to set the ambush at the facility itself. If the players choose the latter, the mining facility is a medium-sized compound, with several small buildings, a large equipment shed and the covered entrance to the mines. The players' force can use at least four ConstructionMechs and some exoskeletons. Keep in mind that Contard Mining will not look kindly on extensive damage to the compound.

Attacker

The Attacker is the Lafayette Legion, a new pirate band made up of disgruntled Liao expatriates originally from Liberty. Stealing a JumpShip and a few DropShips, they've begun raiding border worlds along the Chaos March and the Federated Suns—mainly worlds that used to belong to the Capellan Confederation.

The Attacker's force should equal 100 percent of the Defender's deployed force. Make all equipment rolls on the Capellan Confederation/Federated Suns Random Assignment Tables, with an equipment rating of C or lower. All defending forces are Regular. The Attacker will fight until at least half his force is destroyed before attempting to withdraw.

CBT: The Attacker enters opposite the Defender's home edge. All special equipment (if any) is turned on.

AT2: The Attacker should consist of at least one DropShip and any escorting fighters (if possible). They enter opposite the Defender's home edge with a Velocity of 3.

RPG: The attacking NPCs are military, with only 10 percent of the total force made up of specialized archetypes. The Attacker's force should include at least one battle armor unit per eight player characters.

Defender

The Defender's deployed force may not exceed 75 percent of the players' total force. The Defender may designate up to two hidden units to begin the track.

CBT: The Defender sets up on one half of the mapboard, with hidden units placed anywhere in the playing area. The side where the rest of the players' units are placed is considered the home edge.

AT2: The Defender determines his entry side and starting velocity. All units begin along the first hex row of the Defender's declared home edge. The Defender may set up the hidden units anywhere in the playing area.

VACATIONING IN THE WASTELAND

RPG: The Defender may set up to 25 percent of the players' deployed force in hidden positions. For detection purposes, add a +6 modifier to any enemy detection rolls against those hidden units.

WARCHEST

Track Cost: 400 WP

Optional Bonuses (all bonuses cumulative):

+100 Blowing Snow: Per Blowing Sand rules on p. 153, *CBTComp*

+150 Lethargy: To reflect a period of inactivity, apply a –2 modifier to all Initiative, Piloting and BOD/DEX rolls.

+150 Harsh Conditions: All equipment may malfunction because of lax technical crews and brutal weather. For any weapon system that fails its to-hit roll (or has a Margin of Failure) by more than 3, roll 1D6. On a result of 5 or 6, consider that weapon jammed/misaligned and unable to fire for the rest of the scenario.

Victory Bonuses (bonuses not cumulative):

+250 Partial Victory Completing one objective

+400 Total Victory Completing all objectives

OBJECTIVES

1. They must not pass! Keep more than 50 percent of the attackers from exiting the Defender's home edge.

2. Intelligence is information. Capture or cripple at least one Attacker unit for interrogation. A unit is considered captured if it is crippled or destroyed but still has a cockpit and/or a pilot at the end of the track.

3. No remorse. Keep all enemy forces from exiting their home edge.

SPECIAL RULES

The following rules are in effect for this track:

Prior Knowledge

The Defender receives a +3 Initiative bonus for the first two turns (four turns if using RPG rules) to reflect the surprise of the ambush.

Forced Withdrawal

The Attacker operates under the *Forced Withdrawal* rules (see p. 135).

AFTERMATH

The battlefield hadn't even cooled from the ferocious energies you expended when the call came in from the higher-ups. A resupply shuttle due in-system in a week includes a set of new orders. R&R is over; something major is happening in the Lyran Alliance, contact with Tharkad is lost and powerful people are pounding some major war drums. IE needs all available forces to be ready for action at a moment's notice.

Time to mount up. A storm is breaking on the horizon and it isn't pretty—meaning more work, and more importantly, more money.

ADDITIONAL HOOKS

Interrogation of the captured pirate reveals a central clearinghouse in a nearby system, used by three small pirate gangs staking claims in the Chaos March. Rumor places a secret FedCom supply depot in the system, which might be worth checking out if you have the time.

Expansion Ideas

The ambush can be stretched out using Recon Raid, Probe, Stand Up and Fight! or Hide and Seek scenarios. The gamemaster can also play this out in combination with *AT2* to represent the pirate force's initial atmospheric insertion and possible landing.

NEXT TRACK

Running From the Devil, *Golden Goose*

THE SKYE IS FALLING!

Journal Entry #201

The bosses hired us out to the Alliance. Looks like they stumbled across something big on Skye, and they need us to baby-sit the site. Dunno why. Skye's probably the safest rock in the Theater.

Journal Entry #215

Figures. Fate goes out of its way to give us a hard time. We just got word from Duke Kelswa-Steiner that Free Worlds League forces are making a hard burn for the atmosphere. He told us that with his first sentence; the second pressed us into his personal service. I have no idea what terms he considers valid, but with a couple of Kelswa-loyal RCTs on planet, it seems unwise to argue contracts.

SITUATION

Vector 9B, en route to Sirian Marker-4
Bugbottom Swamp
Skye, Lyran Alliance
5 February 3068

The Sirian Lancers, along with other Free Worlds League and "mercenary" forces, have launched a first strike against Skye, apparently in retaliation for the assassination of General Helen Thrall. A general call went out from Duke Robert Kelswa-Steiner for all available Skye forces and area mercenaries, including most corporate contracts.

A small, unknown combined-arms force has set up camp in an abandoned Commonwealth air base nearby and has been running bombing raids against the planetary capital. Skye Command wants that air base destroyed and all those fighters eliminated.

THE SKYE IS FALLING

GAME SET-UP

CBT: Use the Flatlands Terrain maps.

AT2: Using Flatlands Terrain maps (and/or Coastal if using *Combat Operations*), set up an area at least three mapsheets in size. Gamemasters should use the *Low Altitude Operations* and *Aerospace Units and BattleTech* rules (see p. 33 and p. 40, *AT2*, respectively) for this track.

RPG: The airbase is a temporary field base. Situated in open terrain, it has little surrounding cover. Minimal security measures are in place, along with roving patrols. Roll for an encounter every fifteen game minutes.

Attacker

The Attacker's deployed force consists of up to 50 percent of the players' total force, plus the additional Lyran lance (if used). The Lyran lance consists of elements of the Fourth Skye Rangers RCT. A Veteran lance, its equipment comes from the B column of the Lyran Random Assignment Table. The Attacker enters the battlefield from the east.

Defender

The Defender comprises elements of a Word of Blake air wing with support units, all disguised as Free Worlds-employed mercenaries. The defending force equals 50 percent of the Attacker's deployed force, with another 50 percent on standby (fighters waiting on the runway and/or 'Mechs and vehicles parked in "ready five" mode). Determine equipment using the Free Worlds League Random Assignment Table (B column) for three out of every four units. Roll the remaining force using the Word of Blake Random Assignment Table (B column).

The Defender must first delineate the airbase runway, selecting at least twelve non-water hexes in a row that do not change elevation (or two six-hex rows within two hexes of each other that meet these requirements, if the mapsheet does not permit a straight twelve-hex run). These hexes are considered Paved.

In addition, the Defender places six light Level 1 (CF 10) and one medium Level 2 (CF 40) buildings near the runways. The buildings should stand within three hexes of each other and at least three hexes away from the map edge. A communications tower, represented by a light Level 5 (CF 15) building is placed within four hexes of the end of one runway.

Defending forces begin the track on the board. Units designated "standby" must be placed on a runway hex or in a hex next to a building. The Defender must declare standby units before the start of the track. All other units may be placed anywhere on the battlefield. If using *AT2* units, active units may begin at an Altitude of 3 or less with a Velocity of 4. If playing the RPG version, the gamemaster should have a map handy for player reference.

THE SKYE IS FALLING

Beginning with the End Phase of Turn 2 (and at the end of every turn thereafter), each unit still on standby rolls 2D6. On a result of 9 or greater, that unit starts up and may begin movement in the following turn. Aerospace forces on the ground must take off using the *Liftoff* rules, p. 54, *AT2*.

WARCHEST

Track Cost: 600 WP

Optional Bonuses (all bonuses cumulative):

+200 Under-Gunned: The Attacker may opt to not use the Lyran support forces.

+100 Geysers: Per the rules on p. 152, *CBTComp*. In addition to rolling for eruption and duration, roll 1D6 – 3 to determine height. Any *AT2* forces caught in or flying through an active geyser blast should make a Control Roll with a +2 modifier. Failure sends the unit out of control for the next turn. Gamemasters should secretly place two geysers for every lance (or equivalent) in the Attacker's deployed force.

+200 Poor Intelligence: The Defender is more heavily armed than originally thought. Add 25 percent more units to the Defender's total force size.

Victory Bonuses (bonuses not cumulative):

–200 Total Defeat: Completing only one or no objectives

+500 Partial Victory: Completing two objectives

+800 Total Victory: Completing all objectives

OBJECTIVES

1. Obliteration. Destroy every building at the base.

2. Salt in the wound. Destroy every unit that began the track in standby mode.

3. "Frugal" is the word of the day. Minimize your damage by keeping your casualties (destroyed units) to only 10 percent of the players' deployed force.

4. Just plain mean. Destroy every flying/jumping unit possessed by the Defender.

SPECIAL RULES

The following rules are in effect for this track:

Salvage

The *Salvage* rule (see p. 136) applies only if the attackers achieve at least three objectives and control the battlefield.

Forced Withdrawal

The Defender's entire force operates under the *Forced Withdrawal* rules (see p. 135). Units leaving the battlefield in this manner are considered destroyed when determining objectives.

Gift

If the players attain a Total Victory, the Skye government gives them one unit rolled from an appropriate Lyran Random Assignment Table at Tech Level A.

AFTERMATH

The duke of Skye certainly knows how to reward those who come to the aid of his province. Accepting the gift graciously, you spend a few days recuperating before IE completes the dig and your contract is declared fulfilled. Loading up, you can't help but notice the increased activity in the DropPort's military sector—troops getting organized, 'Mechs lined up like giant metal men. *Lots* of 'Mechs. Weren't the Skye units supposed to be licking their wounds so soon after the FedCom Civil War?

Looks like the duke knows how to reward those who attack him, too.

ADDITIONAL HOOKS

Information downloaded from the airbase's communications array by a special commando squad reveals that not all Skye citizens are loyal to the Lyrans—or to Duke Robert Kelswa-Steiner. It seems SAFE has been active recently among the citizenry. Care to accept a side contract for some wetwork?

Those "mercenaries" seemed fishy, didn't they? Looks like the Word of Blake is in the business of masquerading as other factions, including mercenaries. How much would people pay for that type of information?

Expansion Ideas

The players may execute a Probe scenario to determine the disposition and layout of the base before the actual strike. Possible follow-up scenarios can include Chase, Hide and Seek or even a Recon Strike as the base is abandoned and the "mercenaries" retreat off-planet.

NEXT TRACK

Golden Goose, Running From the Devil, Falcon Ptomaine, Game On!

RUNNING FROM THE DEVIL

A war zone. Forget what the newsvids are saying, it's a bloody war zone at the seat of the Combine's most powerful district, especially now that Luthien's been cut off.

Fighting is rampant. An ugly gantlet in space, with the Blakists and Combine aerospace task forces playing cat and mouse in the asteroid field between the star and the planet. We needed a longer burn-in time to avoid any entanglements.

Maltex has us running in a load of Hatamoto-Chis *for the Combine. The district's supply network is in so much disarray that the various manufacturers are scrambling to hire mules wherever they can. We were rotating stations for IE when the CO took a side contract to deliver the company of assault 'Mechs to the beleaguered Combine forces on-planet.*

No problems dropping off our cargo—coming in on the night side helped us avoid a tangle with that Blakist cruiser in orbit—so we're prepping to lift when this Sho-sho *approaches us with a desperate plea….and some cash, of course.*

SITUATION

Scales of the Dragonet Mountains, Pearl District
Dieron, Draconis Combine
8 April 3068

Everything on Dieron is a mess. Hit-and-run raiding, mass assaults against the capital and a huge forest fire are only part of the dire situation.

A Combine officer approached your CO and set up a quick contract for an out-system run. A convoy carrying some important cargo and intel is due inbound to the makeshift drop zone and they need someone to escort it out. Your force is approached as one of the few not currently engaged, and the officer promises you a large sum of C-bills if you can get the cargo safely to the zenith point, where a ready JumpShip waits.

RUNNING FROM THE DEVIL

GAME SET-UP

This track has two parts. Players may opt to run either part, or for a more intense experience, play both parts. Part A involves intercepting the convoy on land and escorting it to the drop zone for loading. Part B covers the trip out-system, where the DropShip is in danger of interception by a Word of Blake recon flight.

CBT: Use any Terrain Maps and lay them in Chase format (Part A).

AT2: Place Space maps (or the white hexmaps on the back of most *CBT* mapsheets) end to end. In addition, use the *Asteroid* rules on p. 47, *AT2* and scatter 1D6 small, 1D6 medium and 1D6 large asteroids between the two maps. At least half the asteroids are stationary (Part B).

RPG: The part the players decide to play will determine the type of game the gamemaster needs to prepare. In Part A, the players receive two heavy vehicles if they do not have any (roll on the Combine Random Assignment Table). The gamemaster will need to delineate an operational area for the battle and determine appropriate boundaries. For Part B, the players are allotted the *Condor* (upgraded) for transportation. The *Condor*'s crew rating is Veteran.

Attacker

The Attacker contains elements of Word of Blake forces on-planet and in orbit. The Attacker's total force should equal 75 percent of the Defender's deployed force (including additional Combine units) for the ground battle and 100 percent of the Defender's deployed force (including additional Combine units) for the space battle. The Attacker's force is Veteran; determine equipment from the Word of Blake Random Assignment Table (Tech Level B or lower).

Part A: The Attacker enters from the west (behind the convoy) at the beginning of Turn 3. The attacking force should include at least one squad of Purifier battle armor.

Part B: The Attacker enters perpendicular to the Defender's starting position on the furthest mapsheet at a Velocity of no less than 7.

The Word of Blake forces are fanatical, and will fight in both battles to the last man or when their objective (a Daimyo HQ van for Part A, a *Condor*-class DropShip for Part B) is destroyed or exits the map area.

Defender

The Defender's force consists of the players' deployed force and an escaping Combine convoy. The players may use up to 50 percent of their total force for this track. If the players have their own DropShip, they may use up to 75 percent of their total force. Players without a DropShip receive an *Okinawa*-class vessel on loan from Maltex for Part B. The Combine convoy units, loaded into a modified *Condor* DropShip, need not use any of the players' transport assets. All Combine troops are considered Veteran.

RUNNING FROM THE DEVIL

Part A: The player's deployed force enters from the east. The Combine convoy enters from the west. The convoy consists of:

1 HQ 67-K Daimyo
1 Pegasus Scout hovertank
1 Sprint Scout VTOL (laser variant)
1 Saracen hovertank (MRM variant)
1 Maxim heavy hover transport
1 squad of Kage battle armor (flamer-equipped, which begin the track loaded aboard the Maxim)

Part B: The Defender's deployed force enters the map across one of the short sides at any Velocity below 5. The Combine force consists of:

1 *Condor* (upgraded) DropShip
4 AHB-443 *Ahab*s

WARCHEST

Track Cost: 500 WP (Part A or B)/850 WP (both parts)

Optional Bonuses (all bonuses cumulative):

+150 Sand (Part A): Treat all clear Level 0 terrain as Sand, per the rules on p. 153, *CBTComp.*

+150 Malfunctioning Drive (Part B): One of the Defender's DropShips (randomly selected) suffers drive problems. Reduce the unit's Safe Thrust Rating by half (rounding up) and recalculate its Max Thrust.

+200 Overwhelming Force (Parts A or B): Change the Attacker's deployed force to equal 150 percent of the Defender's deployed force.

+150 Mines (Part A): The Attacker may pre-designate five command-detonated minefields before the start of the track.

Part A Victory Bonuses (bonuses not cumulative):

+200 Marginal Victory: Completing one objective
+400 Partial Victory: Completing two objectives
+600 Total Victory: Completing all objectives

Part B Victory Bonuses (bonuses not cumulative):

+200 Marginal Victory: Completing one objective
+400 Partial Victory: Completing two objectives
+600 Total Victory: Completing all objectives

OBJECTIVES (PART A/PART B)

1. Survival of the fittest. The objective vehicle for each part must survive (Part A: Daimyo, Part B: *Condor*).

2. Glory to the defenders! Two or more of the Combine's escort forces must survive each part (not counting the objective vehicles).

3. Duty above honor. None of the Combine forces are destroyed.

SPECIAL RULES

The following rules are in effect for this track:

Asteroids (Part B)

Place 3D6 asteroids on each mapsheet. See the Asteroid rules on p. 47, *AT2*.

Gift

If the players attain a Total Victory, the Kurita government gives them two units rolled from an appropriate Combine Random Assignment Table at Tech Level A.

AFTERMATH

Covered in grease and streaked with sweat, the technician slammed the maintenance hatch shut and hit the wall communicator. "All done. Light it up, we're ready to go."

"Acknowledged." Seconds later the jump siren sounded in three short blasts. While tying themselves down in the cramped engine room, the cleaner of the two on-station technicians looked at his companion. "So why is the Old Man in such an all-fired hurry? We're pretty safe at the moment, no Blakist fighters nearby. Why the hot-load when we could've waited another fourteen hours?"

"Something to do with the Dropper that hooked up a few hours ago. Seems she's got some valuable cargo."

"Oh yeah? Fancy flying, that crew. Dodging space rocks like in that classic film we saw the other month…What was it called again?"

"*Star Racers of Galax*. One of the engine crew came through here awhile ago, looking for some spares. Scuttlebutt says the Coordinator's on that ship. Hurt bad, too."

"Oh, man. I hope to hell it isn't true—first Luthien, then here. Now Teddy K? What the hell has this universe come to?"

ADDITIONAL HOOKS

So what's in that thing, anyway? A quick-and-dirty operation to explore the contents of the *Condor* DropShip (or even enter the *Daimyo* HQ) without the Combine knowing could net nothing—or some good intel for your employer. Of course, all those DEST and ISF guys hanging around make it hard to see if it's the Coordinator, his heir or even another high-ranking official.

Capturing a Blakist and transporting him or her to the proper authorities would make an interesting trip in and of itself. Who knows what the fanatic might know—or try to do!

Expansion Ideas

Gamemasters can link an expanded Chase scenario to Part A or B. Or someone might set up an ambush down the road to take down the rescuers, if they made it through the first gauntlet. Or maybe the Blakists hang back and hit the base when the players' force arrives, or when the JumpShip as docking begins….or maybe the Blakists want to strike a deal for the contents of the objective vehicles.

NEXT TRACK

Golden Goose, *Game On!*, *Full Metal Press*, *Falcon Ptomaine*

GAME ON!

"Commander, I'm getting some odd reports over Solar Five."
"And just why are you monitoring a games channel?"
"Um… 'Information is ammunition'?"
"You're bucking for more latrine duty, aren't you, soldier?"
"Sorry, sir. But Solar Five is reporting riots in the streets of Solaris City."
"Again? What are these people on, three-year cycles?"
"Roger that, sir."

SITUATION

Grid 45Y18X, Tangerine Desert
Solaris VII, Lyran Alliance
16 June 3068

IE has dispatched your force to Solaris, but not for the fun and games. One of IE's smaller member groups, Yoris University Amalgamated, has made a significant find buried beneath the dark sands of the Tangerine Desert. Your job is to protect the site until decent transportation assets can arrive to load up the new find and transport it offworld. After that, you and your mercs can spend some time amid the glitz and sham that make up the Game World.

Even if the Game World is under siege.

GAME ON!

GAME SET-UP

CBT: Use Flatlands/Badlands Terrain maps in a minimum two-by-two grid. The gamemaster should place two Light Level 1 (CF 5) buildings in adjacent hexes anywhere on the map grid. The buildings should be at least five hexes from the map edge.

AT2: Use Flatlands/Badlands Terrain maps in a minimum two-by-two grid. The gamemaster should place two Light Level 1 (CF 5) buildings in adjacent hexes anywhere on the map grid. The buildings should be at least five hexes from the map edge. Gamemasters and players are encouraged to use the *Low Altitude Operations* and *Aerospace Units and BattleTech* rules (see p. 33 and p. 40, *AT2*, respectively) for this track.

RPG: Gamemasters should prepare for a desert battle in this track. Both buildings are large tents, one being the dig site and the other containing partitions for sleeping/eating quarters. Possessions are minimal, and only six personnel are on-site. No vehicles or heavy weapons are present. The gamemaster may have one medium-sized support vehicle present, if desired.

Attacker

Unmarked elements of a Word of Blake assault force that dropped onto the planet a few hours prior have dispatched a smaller force to capture the site and kill all personnel present. They will fight to the death.

The Blakists' deployed force should equal 120 percent of the Defender's deployed force, using the A column on the Word of Blake Random Assignment Table. The attackers are a Veteran combined-arms force, with an equal mix of aerospace, BattleMech and vehicle/infantry units. The gamemaster should randomly determine the Attacker's starting edge.

Defender

The players may use up to 50 percent of their total force for this track. Personnel at the dig site are civilians and have no military training.

The Defender begins with 75 percent of the players' deployed force within six hexes of the two buildings. The other 25 percent may begin anywhere in the playing area as hidden units.

WARCHEST

***Track Cost*:** 900 WP

Optional Bonuses (all bonuses cumulative):

+200 Sand: Per rules on p. 151, *CBTComp*
+200 Winds: Per rules on p. 153, *CBTComp*
+300 Blowing Sand: Per rules on p. 153, *CBTComp*

Victory Bonuses (bonuses not cumulative):

+600 Partial Victory: Completing one objective
+1,000 Total Victory: Completing both objectives

OBJECTIVES

1. Protect and secure! Keep the site buildings from being destroyed.

GAME ON!

2. Time is of the essence. Keep the Attacker from capturing the site by crippling/destroying or driving off all the attacking forces.

SPECIAL RULES

The Attacker operates under fighting withdrawal rules. At the end of twenty turns, if the Word of Blake has not destroyed or captured the site, they begin to pull back in response to reports of incoming Yoris DropShips. Units withdrawing in this fashion may still fire on their opponents without restriction, and after Turn 20 are not counted toward Objective #2 for victory determination.

AFTERMATH

Whoever said archeology isn't dangerous was a fool. By the skin of your teeth, you managed to salvage some of the site after the Word of Blake's deadly attack. Speaking of which, when did they show up on Solaris VII? Didn't ComStar have this planet's HPG under its protection? Of course, considering your less-than-public approach to begin with, it's not like you were really paying that much attention.

Whatever the reason, the Games are on hold in the wake of more rioting in Solaris City. It seems this time no one knows what's going on—reports over the radio bands say some unknown DropShips and 'Mechs just hot-dropped onto the Factory complex in Montenegro, ruining a great grudge match event.

Looks like R&R will have to come later. IE wants you to leave the hot zone and move on to another assignment….

ADDITIONAL HOOKS

Just what did YUA discover? Rumor has it that the dig site is where the original *Phoenix Hawk* / *Sentinel* battles occurred, but why would YUA need three *Buccaneer* DropShips to cart off records and files? Maybe because the site used to be a Defiance Industries R&D lab, complete with computer reports and working prototypes of new laser technology….

Expansion Ideas

Gamemasters can stretch this track into a series of Hide and Seek clashes in the Tangerine Desert, with the players intercepting the Blakist force before it reaches the YUA base camp. Players can attempt to redirect the Blakist force away from the base camp to save the site from destruction. Gamemasters who choose this route will need to alter Objective #2.

NEXT TRACK

Falcon Ptomaine, *Final Curtain?*

GOLDEN GOOSE

GOLDEN GOOSE

Personal Log #326

An ideal situation—our high-up muckety-mucks want us to steal a computer core from a contractor that ripped them off. Nothing truly important in the core; apparently it's just a lot of accounting data. This is more about revenge than a surgical hit. Though I wonder, given that these orders came after we'd been assigned to help the Illician Lancers raid Tsingtao in the name of the Federated Suns. Why such a prestigious force needs help from grunts like us I'll never know. All I see right now is being able to take a few months off and hit the Pleasure Circus on Daniel if we can double-score this mission.

After all, getting paid twice for one job doesn't happen often….

SITUATION

Inbound Trajectory
Tsingtao, Capellan Confederation
28 June 3068

Company higher-ups have "attached" your force to the Illician Lancers, who are conducting a high-impact raid on Tsingtao for Duke George Hasek. However, your services weren't leased out just for good intentions. Apparently your bosses want you to conduct a side raid to steal a competitor's computer cores—specifically, those owned by Shun-lin Networking, Inc. The cores can be stolen from a few locations on- and above-planet, so you're getting paid by the Davions to hit a world you were already assigned to hit. Twice the pay, onetime risk. Always a good thing for a mercenary.

GOLDEN GOOSE

GAME SET-UP

CBT: Use Mountain and Wooded Terrain maps. Place one heavy Level 1 (CF 70) building somewhere on the mapboard, preferably near a Heavy Woods hex. The building should be at least seven hexes from the map edge.

AT2: Use at least two Space maps for this track. Place one marker toward one edge to represent a space-borne facility. The facility has a Velocity of 0 and the following statistics: SI 4, 30 armor, no weapon bays. In addition, use the *Atmospheric Operations on the Space Map* rules, p. 18, *AT2*. The facility may not be placed in an atmosphere hex but should be within two hexes of the Space/Atmosphere hex row. The station is considered stationary for the duration of the track.

RPG: The players (or gamemaster) can determine whether to hit the mountain base or the one in space. Both facilities are small—they have enough room for a squad of marines and a three-person technical staff. Computer and site security are high (minimum TN of 16 to avoid sensors or hack the computer network) and the gamemaster may feel free to develop the facility as he chooses, though there should be only one entrance/exit. The company requires the entire computer core, not just a data dump.

Attacker

The Attacker may comprise up to 50 percent of the players' total force. The other half of the team is operating with the Illician Lancers to keep suspicion down about the player group's little side trip. The Attacker begins the track on the map edge farthest from the facility.

Defender

The Defender comprises a mix of planetary militia and mercenaries hired by the local government. Each of these forces should equal 50 percent of the Attacker's deployed force, resulting in a total deployed force strength that matches 100 percent of the attackers. When determining forces, locally hired mercenaries roll on the B column of the Mercenary Random Assignment Table; for the militia, roll on the C column of the Capellan Random Assignment Table. The mercenaries are Veteran, the militia Green. If the defending force includes vehicles, care should be given when determining the motive type, as the militia will deploy only vehicles that make sense in the terrain being used (for example, re-roll any hover forces for the militia if using any Heavy Woods maps).

The militia force enters the area at the beginning of Turn 5, while the mercenaries are placed anywhere on the battlefield within eight hexes of the facility at the start of the track.

WARCHEST

***Track Cost*:** 700 WP

Optional Bonuses (all bonuses cumulative):

+300 Ambush: Change the Defender's militia force to 75 percent of the Attacker's deployed force. Half the militia force begins the track as hidden units (if using *CBT* rules) or may begin at any Velocity anywhere on the Space maps (if using *AT2* rules). For *CBT: RPG*, consider them well hidden with a +4 bonus to detection TNs. The mercenary force remains at 50 percent of the Attacker's deployed force.

+200 Mines: As an added defensive measure, the area surrounding the selected facility is seeded with minefields. For *CBT*, add four 10-point conventional minefields; for *AT2*, add four hexes of space mines (see *Combat Equipment*, p. 22); for *CBT: RPG*, the gamemaster determines the type and number of minefields.

+200 Electromagnetic Interference (EMI): Tsingtao's unusually powerful magnetic field fluctuations sometimes cause havoc with ground and close-orbit electrical systems. At the beginning of each turn, roll 1D6 for each powered vehicle, 'Mech, fighter or armored infantry. On a result of 1, powerful EMI adds a +2 modifier to all ranged weapon attacks for that turn, and all rolls on the Missile Hits Table (regardless of the weapon system used) suffer a –2 modifier. During the turn, all ECM systems in use double their effective range, while all active probes are effectively disabled. The facilities are shielded from such phenomena and remain unaffected, as do units inside the facilities.

Victory Bonuses (bonuses not cumulative):

+300 Marginal Victory: Completing one objective
+500 Partial Victory: Completing two objectives
+900 Total Victory: Completing all objectives

OBJECTIVES

1. Retrieve the core. To accomplish this in *CBT* games, one attacking unit must end its movement next to the building hex and remain stationary for five complete turns. This may be shortened to three turns if an ECM is in use around the facility at the same time to assist in defeating the computer security. In *AT2* games, one attacking unit must dock with the facility and remain stationary to it for five complete turns. This may be shortened to three turns if the attacking unit is a small craft with a Marine complement on board. In an RPG game, the players must seize the computer core, defeating a Tech/Electronics TN of 18 to physically remove it from the system (in addition to any efforts to subvert building or system security measures).

2. Defeat the defenders. Destroy, cripple or forcibly withdraw every defending unit.

3. Destroy the facility. Ideally, the players' force should do this *after* seizing the core.

SPECIAL RULES

The planetary militia is comprised of regular citizens, not hardened soldiers, and so the *Forced Withdrawal* rules (see p. 135) apply to these units.

GOLDEN GOOSE

AFTERMATH

Burning out from Tsingtao, you happen to catch the weekend business report. Though not normally your speed, the slick announcer mentions something about Shun-lin, the company you just stole a computer core from:

"—announced today the total data failure of their intercommunications network. While not normally worth a major announcement, Shun-lin representatives stated that because of the network failure, the company has lost the new genetic codes for the pesticide protocol needed to hold back the Chaultapec Virus. Scientists are warning citizens to start stocking up on non-perishable items for the coming winter. The Chaultapec Virus is deadly to native wheat, used in making bread products and the ever-popular Tsingtao beer. In the wake of this news, Tsingtao Bottling's stock dropped 110 points on the planetary market—"

ADDITIONAL HOOKS

Shun-lin, the company you just ripped off, figures out what happened rather quickly. They launch a strike at the players, attempting to retrieve the stolen data. Or they interfere with the handoff, sparking a running firefight.

The other half of the players' force is still operating with the Federated Suns raiders, and they face unexpected opposition from the planetary militia. Why? Perhaps an important official is on the planet, or the raiding party stumbles onto a secret Maskirovka base.

Expansion Ideas

Gamemasters can use several scenario types to create the Federated Suns raid on ammunition and supply facilities located on Tsingtao. This action occurs simultaneously with the player group's computer-core raid, using the other half of the players' total force. In addition, if the Confederation gets wise to the computer theft, then Capellan authorities may authorize pursuit of the players.

NEXT TRACK

Full Metal Press, *Falcon Ptomaine*

FULL METAL PRESS

FULL METAL PRESS

[Scout Four]: "Uh, boss, pickets reporting some long-range fire from Hill 21445. Isn't that where the Feddie troops are?"
[Base Alpha]: "21445? Damnation. Who do they think we are—"
[Baker Three]: "Sir! Baker Three reporting. I've got a mass push by the Confederation militia. Looks like they're angling our way."
[Base Alpha]: "What the hell? They plan to fight this out on our doorstep?"

SITUATION

Colmar Myomics Scrap Facility HH-2, Trachen Plains
Minnacora, Capellan Confederation
5 July 3068

Fighting around the complex you're protecting has gotten brutal fast. The Confederation forces called in some heavy reinforcements to hammer at the stubborn Davions for their assault on the Capellan world of Minnacora, and reports all around you show the widespread destruction inflicted by the two armies.

Apparently, word has gotten out that the complex you've been diligently guarding houses some major stockpiles of ammunition and spare parts—which is partly true. The warehouses are jammed full of 'Mech parts, but it's all scrap from bad production runs, failed prototypes and outright destroyed units turned in for quick cash by mercenaries like yourselves. Just because they store it here before shipping off to the smelting pits doesn't mean you're sitting on gold.

Doesn't matter to the soldiers outside, though. The Confederation has been threatening legal action against Colmar Myomics for several environmental regulatory infractions, and the AFFS troopers—well, they don't like the idea of Capellan ammo dumps, so they've been blowing up any they find, real or suspected.

At the moment, neither side seems to care that your force is a non-combatant. You're sitting on ground the other folks want. And you're being paid to keep everyone from setting foot on that particular patch of clay.

FULL METAL PRESS

GAME SET-UP

CBT: Use Urban/Woodland Terrain maps. Designate (or add) six Level 1 medium buildings (CF 40) near each other on one map sheet. There should be at least one hex between each building, and the buildings should stand at least four hexes from the edge of the map.

AT2: Use at least one Space map (or two white hexmaps). One edge is considered the planetary surface, with the center hex of the last row designated as the target area. This track uses the *Atmospheric Battles on the Space Map* rules from p. 18, *AT2*.

RPG: The complex you're guarding is small, with four warehouses, a hangar and the office building. All are medium buildings (CF 40). The gamemaster should design a map of the facility and surrounding area. The facility has no hardpoint defenses.

Attacker

Two components make up the Attacker in this track—elements of the AFFS and the CCAF. Neither side will cooperate with the other—instead, they will attack each other on sight. Both forces will strike each other before attacking the Defender's force.

The AFFS force should equal 50 percent of the Defender's deployed force. These are Veteran troops; to determine equipment, roll on the C column of the Federated Suns Random Assignment Table. They enter the board on the farthest edge from the facility (or the target hex, if using *AT2*) at the beginning of the track.

The CCAF force consists of Green troopers and should equal 125 percent of the total AFFS force. At least three-fourths of the Capellan units should be vehicles and infantry, as these elements are a planetary militia. They enter along any map edge at the beginning of Turn 3 (except for the planetary surface, if using *AT2*). Roll on Column A of the Capellan Confederation Random Assignment Table.

Defender

The Defender should consist of up to 75 percent of the players' total force.

WARCHEST

***Track Cost*:** 800 WP

Optional Bonuses (all bonuses cumulative):

+250 Better Troops: Increase the skill level for the AFFS and CCAF troops by 1 after total forces have been selected.

+200 Weapon Malfunction: On any failed weapon roll result of 2 (or Margin of Failure 5 or greater), consider that weapon jammed/damaged for the rest of the track.

+100 Fog: Per the rules on p. 153, *CBTComp*. For *AT2* games, atmosphere hexes contain heavy clouds; follow the rules for Fog to simulate this effect.

Victory Bonuses (bonuses not cumulative):

+300 Marginal Victory: Completing one objective

+550 Partial Victory: Completing two objectives

+900 Total Victory: Completed if all the buildings survive and Objective 3 is attained

OBJECTIVES

1. Defend the warehouses. At least three buildings must survive the track. For *AT2* games, standard bombing/strafing/striking runs are performed per *Special Maneuvers*, p. 34, *AT2*.

2. Minimal obligation. The players can fulfill the minimal obligations of their contract if only two buildings survive the track.

3. Doing a favor. Because Minnacora is a Confederation world, the Capellan government will consider it a favor if the players destroy all the AFFS forces—once things get sorted out, that is.

SPECIAL RULES

Forced Withdrawal rules (see p. 135) are in effect for the AFFS and CCAF forces.

AFTERMATH

Once things calmed down and everyone realized they were fighting over scrap metal—those who survived, that is—the battle moved further east. The Feddies stayed on-planet for just a few days, shooting things up, before lifting off—though your Chief Tech swears on his mother's grave he saw a lifting DropShip explode late one night as the Feddies burned out of the atmosphere. Capellan resistance apparently ended, too, since the Davion flag soon flew over the various government buildings.

Shortly afterward, IE recalled your force elsewhere. You happened to catch a report that a mysterious fire burned the facility to the ground shortly after you left. Apparently there was a natural gas leak from some pipes under the facility; all it took was one spark for the whole thing to go up in flames. Good thing nothing of value was there.

ADDITIONAL HOOKS

So why is a scrap metal yard so important? When underneath it lies a TSM production plant owned and operated by Cortide Magnetics, an IE council member—and rumored to have ties to Loki, or is it the NAIS? Of course, there's no visible proof of the plant's existence, but enterprising players might find a way…After all, the FedSuns forces made a beeline for the facility after landing. Did they know all about it?

Expansion Ideas

Using a Probe or Recon Raid scenario for the initial contact with either House force will alert the players' force guarding the facility that company is coming. Gamemasters may follow up with a Hide and Seek or Stand Up and Fight scenario, then with a Base Attack for a multi-linked scenario campaign.

NEXT TRACK

Final Curtain?

FALCON PTOMAINE

FALCON PTOMAINE

"Why is it that lately, no matter where we go, someone assaults us? Who the hell has it in for us, anyway?"

"Don't know, Sarge. Though you have to admit, it is beautiful here. And the beach isn't poisonous, for once."

"True. I thought I'd never wish for a quiet garrison contract. This constant action is tiring me out. Who knew our employer had so many enemies?"

"Well, it sure ain't ticked-off students. Hey, if they want to keep paying us primo cashola, who are we to argue? Hell, we could've been up on the Falcon border if we'd gone with the Kell Hounds."

"We are *on the Falcon border."*

"Oh. Really?"

SITUATION

Grant's Station Tango, Nuevo Roma
Tomans, Lyran Alliance
1 August 3068

A standard downtime clause in your contract with IE allows roughly two months rest every year. When you ended up close enough to IE's main research complex on Tomans—a sprawling university with its own mini-DropPort, seconds from a decent beach—your CO decided now was a good time to invoke that clause.

Officially, you're under a garrison contract, though IE recognizes the need for R&R. With the Falcons not too far away, it made sense to stay on guard. Only half your people were on leave when the Green Ghosts dropped in without calling first. People like that rarely get invited back.

FALCON PTOMAINE

GAME SET-UP

CBT: Use Urban Terrain maps (Heavy Urban, Coastal if using *Combat Operations*). The gamemaster should designate three buildings at least four hexes apart as the objective structures. If no buildings exist, the gamemaster may place up to three heavy Level 2 (CF 60) buildings on the map area.

AT2: Use at least two Space maps. Designate one side as the planetary surface and use the *Atmospheric Battles on the Space Map* rules from p. 18, *AT2*.

RPG: Rather than roleplay a large-scale battle, the players should consider themselves the on-duty security personnel at one of the university buildings. The building is two stories high and has minimal security. The player characters must protect it from a contingent of armored and unarmored Green Ghost infantry squads.

Attacker

The Green Ghosts have decided to drop in for a quick snatch-and-go. Roll for these Elite troops using the B column of the Federated Suns, Lyran or SLDF Random Assignment Tables, or (once per lance) on the Second-Line Clan Goliath Scorpion Random Assignment Table. The Ghosts' total force size should equal 50 percent of the Defender's deployed force.

Halfway through the battle—a point determined by a 2D6 roll result of 7 or greater, made at the start of any turn after Turn 5—Jade Falcons units arrive, conducting a planetary raid to test their newer warriors' mettle. One contingent targets the same area as the current battle. The Falcon force equals 100 percent of the Defender's force (as deployed at the beginning of the track). They are Regular Clan troops; roll for equipment on the Front-Line Jade Falcon Random Assignment Table.

The arriving Falcons, not bound by *zellbrigen* (dueling rules), may fire on either of the factions currently engaged in battle, with no preference toward either side. To determine which units the Falcons target, each Falcon unit should roll 1D6 on the turn of its arrival. On a result of 1–3, the Falcon selects a Green Ghosts target; on a result of 4–6, a players' target. Even though this roll determines which side the Falcon unit will fire on first, it does not define the particular unit to be fired on, and a Falcon warrior may ignore the result if fired on first by an element of the targeted faction.

Defender

The Defender can consist of up to 100 percent of the players' total force.

WARCHEST

***Track Cost*:** 900 WP

Optional Bonuses (all bonuses cumulative):

+300 Rainfall: Per rules on p. 153, *CBTComp*.

FALCON PTOMAINE

+200 Dusk/Dawn: Per rules on p. 153, *CBTComp*. Games using *AT2* space combat can use the *CBTComp* rules as well; consider the system's sun to be on the rim of the planet, creating a blind spot of glare.

+400 Earthquake (ground only): Per the rules on p. 153, *CBTComp*. Tremor strength is a 3, with two aftershocks (the first at strength 2, the next at 1). To determine when the earthquake hits, roll 2D6 after Turn 4. The earthquake occurs on a result of 8 or greater. After the initial tremor, roll 2D6 every turn; an aftershock occurs on a result of 10 or greater. Once two aftershocks have passed, the earthquake subsides.

+400 Meteor Shower (space only): Prepare 2D6 asteroids to use as meteors. To determine when the meteor shower hits, roll 2D6 after Turn 4. The shower occurs on a result of 8 or greater. When the shower happens, divide the number of meteors in half. Each side picks a map edge and then enters a meteor at Velocity 6, alternating between the two sides until all the meteors have entered. Treat the meteors as asteroids under the optional *Asteroid* rules. p. 47, *AT2*.

Victory Bonuses (bonuses not cumulative):

–700 Total Defeat: Completing no objectives
+400 Marginal Victory: Completing one objective
+750 Partial Victory: Completing two objectives
+1,200 Total Victory: Completing all objectives

OBJECTIVES

1. Protect the academy. Keep at least one designated target building from destruction or capture by enemy forces.

2. Begone, foul spawn! Destroy all the Green Ghosts or force them to withdraw.

3. "Sharpen *this!*" Destroy or cripple at least half the Falcon forces.

SPECIAL RULES

The following rules are in effect for this track:

Forced Withdrawal

The *Forced Withdrawal* rule (see p. 135) is in effect for the Green Ghosts.

Clan Honor

Though not following *zellbrigen*, the Falcon Star Colonel in charge of this force still believes his troops should fight with some honor. Therefore, no Clan units may conduct physical attacks until enemy units from either opposing faction make at least three successful physical attacks against the Falcons. After that, all bets are off, and the Falcons gain +1 to all subsequent Initiative rolls as well as being free to retaliate in kind.

AFTERMATH

Looks like trouble is starting to follow you guys around like a bad stench. A complaint by your CO to the IE liaison met with little result, though after this last debacle, for once they're not calling you up right after the last missile was fired. In fact, you hear little from IE for almost two weeks. Which is fine by you, as it allows your team to repair, recover and rest.

ADDITIONAL HOOKS

The Falcons are here to raid, testing defenses. Are they planning a follow-up attack? And just who are the Green Ghosts? IE would appreciate any leads you can dig up, considering that the Ghosts have hampered IE operations for years.

Expansion Ideas

Gamemasters who want to split this track into two or more continuous scenarios with the Green Ghost attack and a fast follow-up by the Falcons can use any scenario type. Players should track damage and ammunition across all linked scenarios, making on-the-spot field repairs and reloading if they have the right equipment. The players' force may claim salvage only after completing the entire track.

NEXT TRACK

Final Curtain?

FINAL CURTAIN?

Personal Journal #552

Planetary assaults are such nebulous affairs. Murphy rules these types of engagements with an iron fist. I've never joined one that went as planned.

Intel assures us that Giausar is only a supply world for the Lyran assault on the Free Worlds League. As part of the push to punish the LAAF for following Duke Kelswa-Steiner's foolishness, the League hired a bunch of mercs to lead the assault while the FWLM sits back and learns from us.

Stupid armchair generals. Paying for their greed with our blood.

Hopefully, Mr. Murphy is on holiday. Because I for one would like to spend the cash they're throwing at us for this operation.

SITUATION

Task Force Gauntlet, Inbound vector TT-4
Giausar, Bolan Province
Lyran Alliance
2 September 3068

IE didn't renew your contract when it ended a week ago. Looking for quick work and pulling in some favors from a few Free Worlds League government types, the CO signed you up to assist in a major push to seize Giausar from the Lyrans. Why doesn't matter—it's work, and with good pay at that.

The downside? Serving under the arrogant Knights of the Inner Sphere. Of course, they do lead from the front, so they're either really good at what they do or they're out to seize all the glory. Either way, they're your employer, so you do as they tell you.

It's all about the money, after all.

FINAL CURTAIN?

GAME SET-UP

This track is a straightforward planetary assault. Players may take part in any operation hitting the planet: main force, recon, decoy, strategic operations and so on. The gamemaster and the players decide what rules to use.

Attacker

League-hired mercenaries—including the players—are in the vanguard of the attack, along with the Second Battalion of the Knights of the Inner Sphere. All forces have assigned objectives, determined by the gamemaster. Because this is a planetary assault, the gamemaster should decide how large a force the players may deploy based on the Defender's total deployed force.

Defender

Defending Giausar is the One-Eyed Jacks mercenary command, led by Colonel Darrel "Ramrod" Duke, along with that command's aerospace wing, the AeroJacks. The Defender's total force comprises a BattleMech regiment and two aerospace fighter squadrons, all Veteran troops. Determine most of the Jacks' units using the C column of the Mercenary Random Assignment Table. To reflect Duke Kelswa-Steiner's efforts to capitalize on the Alliance's need for a solid defense against the League, the gamemaster may determine one in every five Jacks units (aerospace and BattleMech) using the A column on the Lyran Random Assignment Table instead.

Because this is a planetary assault, the gamemaster has full authority to determine both sides' deployed forces. We suggest the Defender's deployed force equal at least 75 percent of the Attacker's deployed force for any given scenario. The Jacks also have two *Union*-class DropShips and an *Overlord* for on-planet mobility and added firepower.

WARCHEST

***Track Cost*:** 1,500 WP

Optional Bonuses (all bonuses cumulative):

+400 Mixed Terrain/Weather (ground only): The gamemaster may select one appropriate Terrain Type/Condition and one Weather Condition from pp. 151–153, *CBT: Comp,* for this track. Alternatively, if using a linked-scenario campaign, the gamemaster may change the Terrain Type/Condition and/or the Weather Condition for each scenario.

+400 Orbital Defense (space only): The gamemaster places at least one space station (*Bastion* or similar size) at least three hexes "above" the space-atmosphere interface. The station's gun crews are Veteran. Fighters may launch from the station, if desired.

Victory Bonuses (bonuses not cumulative):

+1,200 Marginal Victory: Completing the first objective
+1,750 Partial Victory: Completing the second objective
+2,500 Total Victory: Completing the third objective

FINAL CURTAIN?

OBJECTIVES

1. Bing… Destroy or cripple at least 50 percent of the Defender's units.

2. Bang… Destroy or cripple at least 75 percent of the Defender's units.

3. Boom! Force the Defender to withdraw from the planet (attained by destroying or crippling 100 percent of the Defender's units).

SPECIAL RULES

The following rules are in effect for this track:

Salvage

If using a multi-linked scenario campaign, the players may claim salvage between scenarios rather than at the end of the track.

Forced Withdrawal

The *Forced Withdrawal* rules (see p. 135) are in effect for the One-Eyed Jacks. If the gamemaster is using additional Free Worlds League forces (such as the Second Knights of the Inner Sphere), these forces likewise operate under those rules.

AFTERMATH

The Lyrans seemed surprised at the amount of force the League shoveled onto Giausar—as if they didn't expect the League to pour over the border and seize a major supply world for the Skye/Bolan push into League space. No matter; the League troops just mopped up after the mercs did all the work. The salvage clause in your contract helped a lot—the League practically gave the salvage to all mercenary commands involved.

The odd thing was the sudden withdrawal of the Knights' Second Battalion, right in the middle of pushing the One-Eyed Jacks' right flank. Jacobi, in the communications van, said the Knights got an ultra-encrypted transmission during the battle. They packed up and left in the middle of the firefight, radioing to let us know the change of command to another League unit.

Stupid Knights. Guess they have no stomach for fighting down in the dirt. The Jacks fought tooth and nail, almost to the last man. Two of their Droppers made it past the League space cordon, so for sure by now the LAAF knows we're here.

Question is, for how long?

ADDITIONAL HOOKS

Because this is a planetary assault, the players can explore hundreds of different possibilities, from hot drops to pre-invasion recon to assassinations. The gamemaster can put the players through as much as he desires. The contract is a blanket one—assist in taking Giausar. How that happens apparently doesn't matter much to the League military.

Expanding this track into a larger campaign may involve the addition of allied units (such as elements of the Knights) to the players' force at the gamemaster's discretion. If so, and for any scenario in which the players and allied units face a One-Eyed Jacks force, the Jacks may use their special ability to create confusion between the non-integrated commands, winning a +1 Initiative bonus for every distinct force opposing them. Negate this bonus (and apply a –1 initiative modifier to the Jacks) if the players and their allies field at least one mobile HQ between them.

Expansion Ideas

Gamemasters can expand this track into a large-scale assault from arrival to endgame on Giausar. A small planetary militia exists, mainly as a harassing force. Gamemasters can include the Second Battalion of the Knights of the Inner Sphere, if desired, as well as three to four small mercenary companies. The gamemaster decides how long the battle runs and for what type of objectives—as long as the track objectives are met, the sky's the limit.

NEXT TRACK

None. Time for refit and repair while you await the next Jihad campaign!

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NOTES

"Injuries ought to be done all at one time, so that, being tasted less, they offend less; benefits ought to be given little by little, so that the flavor of them may last longer. And above all things, a prince ought to live amongst his people in such a way that no unexpected circumstances, whether of good or evil, shall make him change; because if the necessity for this comes in troubled times, you are too late for harsh measures; and mild ones will not help you."

—Niccolo Machiavelli, The Prince, Chapter VIII

"And of all princes, it is impossible for the new prince to avoid the imputation of cruelty, owing to new states being full of dangers."

—Niccolo Machiavelli, The Prince, Chapter XVII

"The truly ambitious do not seize the throne; they push others to do so and then rule from the shadows."

—Conrad Toyama, Commentaries

Marik Palace
Atreus, Marik Commonwealth
Free Worlds League
9 August 3069

Thomas froze midway through reaching up to the high shelf, the leather-bound book gripped in his right hand. He'd ignored the trace of whiskey in the air—he'd shared a glass here with Heather Alexander a couple of hours ago—but the faint whisper of cloth against cloth that sent icicles down his spine couldn't be explained away. He'd thought he was alone. Security should've *guaranteed* he was alone.

He fought the urge to spin and face the intruder, knowing any sudden movement might prove fatal. He pushed the book onto the shelf, then allowed his arm to fall, the movement slow and controlled. His mind raced through a host of scenarios. An assassin? It wouldn't be the first attempt since this contretemps began, though none had gotten through his security yet. One of the children playing? They knew better than to come into Daddy's study. One of *his* agents?

That possibility scared Thomas. *His* people were brutal, efficient and often inhuman, and the events of last October had made clear to all the lethal differences between Thomas and the Master. In fact, Thomas had waged a covert campaign against the puppeteer for some time, a crusade dating back to the Conference of 3063. Until last autumn it had been a hidden war, in which even many of the participants remained unaware they were taking part.

He turned carefully, making no sudden moves that might alarm the intruder. He scanned the room, but at first couldn't see where the intruder lurked, let alone who it was. Then a faint movement in the shadows in the far corner caught his eye. From the leather armchair beneath the unlit floor lamp, a small dark figure watched him. Shadows moved and light flared.

"Sit down, Captain-General." The watcher gestured toward the other chair, his hand trembling with an agitation that threatened to spill some of the Stewart Malt he clutched. Thomas crossed the room with measured steps and sat as directed, resting his palms on the cold leather armrests.

"You used to call me Thomas, Paul. We were brothers."

"But you're not Thomas, nor are you my brother. *You* never were."

"We've discussed this before."

They had done so last autumn, after the Blakists made it known that Captain-General Thomas Marik was *not* a Marik by birth, but rather someone the Order—in its pre-Schism form—had created and installed. Political and social outrage had erupted across the Free Worlds League, yet in this time of war Thomas (he had worn that name so long it was easier to use than his own) had retained his office. Some called foul, naming him impostor and traitor. Others said his elevation proved that the Marik dynasty was a white elephant and any appropriately skilled individual could lead the Free Worlds. The entire situation could have gone to hell in a handbasket, but ironically his greatest support came from old political foes and those whom his enthronement had disenfranchised. Alys Rousset-Marik, architect of the Great Debate, called on the people to rally round her erstwhile uncle; Therese Marik, oldest child of Janos Marik, disowned but influential and the wife of warlord and hero Jeremy Brett, called on the populace to support Federal authorities; Paul Marik, the insightful but reserved Minister of Intelligence, briefly stepped out of the shadows to affirm his support for "the Captain-General." What had changed? Why was Paul sitting here now, looking as if his nerves were on a knife-edge?

A faint smile crossed Paul Marik's lips. He nodded. "I was prepared to see what you could do to hold the Free Worlds together. I've waited calmly for months, but not everyone is that patient. Some people have decided that your efforts are not enough, and that matters are better off in their hands."

"Kirc never was very patient."

"Regulus is the least of your worries, *brother*." Thomas saw the gun then, a compact Sea Eagle needler resting in Paul's lap. "You should've left matters alone. The world was none of your business."

"Him!" Thomas spat, and started to rise. Paul's left hand snapped up, leveling the weapon at the scarred man's face. "You sold out the League to a madman."

Paul glowered, sweat beading on his brow and his gun hand trembling. Thomas sank back into his seat. "Don't speak about him like that, you fraud." Paul's voice scarcely rose above a whisper. "The Master is a visionary. He can see what those shortsighted

THE SHROUDED BLADE

fools in the Star League cannot. He doesn't put self-interest above the needs of all."

"Oh, Paul." Sympathy tinged Thomas' voice. "I'd hoped you wouldn't fall prey to him."

"Wouldn't learn the truth, you mean." The gun shook as Paul vented his fury. "Wouldn't learn of your treachery. You brought this on the League. You and you alone. Now, because you tore up the plan, we have to practice triage, sacrificing part of the League so that some of it will survive.

"Paul, I—"

"Spare me your excuses, fraud. You were supposed to be *his* spokesman and agent in the Free Worlds, but you turned your back on him and ComStar."

Frustration made Thomas lean forward, causing Paul to flinch. Sweat rolled down his temple and onto his cheek. His free hand rose to wipe it away. The gun, still shaking, never moved from Thomas' face.

"I did what was best for the Free Worlds," Thomas responded. "Our people, *our people*, were not best served by becoming a ComStar puppet state. With all you know, you must be able to appreciate that."

"I don't care about ComStar. I don't give a damn about shoddy maintenance on Tharkad, or Combine bioweapons on Galedon, I care about the here and now. About our people. I care about your betrayal. That in your attempts to play elder statesman, you abandoned him, made him—"

"Have you met this 'Master'? In the flesh? Spoken to him face to face? " Thomas' eyes narrowed as he met Paul's gaze. "I thought not. If you had, you wouldn't be questioning my motives. Believe me, he doesn't care about the Free Worlds. At first, perhaps, but the last time we communicated it was clear he thought even Myndo Waterly was a bleeding-heart liberal. You know what this is in *his* eyes? This is Scorpion, writ large. His attempt to outdo the Primus *he* pretty much regards as a god, Toyama. He's using you. He—"

The safety snapped off. Thomas froze.

"I should kill you now." Paul's voice was cold and the gun didn't waver.

Thomas' mouth went dry, but he refused to avert his gaze, instead meeting the challenge in his brother's eyes. "I suspect…" He paused briefly, licking his lips and cocking his head to one side as if listening intently, a mannerism that had become his trademark in Parliamentary debate. "…That *he* wants me alive." *For now, at least*, was the unspoken codicil.

A smile tugged at Paul's lips and the gun dropped away from Thomas' face. "I'll give you that much credit. You do know how he thinks…now and then."

"And you still think I'm wrong to act the way I do? I know what he wants and what he'll do to achieve it. If you know that, why do you go along with him?"

"Blood is thicker than water, and with Cameron-Jones' declaration you have become a liability. If the League is to be saved, we need a Marik at the helm. A *true* Marik."

"And you think you're up to the job? Or perhaps *he* thinks the people will accept him for what he is?" A wry grin crossed his face as he saw Paul frown. "I thought not. You never were one for the limelight and his…"—he paused, searching for the right word—"…disabilities would count against him with too many people in the League. Oh, yes, I know about that. I was briefed as to why I rather than he took the throne."

Paul set down his whiskey glass and stood, motioning for Thomas to do likewise. He gestured toward the door with the pistol, his face a cold mask.

"My daughter will succeed you. She has long been a favored candidate."

Thomas let out a small laugh. "Corinne hates the idea of ruling as much as you do, or of going against authority. She even hesitated to join Alys' little clique." That group, opposed to Thomas' rule and seeking the repeal of Resolution 288, seemed so innocent now.

"She knows her duty. She will provide a focus for the true power of the Mariks."

"Oh, she'll love you for that, Paul." Irony dripped from Thomas' voice but Paul either didn't recognize it or pretended not to notice.

Paul reached for the door and pulled it open, motioning with the gun for Thomas to enter the outer office.

A pair of security troopers stood there, wearing FWLM battledress and cradling heavy needler rifles. He was surprised by their presence—for all their weight, they'd moved into position quietly. The scent of grease from the armor fought with the fragrance of the large vase on the side table. The grease was winning. Surely that was symbolic. The troopers wore the purple of the Mariks, but something was out of place. It took a moment for Thomas to identify it: The Marik Eagle emblazoned on their shoulders and on the pectoral armor plates of their vests stood before a silver broadsword, the sigil of the Word of Blake. He looked into the mirrored faceplate of the trooper on the left and saw a distorted image of himself looking back.

Oddly appropriate, he thought.

Paul slipped his pistol into a jacket pocket, then pulled out a comp-pad and keyed up various readouts. After two or three pages, he grunted and frowned.

"Not everyone cooperating with this little coup d'etat you've engineered, Paul? Some troopers remembering their oaths of office?" He glanced at the statue-like soldiers.

"They're Blake Militia, a gift, so don't hope they have any residual loyalty to you. And you really have no idea how ill-liked you are, do you, Captain-General? Of how little support you have in the military. I didn't need to engineer a coup. I just gave my approval and allowed matters to take their course. Adam simply made sure people we could trust were in the right place at the right time."

THE SHROUDED BLADE

Thomas pondered. Adam Tam, Chief Armorer. His Blakist sympathies were an open secret, but Thomas had thought—had hoped—he'd been isolated from them. Like Paul? The mistakes were compounding.

"And you expect me to meekly go along with things?" Thomas finally said.

"Not really, no." Paul slipped the pad back into his pocket and pulled out a comm unit. He thumbed the transmit button. "Bring them."

He turned to regard Thomas, his face impassive. Footsteps sounded on the creaking boards of the wood-paneled corridor, an innovation previous generations of security-conscious Captain-Generals had installed to warn them of approaching intruders. The antechamber's outer door opened and another armored trooper stepped through, leading a huddle of bedraggled figures. A second trooper followed the group.

"Thomas!" Sherryl Halas cried as she fell into her husband's arms. Her hair was in disarray and she appeared to have dressed in a hurry. She smelled faintly of lavender.

"Papa!" cried the two boys as they clutched at his waist, both still in pajamas. His youngest child, six year-old Jessica, clutched at Thomas' face from her perch in Sherryl's arms.

Paul watched the reunion impassively. "How touching," he said, deadpan. "As you see, any attempt you make to resist will imperil your wife and children."

Sherryl gave Paul a cold look. The boys, ten-year-old Janos and nine year-old Christopher, looked ready to attack their erstwhile uncle. Jessie, seemingly just woken up, appeared ready to burst into tears.

"My, how fierce." Paul reached out to ruffle Janos' hair, but the youngster jerked away.

"I won't let you turn Dormuth into a new Yekaterinburg, Paul." Adrenalin surged through Thomas' veins and he clenched his fists. How could he save the children and Sherryl? Would the guard expect an old man like him to put up a decent fight? Against one he might've tried, but two...there was no chance.

Paul looked him straight in the eye. "If you cooperate, none of you will be harmed. You have my word on that."

Political necessity, Thomas realized. He might be persona non grata, but Sherryl was Chris Halas' daughter, and Paul could ill afford to anger the powerful Duke of Oriente. Paul knew Thomas loved her, but not with the same passion he'd felt toward Sophina. Their marriage was a partnership, equal parts business and romance—Halas imperial ambition married to Thomas' desire for a political redoubt against certain revelations.

For now, as it happened.

Sherryl snorted and Thomas put a comforting hand on her shoulder. "Tell that to Heather Alexander," she said. She turned to face her husband. "I saw some guards carrying her out of the Ops center as they brought us down here." She paused. "It looked like she'd put up quite a fight."

Thomas closed his eyes for an instant, remembering his Minister of Defense, then glared at Paul.

"Admiral Alexander and General Blake refused to cooperate. They were...dealt with." Paul's voice held no remorse, despite having worked with both women for several decades.

Cassie Blake, despite her surname, despised the Blakists, which had gotten her into hot water both professionally and in her private life, but it had also made her a determined supporter of the Captain-General and his agenda. Thomas wondered if Adam Tam had killed her. They'd loved each other and fought in equal measure. It had almost seemed they'd loved to fight.

"Enough of this," Paul said. "Escort the Captain-General and his family to the *Noble Vision*. Precentor Nathan is expecting them and will escort them to Mars."

The two soldiers who had arrived with Sherryl and the children saluted. One gestured for Thomas and his family to enter the Nightingale Corridor.

"One day you'll see the truth, Paul. One day you'll realize that rather than helping the people, you've destroyed the last chance to end the madness." *Do this and he'll win this Blake-forsaken Jihad*, he screamed silently. Despite his rising sense of terror, Thomas couldn't help the hint of a smile at the irony of the epithet he had chosen.

"So you say, impostor. Give my greetings to my real brother."

The second guard leveled his weapon at Thomas, nudging him in the small of the back with the muzzle. Grudgingly, Thomas followed his family into the corridor.

THE SHROUDED BLADE

Their twin captors led Thomas, Sherryl and the children through the winding corridors of the palace. Similarly dressed guards stood at intersections, demonstrating the extent of the coup and the iron grip of the Blakist occupation. That it had occurred so quickly and quietly shocked Thomas, as had its success despite all his precautions.

Paul's betrayal had been the weak spot. Having your Minister of Intelligence side with the enemy was just a *small* inconvenience, Thomas thought wryly. He'd certainly misjudged the younger man. Paul's intellect was well known, but so was his dislike of the spotlight and being in authority. Had it always been an act, or had Paul been playing politics for decades? Thomas thought through a succession of conversations over the more than three decades he'd spent in office. Had he been that blind to Paul's actions and his relationship with his real brother, or was that a recent innovation? Had Paul shown any sign of disloyalty or a hidden agenda?

Options raced through his mind. Could he persuade them to let Sherryl and the children go? Unlikely; his family was leverage. Could he fight his way out? His eyes flicked to the troopers. Fat chance. A rescue? Here? The modern palace was a fortress, or more accurately, a prison, designed to keep the enemy out. Now it effectively isolated him from rescuers.

And if they get us off-world to Mars? With that system smashing the Dragoons and ComStar's Case White, if he fell into that hole, none of them would ever escape. Could he get a message out before they left the Atreus system to someone who could act? Romanov, perhaps? Hell, did anyone even know he'd been taken? Would the Blakists acknowledge his capture, or might Paul continue to issue orders under his signature as if nothing had happened until it was far too late? Paul, for all his reserve, had considerable intelligence.

Thomas was so lost in thought that he didn't register the woman's approach until she was only a few meters away. Dressed in FWLM dress whites, she strode with authority down the passageway, a sheaf of documents clutched in her left hand while her right was folded behind her in the formal style favored at court. Chestnut hair cascaded over her shoulders, a trait she shared with her cousins Alys and Isis, but whereas the two younger women were slight and pretty, this officer exhibited a hardness that detracted from her appearance. She was still handsome, but her demeanor was cold and distant.

"Come to gloat, Corinne?" Sherryl snapped. Thomas rested a gentle hand on her forearm as if he feared she would attempt to strike the younger woman. "Or should I call you Captain-General?"

Corinne ignored her and stepped toward the right-hand guard. Her left hand came up, holding out the documents to the trooper. "Your orders," she said in an authoritative voice. Instinctively the soldier reached out to accept the documents.

Thomas heard the dull chink of metal on Perspex, then a faint "zing." His eyes narrowed as the sound registered and his brain tried to work out what it was.

The guard fell back, a thin wisp of smoke trailing from a neat hole drilled in the faceplate where the muzzle of Corinne's laser pistol had touched it.

Sherryl was still glaring at her pseudo-niece when Thomas' elbow came up. Though fifty years older than the trooper—at least—he had the advantage of surprise. His training, given many years before, made obvious the futility of striking at an armored opponent. The bulky torso and head armor protected the trooper from most physical harm, but you could always find a weak spot if you knew where to aim.

The blow caught the guard, whose gun was already moving toward Corinne, in the throat. Thomas yelled in pain as his flesh struck the ceramic plates of the soldier's gorget, but at the same he felt a grim satisfaction as the blow drove the armor back into the soldier's windpipe. He heard a crunch and a gurgle as the impact crushed the trooper's trachea. The man fell back, dying, but unlike the guard Corinne had shot, he was not dead yet. His trigger finger tightened.

The stuttering whisper of the retort belied the carnage it unleashed. Even as Corinne twisted and fired at the second guard, Sherryl and the boys fell forward.

"NO!" Thomas screamed. *Not them. Please, not them.*

He fell to his knees, gathering up the nearest child. Christopher's eyes looked back, but they were glazed over. Blood soaked through onto Thomas hands. He grasped for a pulse. Nothing. Clutching his youngest son to him, mindless of the spreading pool of blood, he reached out to his other son. Janos looked peaceful, but his eyes too stared back sightlessly. Thomas sobbed. The room faded away and become a void. There was nothing left. Nothing for him. It had all been in vain.

"Thomas?" The voice sounded slurred and weak. Frozen, Thomas watched Sherryl struggle to push herself up. She coughed, and blood flecks spattered her lips. A wailing cry sprang from beneath her, and she fought to rise a second time. Corinne dropped to her knees next to the stricken woman, the pistol falling from her hands, and pulled the trapped child from beneath her mother. Blood soaked Jessica's nightdress. Corinne hurriedly checked the child for wounds.

"She's fine, Sherryl. Jessica's fine." Corinne forced the words out.

Thomas heard them, but they held no meaning. He rocked back and forth, a boy clutched in each arm, his face a sea of emotion. He paid Corinne no heed and seemed not to hear Sherryl or his daughter.

Dimly, he heard Corinne speak his name. "Thomas?" He couldn't respond. "Thomas?" Louder. Still no response. Then Corinne's hand came up and around, slapping his scarred face. His head snapped back and his eyes locked with hers. His heart skipped a beat, and a sense of relief rushed into the void. The pain remained, but now he felt a faint hope along with it. He tasted copper in his mouth and spat blood on the floor.

THE SHROUDED BLADE

"Sherry needs you. Jessie needs you," Corinne said.

Thomas stared at her, struggling to comprehend.

"I'm sorry, Thomas. It wasn't supposed to happen like this. None of it was, but your wife and daughter need you."

He lowered the bodies of his sons gently, brushing dark hair back from their eyes. Then he gathered up his whimpering daughter, clutching her to him with his left hand. Jessica looped her arms round his neck and buried her head in his shoulder.

"I'm so sorry, Thomas, I'm—"

His right hand shot forward, closing around Corinne's neck in a grip like a battle armor claw. She tried to pull free, but he squeezed harder. "You selfish bitch." His hand closed further. Her eyes bulged. "Not satisfied with the throne, you try to kill my family, too?"

Corinne could only gurgle. Her left hand clutched vainly at his grip on her throat, while her other hand struggled to recover the discarded pistol. She kicked him, but he barely felt it.

"Thomas, no." Sherryl's voice, little more than a whisper, held urgency. Thomas pushed his niece away. She fell back, gasping for breath. With Jessica still hanging from his neck, Thomas recognized his wife's predicament. She had been shielded from much of the shower of polymer needles—by the boys, he realized to his horror—but the fringes of the cloud had shredded clothes and the flesh across her upper back. She was bleeding profusely, the ends of dozens of needles protruding from her skin. He knew enough to realize that with appropriate medical attention she might survive, but if they fled she'd be denied any chance of life. The desire to escape fought with the desire to save her. *If I take her with me, she dies. If I leave her, they'll use her against me. They won't stop hunting me, though, so could my enemy's home be the safest place for her?* If he left her there, would they think him leashed, while in reality he could quietly continue the war? Was it the sacrifice of a queen to allow the pawns to advance?

"Go, Thomas. Take Jessie and go," Sherryl whispered. She understood. Both his wives had a keen grasp of political reality, and he loved them for it.

"I'll make sure she gets medical aid. No one will harm her. No one," Corinne rasped as she looked around for something to staunch the blood flow. "You have my word."

"That's worth nothing, girl. Yours and your father's both."

Corinne glared at him. "Every minute you waste is a minute less to save Sherryl." She wiped bloody hands on her jacket, leaving gory streaks on the dress whites. She looked down and then stripped off the jacket, using it as an impromptu dressing. "And believe it or not, not everyone is against you. Yes, papa decided your time was up—something spooked him, something you were going to do, he said.

Thomas' scarred hand gripped one of Sherryl's while he brushed hair from her face with the other. She tried to smile, but winced. "Did he say what?"

"Something about rogue Knights and 'Stevens,' whoever that is." Thomas raised his eyebrows, but made no comment. "By the time I found out, about an hour ago, it was too late to head things off. I couldn't stop the coup, but I can mitigate its effects. Dad wants me to be Captain-General, but I have no plans to cooperate with his friends. The Word will find Atreus much less hospitable than they hoped." A wry gin crossed her face even as she tried to staunch the blood flow from Sherryl's back. "In fact, if I have my way it'll become a quagmire for them."

"Love, leave me here. Trust her," Sherryl gasped.

Thomas leaned forward and kissed his wife's forehead. Her eyes closed. A faint smile played across her lips and her breathing became regular. He stood, then crossed to the boys, reached down and closed their eyes. He whispered a quiet prayer.

"Go," Corinne urged. "There's a shuttle on Pad Two that will take you and Jessie to the *Raptor*. Captain Bowen can still be trusted and he'll get you to safety. Duke Halas will take you in, you and his granddaughter both. Hell, even Alys won't turn you away now, though from what I gathered from Dad she may well have other problems on her plate. Chris Halas is your best bet, particularly as Dad knows I won't take the League to war against itself. There you'll only be facing Blakists." She glanced down at the two boys. "Whatever you choose, I'll make sure they receive a funeral that befits their status."

"Paul will kill you, or his brother will," he said. She looked at him quizzically. "You'll figure it out. And they'll use Sherry against me and Duke Christopher."

"I'll do what I can to shield Sherryl. As for the other, Dad needs me. After all, how can I be held responsible for you overpowering two of his elite troops? Especially since, in the chaos of the coup, someone accidentally switched off all the security pickups." She glanced up at the camera that observed the corridor. "They won't be able to get that working for hours." This time her grin was genuine. "I turned them off before trying to rescue you, and the toaster-worshipers will spend ages working out which prayer to say to get things working right again. Now, go!" She gestured down the corridor with her chin.

Thomas rose from his crouch near the boys. He took a step down the corridor, then turned back and leaned down toward Corinne and his wife. "Keep her safe, and yourself." He bent down and kissed his wife one last time. Jessica reached down too, a small hand grasping toward her mother.

Then Thomas Marik, former Captain-General of the Free Worlds, rose and strode down the paneled hallway and into exile.

STATE OF THE SPHERE: 3070

Welcome to tonight's special report, "State of the Sphere: 3070", here on INN. I'm Michael Bosworth, your host. Before we begin, I'd like to thank ComStar's tireless engineers and communications specialists for working around the clock over these past eighteen months in an effort to purge the HPG network of the Word of Blake virus that has corrupted much of our recent programming. We here at INN know it has been an inconvenience to our audience, and while we have not fully re-established regular unfettered services, we have isolated and eliminated a fair portion of the interference.

Presented here tonight is a rundown of the events that have occurred across the Inner Sphere since our last report in October of 3068. While many of our own reports and newsfeeds over the past several months were hopelessly garbled and tampered with by the Blakists, our colleagues with the InterStellar Associated Press services have graciously allowed us to access their own material for this comprehensive review. In addition, unprecedented access has been given to us by many of the other state news and intelligence services, enabling us to bring you declassified reports and summaries from all levels of government. In cases where access remained restricted, other sources have been gleaned for information that may shed light on certain subjects. Whenever possible, we have tried to bring you all types of voices, so that we may all better grasp the Sphere-wide war the Word of Blake continues to wage, seemingly against all of humanity.

We have attempted to provide as much of the material as possible in chronological order, to give you, the audience, a sense of structure. Please understand that while we have tried to be as thorough and as selective as possible in making sure the material herein is accurate, some pieces may contradict others or even contain false or misleading information due to certain biases, opinions, slants and even outright Blakist manipulations. As we fight through this Word of Blake Jihad, we here at INN will continue to update and correct any misinformation.

Our review of the past few years of this terrible war begins with a rundown of the known events that occurred in the chaotic time between the Star League dissolution and the Blakist White-Out in late 3068.

—Michael Bosworth, INN Special Correspondent, Orestes, Free Rasalhague Republic, 3 January 3071

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Jihad Hot Spots: 3070 (*JHS: 3070*) is a sourcebook for *Classic BattleTech* that continues where *Dawn of the Jihad* (*DotJ*) left off, providing players and gamemasters with an ongoing first-hand look at the events of the Word of Blake Jihad from the closing months of 3068 through the end of 3070. To best reflect the continuing chaos and uncertainty of this period, the material presented in this sourcebook—and in subsequent *Jihad Hot Spots* books—will use the same format of compiled news articles, interviews and "first-person" material featured in *DotJ*. In addition, as the truth of events comes to light, this book and its successors will include a timeline describing those events known to be true from previous books, while also providing additional campaign scenarios and even new game rules and units based on developments in the appropriate time period.

Beginning with *A Sphere in Flames*, *Jihad Hot Spots: 3070* reviews the events that led up to and through *DotJ*, including those incidents nearly lost to HPG interference initiated by the Word of Blake on 25 October 3068. A review of known events—removed enough from the immediate chaos to be considered fact by nearly everyone in the *Classic BattleTech* universe—is also provided here.

The following sections take us forward in six-month increments, using the same basic format as *DotJ*, but with a more chronological focus. Each of these sections includes scenario tracks (called *Chaos Unleashed*) compatible with the *Chaos Unbound* campaign system outlined in *DotJ*. Gamemasters and players can use these campaign scenarios, which follow the *Chaos Unbound* system, for any number of one-off games. We chose not to reprint the campaign system in this book so as to provide more room for articles and "hard" rules later on. *Taking Stock*, the final sourcebook section, wraps up events through 3070, covering a few remaining key happenings between late 3068 and the end of 3070.

The final section, *Jihad Hot Spots: 3070 Rules Annex*, highlights new special rules and spotlights a few new units for *Classic BattleTech* game play whose introductions and/or use played a major role in the events preceding and featured within this book. Future *Hot Spots* books will add to these rules as the war continues, roughly approximating the pace at which new developments became widespread factors in the greater conflicts of the Jihad.

ABOUT THE CHAOS: UNLEASHED CAMPAIGN

The campaign tracks presented in *Jihad Hot Spots: 3070* (*JHS: 3070*) follow the same rules as originally presented in *Dawn of the Jihad* (*DotJ*). As such, to use the tracks in *JHS: 3070*, players will need the rules presented on pages 134 to 138 of *DotJ*; those rules can also be found on-line at www.classicbattletech.com.

Players and game masters (GMs) will also find these rulebooks handy, depending on the type of campaign run: *Battletech Master Rules, Revised* (*BMR*), *AeroTech 2, Revised* (*AT2*), *Classic BattleTech RPG* (*CBT: RPG*), *Classic BattleTech Companion* (*CBTComp*), *Maximum Tech, Revised* (*MT*), Combat *Operations* (*CO*), *Combat Equipment* (*CE*), *Interstellar Players* (*IP*), *FM: Mercenaries, Revised* (*FMMercs*), *Mercenaries Supplemental I* and *II* (*MS1* and *MS2*, respectively).

If a track does not specify certain parameters, it is up to the GM to decide what is fair to their particular player group. The overall concept of this campaign is to present GMs with a framework that allows them to bring their players through the massive conflagration known as the Word of Blake Jihad. Player groups may begin this arc of the Chaos campaign with 1,000 Warchest Points, starting with the *Leading Edge*, *One For the Money*, or *Graveyard Shift* Tracks; all generic militias referenced in these tracks are non-'Mech forces, using the D column of their parent affiliation's random assignment table.

A SPHERE IN FLAMES

A SPHERE IN

WAR ENGULFS INNER SPHERE

This report is a draft we received from a sister news outlet on Zollikofen. Embedded within the article are comments from the writer's editor. Though the majority of these comments demonstrate certain biases on the part of the reporter and the editor, the bulk of the piece provides a solid overview of events leading up to the Jihad as well as its first chaotic month.

We have also interspersed a number of related articles with this text, which will hopefully give you a better understanding of what was happening in each of the Inner Sphere nations when the Jihad struck.

—Michael Bosworth, INN Special Correspondent

A WAR IN REVIEW

Only one year has passed. In a few scant days, we will recognize the first anniversary of what many consider to be the "official" start of this so-called Jihad. Yet after only one year, should we truly be placing the blame for all our ills squarely on the shoulders of the Word of Blake? [*Ok, interesting take, Steve. I'm willing to see where this leads. –Ed*]

When looking at the evidence now, from a more objective distance, the issue of this Sphere-wide conflagration isn't that cut and dried. Many other events have occurred during this stretch of time, with less obvious connections to the "evil" Word of Blake. [*Bias here? Not sure that's really appropriate for a review piece. –Ed*]

One could even say that some evidence suggests Wolf's Dragoons are the true instigators here. [*Interesting. –Ed*]

MERCENARY BETRAYALS CONTINUE

(7 October 3068)

Galatea [DBC]—The MRBC has declared Mobile Fire a rogue unit. It has now been confirmed that Mobile Fire broke off negotiations to extend their contract and have taken service with the Word of Blake.

[*Listen not to these lies! Know that the Word of Blake offers honest coin for faithful service. We salute the skill and courage of contract military advisors, and offer a wide and exciting variety of employment opportunities.*]

With Mobile Fire abandoning their post, the LAAF has been caught flat-footed. A Blakist invasion force struck New Earth mere days after Mobile Fire jumped out of the New Earth system. Amid confused reports coming from New Earth has been news that the Blakists have repeated the atrocities they inflicted on Outreach, Tharkad and Dieron. Neighboring systems are also reported to be under attack.

[*Still the unbelievers besmirch our reputation! Know for all time that we did not use nuclear weapons on Tharkad. Nor have Muphrid, Thorn and New Earth been subjected to the kind of intensive bombardment reported.*]

The MRBC has reminded all mercenary commands that any who accept service with the Blakists will be branded rogue.

THE DRAGOONS DEBACLES

In mid-October of 3067, a large conglomeration of mercenaries incited a revolt against the Dragoons on Outreach. Led by Colonel Wayne Waco, the rebel forces engineered a sneak attack that wiped out much of the Home Guard and eventually killed Jaime Wolf. These "rogues" included several down-and-out units,

TIMELINE OF THE JIHAD

3066

(18 February) Word of Blake declares formation of Word of Blake Protectorate, including many Chaos March worlds.

(7 March) Wolf's Dragoons, the Northwind Highlanders and the Dismal Disinherited form Allied Mercenary Command (AMC) to stem rising Word of Blake influence in the Chaos March.

3067

(20 April) FedCom Civil War ends.

(8 September) With the recent deaths of four Clan leaders, the Northwind Highlanders exercise escape clauses in all current contracts and begin to return home for elections.

(10 October) Despite AMC efforts, the planet Hall joins the Free Worlds League. Blakist machinations are suspected.

(15 October) Commanded by Wayne Waco, rogue mercenaries in Harlech City on Outreach launch a surprise attack against Wolf's Dragoons and the Hiring Hall. Roughly half of the on-planet Dragoons forces are destroyed by October 19th. Jaime Wolf is killed in battle. The Dragoons' subsequent "Condition Feral" assures no survivors among the primary attacking forces, including the Fifty-first Dark Panzer Brigade, Smithson's Chinese Bandits and Waco's Rangers. Evidence of Blakist influence is uncovered.

(November) The Second Dismal Disinherited mercenary regiment arrives on Outreach from Tall Trees. Maeve Wolf, en route to Outreach with the Dragoons' Alpha Regiment—recently released from its contract—orders Gamma Regiment to exercise its contract escape clause from Tikonov.

(28 November) The Star League Conference begins on Tharkad, with all Great Houses in attendance save Liao, and representatives from ComStar, Word of Blake, the Rasalhague Republic and the Taurian Concordat. After a scathing message delivered

A SPHERE I

people relegated to Outreach's fringes by the Dragoons' own self-instigated class structure. [*Ok, that's your opinion. Strike that. If you can prove a pattern there, then do so—possibly in another article. –Ed*] Some of the more level-headed among them—like the Dark Panzer Jaegers and Smithson's Chinese Bandits—sided with Colonel Waco and attempted to address the problem the only way mercenaries know how, by war. The revolt failed, and both sides suffered gravely.

Rather than address the social and economic causes of the revolt, the Dragoons instead proclaimed that the Word of Blake was behind Waco's attack, offering scant proof in support. In what some might characterize as Clan-like hubris, they gathered their forces and headed off to strike the Terran system, recalling several commands that were under contract to other employers, invoking vague clauses that left many employers in the lurch. [*Granted, pulling units out on the basis of escape clauses is a way to manipulate the system, but in the Dragoons' defense, their celebrated leader was murdered, and only revenge would sate that wound. –Ed*]

THE STAR LEAGUE FAILURE

And then the Star League conference takes a downturn when Chancellor Liao decides he has no more use for the august Star League Council—meaning, to some, that he can no longer find a way to selfishly manipulate it further [*and Theodore didn't? –Ed*]—and quits the League. The Steiner-Davion children then astonishingly agree with Liao, and also decide to withdraw, because in their own family squabble they have destroyed trillions of C-bills of infrastructure, economic assets and military forces. Rather than call on the Star League for economic assistance—which is partly why it's there—they decide they're better off without anyone else's help. First Lord Månsdottir, despite his illness (rumors of poisoning notwithstanding) made a valiant and noble effort to

WAS THE STAR LEAGUE SABOTAGED?

(26 January 3068)

Orestes [ISAP]—Guests left dangling on purpose, House Lords spewing insults, long-standing members stepping back for no obvious reason, WarShips of legend, the Word of Blake losing its last shred of sanity, unexplained reactor explosions: The last Star League Conference had it all.

And none of that mattered anymore as the Inner Sphere once more plunged headfirst into a dark age. Granted, when war is brewing, no one cares about what or who started it in the first place. And the Word of Blake makes a convenient institution to stick it to.

[*"Blake's spirit guides the fate of the universe. Those following his path are mere vessels of his will. Those believing in his path will be rewarded. Those opposing him will feel his disregard and they will be left behind."*]

But are they really the true reason behind everything? Shouldn't we take a closer look at the aforementioned events? And what of the very plausible rumor about an attempt on First Lord Christian Månsdottir's life? Though vehemently denied by his office, the First Lord's malady, while 'almost' well concealed, didn't stem from insufficiently prepared Grumian clams. Instead—so credible sources among the court claim—it came from a slow-working poisonous substance that had to be administered to the First Lord over an extended period of time during last year.

TIMELINE OF THE JIHAD

by courier from Chancellor Sun-Tzu Liao, Princess Regent Yvonne Steiner-Davion of the Federated Suns and Archon Peter Steiner-Davion of the Lyran Alliance announce plans to withdraw from the League, citing internal matters. Despite a desperate bid to shore up the Star League by inducting the Word of Blake and the Taurian Concordat against a looming "no confidence" vote, the League formally dissolves.

(5 December) After a final threat from Word of Blake representatives, Blakist fleets attack Tharkad and New Avalon. The assault on Tharkad is spearheaded by the long-lost LCS *Invincible*, in Star League colors and crewed by Word of Blake. The opening volleys strike just outside Tharkad City and set off a catastrophic meltdown of the city's reactor. Initial reports, however, claim the Blakists loosed a nuclear device on the capital.

At New Avalon, AFFS WarShips attempt to interdict the inbound Blakist fleet and successfully cripple the attacking flagship. Heavy fighting in space precedes a subsequent bombardment aimed directly at Avalon City. Both the Tharkad and New Avalon fleets subsequently drop ground troops on their respective capitals, estimated at nearly a full division each.

(7 December) In retaliation for the Harlech assault, Wolf's Dragoons leads a punitive AMC assault against Mars, consisting of Beta Regiment and Zeta Battalion, the Second Dismal Disinherited and Lindon's Battalion, augmented by Home Guard forces and the Dragoons WarShips *Beowulf* and *Athena*. The assault fails, with all forces reported lost over Mars one day later.

(15 December) Word of Blake forces blockade Northwind, reportedly destroying or capturing all Highlander transport assets.

(19 December) Luthien HPG falls silent.

(20 December) Word of Blake naval forces arrive in the Outreach system, destroy the Dragoons defending WarShips *Nelson* and

A SPHERE IN FLAMES

salvage the League by installing two new members—the Taurian Concordat and the Word of Blake—but alas, the historic vote not to disband failed to carry the required two-thirds majority. And thus dies, with a gavel's bang, the noblest experiment in human history since the original Star League. [*Waxing a bit dramatic there. Tone it down. –Ed*]

The Word of Blake, incensed that the House Lords would give up so easily, ordered their small WarShip fleets near both Steiner-Davion capitals into planetary orbit. Perhaps they thought that just by showing their massive naval might, they could help the Steiner-Davion leaders realize what they risked by selfishly disbanding the League. [*Interesting. I assume you have proof of this? Because you know you cannot make blind assumptions here. Forward me what you have. –Ed*] At Tharkad, a weapons misfire struck too close to the Estates General and ignited a nuclear blast. At New Avalon, the trigger-happy FedSuns navy opened fire on the approaching Blake ships, which returned fire in self-defense. Those incidents, like so many others in our human history, set off a firestorm. [*Ok, I think you're being a bit too presumptive here, unless you have explosive proof from recordings and whatnot that I'm not aware of. If I didn't know better, I'd think you were trying to make the Word look like misunderstood saviors. I'm going to recommend you either strike this or reword it. –Ed*]

Even so, if the Dragoons' self-serving attack on the Terran system hadn't occurred two days later, the Word of Blake probably would have been able to work things out despite the apparent errors. [*Now you're treading the line of propaganda. I've not heard anything of this, so you'd better have proof. –Ed*] Instead, the mercenaries, operating under the mistaken belief that they are a nation unto themselves, launched a doomed operation against Mars. Even now—nearly a year later—the final fate of all the attackers remains unknown.

TIMELINE OF T

Darius along with the planet's orbital stations, and hold off a last-ditch defense by the Dragoons flagship *Alexander*.

(21 December) Clan Nova Cat forces on Tukayyid and elsewhere in Combine space, including their attached WarShips, abruptly withdraw to the Irece Prefecture. Elements of the reactionary Black Dragon Society launch a coup against the Luthien government. Blakist ground forces land on Outreach, initiating a massive battle on both primary continents.

(24 December) General Helen Thrall, head of the Sirian Concordance, is assassinated, reportedly by Skye agents.

(26 December) Blakist forces unleash a devastating series of orbital bombardments and strategic nuclear attacks against the Dragoons and their allies on Outreach, reportedly annihilating all Dragoons on the Remus continent and devastating the mercenary unit's forces on Romulus.

DESPERATELY SEEKING GABRIEL

(28 October 3068—System Error 0404—Backup Transmitted 20 November 3068)

Arc Royal [INN]—Last year, the Word of Blake unleashed an armada of WarShips on an unsuspecting Inner Sphere. The "Ruins of Gabriel" unquestionably played a role in creating that fleet. Whispers of a Star League cache or depot located in Lyran space circulated for years, but with the discovery of Camelot Command the issue was thought closed. Apparently, however, the Word of Blake discovered another SLDF facility.

["*Blake's holy light guides our steps.*"]

Locating the Ruins of Gabriel and cutting the Word of Blake off from its resources is now a matter of the highest priority.

["*The eyes of unbelievers shall be clouded. Only the Faithful may find the way!*"]

The Blakists recovered enough resources to kick-start the Free Worlds League WarShip program and provide aid to the Capellan Confederation.

["*The time when we receive payment for our services approaches.*"]

In addition, the Ruins probably contributed to the Blakist efforts to increase their own fleet strength. Some reports estimate no less than fifty capital ships.

["*Tremble before Blake's might!*"]

Inconsistent sighting reports, weird jump signatures—evidence is growing that the Word of Blake vessels have K-F drives whose performance is hitherto undreamed of. If this is true, then estimates of enemy fleet strength could be grossly exaggerated. But the implications are frightening. The ability to rapidly concentrate forces to achieve local superiority would effectively throw conventional strategic thinking out the airlock, much as the wide-scale deployment of lithium-fusion batteries did during the Reunification War.

["*The Warriors of Blessed Blake shall fight with the strength of Five!*"]

What other technological marvels (or nightmares) could emerge from the Ruins? Wild stories of 200-ton BattleMechs or AI combat computers replacing MechWarriors may need to be reevaluated.

["*As foretold, the anvil of knowledge is used to forge the weapons of redemption.*"]

A SPHERE

The Word of Blake struck back at the Dragoons and their allies with a devastating counterattack on Outreach. Shattering the defenders there with unexpected strength, the Blakists resorted to nuclear weapons on hardened Dragoons positions, to eliminate the threat of the renegade mercenaries.

DOMINOS FALLING

Meanwhile, around the Inner Sphere, other events unfolded even as the Word worked to pacify the civilian populations of Tharkad and New Avalon. The Black Dragon Society, sensing yet another opportunity for power, staged a coup on Luthien, seizing the palace and declaring Coordinator Theodore Kurita unfit for leadership. Units loyal to the Coordinator and to the Black Dragons clashed on the Black Pearl, shutting down the local HPG and doubtless terrifying the average Combine citizen. Pirate raids continued along the Periphery borders of all realms, along with the looming threat of the Wolf and Jade Falcon armies—two Clans who style themselves unbound by the Great Refusal of 3061. Agents allegedly from Skye assassinated General Helen Thrall on Christmas Eve, removing a stable voice in the FWL Parliament. [*All verifiable events. Good. Shows that it's not all about the Suns and the Lyrans. Stick to the facts like this and you'll be fine. –Ed*]

The beginning of 3068 saw the escalation of war as the House Lords threw off the restraints of the Star League that had previously bound them. Even ComStar jumped into the fray, attempting to seize power from their brethren in the Word of Blake.

In the Combine, rebel forces on Luthien galvanized after Coordinator Theodore Kurita disappeared while his delegation crossed into Kurita space. The Word of Blake, attempting to render

SOLARIS RESISTANCE BATTLES INVADERS

(30 July 3068—System Error 0404—Backup Transmitted 19 August 3068)

Solaris VII [VOICE OF FREEDOM]—For weeks now, the Solaris Home Defense League has successfully defended Solaran soil from the Blakist invaders. Thanks to the military genius of men such as Erik Gray, and with the valiant help of the men and women of the Silver Dragon, DeLon and many other stables, we have repelled the Blakists at every turn! We grow stronger with every day and every victory, and every free man and woman who joins our ranks! We hold secure the regions north of the—

[*"Terrorists. That's all these 'Solaris Home Defense League' thugs are. Erik Gray and his kin are nothing more but petty warlords, hoping to use this conflict as a means to become the overlords of this planet and turn it into their own private world, or one with a level of autonomy similar to that on Irian.*

"One need only look at the carnage they inflicted on Solaris City. Through the childish and self-absorbed actions of these self-styled warlords, this planet's capital has been laid waste twice, and now it has been ravaged a third time. These war criminals do not represent the people of Solaris.

"In contrast, we offer the safety and hospitality of our refugee camps located all over the Greyland continent. If you desire safety, peace, warmth and food without the constant danger of being trampled by 'Mechs loose on the streets of Solaris, leave and join us.

"We strive to return peace to Solaris City, an effort handicapped by our desire to avoid civilian casualties and unnecessary damage. Our foes operate under no such restriction, and have casually thrown away the lives of those they claim to protect from us. How much longer will you tolerate their lies?"]

TIMELINE OF THE JIHAD

(28 December) The Dragoons flagship *Alexander* covers a general retreat from Outreach by surviving Dragoons and allied forces. The *Alexander* herself is destroyed. Blakist blockade of Outreach begins.

(30 December) Black Dragon forces gain control over Luthien. Blakist forces complete conquests of Epsilon Indi, Fletcher and Tall Trees.

3068

(1 January) Word of Blake naval and ground forces attack the Luthien system. Reports of Blakist support for the loyalists are unconfirmed due to a planetary blackout. Loyalist and Black Dragon forces engage the Word of Blake, sparking a three-way battle for planetary control.

(21 January) The Word of Blake WarShips *Deliverance* and *Blake's Sword*—last reported at Tharkad—appear at Tukayyid to attack the Com Guard forces headquartered there. The Com Guard WarShips *Hammerstrike* and *Blake's Vengeance* are destroyed.

(28 January) Theodore Kurita suffers a stroke and falls into a coma while planning a campaign to reclaim Luthien. Hohiro Kurita, on Orestes at the time, does not immediately claim the throne. Blakist WarShips use coordinated orbital bombardment to cripple or destroy all Com Guard troops stationed on Tukayyid, as well as any SLDF units that rise to their defense.

(4 February) An allegedly renegade Free Worlds League *Eagle*-class WarShip (the *Percival*) raids Skye, and units sporting Sirian Lancers colors land on the planet to engage in a two-day battle with Skye forces. Duke Robert Kelswa-Steiner decries the assault, declares war on the League and calls all Skye-loyal troops to come to the Isle's defense. Word of Blake forces assault Dieron. Com Guard forces around the Terran system

COVENTRY BLOCKADE CONTINUES

(29 March 3068)

Coventry [DBC]—Their playgrounds are safe again, but how long until the children can watch the stars without fear?

Though the valiant Coventry Militia has driven the Word of Blake invaders from our home soil—gloriously shattering their ground forces in the effort—the danger seems far from over. Obviously unwilling to accept defeat, Blakist ships remain in-system, showing no intent to leave and continuing their illegal blockade.

[*"We offered a path to peace and prosperity to those deserving of it. We offer it again, for that very path to enlightenment can be a rocky one. Decide, or be still forevermore!"*]

But even while the local aerospace defense is rallying its assets for a decisive excursion, one question is on everyone's mind: Can it really be that easy?

Despite all prejudices and appearances, the Word of Blake military command isn't ignorant and is well aware of Coventry's industrial importance. So their empty fleet still loitering around could be a harbinger of things to come.

[*"May Blake's wisdom come upon you in a blaze of light, people of Coventry!"*]

May the universe have mercy on our souls.

IN FLAMES

humanitarian aid on the Combine capital, instead drew attacks from Loyalist DCMS and Black Dragon forces, plunging the heavily populated world into a three-way shooting war. [*Humanitarian aid? The record we have is the WOB commander declaring that he had arrived to assist the true loyalists of the Combine. Whether he meant one side or the other, we don't know. It looks to me like you're attempting to rewrite history here. I'm not liking this, Steve. –Ed*]

Seeking vengeance for a Lyran duke's attempt to influence Free Worlds League politics, Sirian forces launched a punitive raid against Skye. Unfortunately, the assault only brought further rage from the power-mad Duke Kelswa-Steiner, who promptly declared war on the Free Worlds League and—by action if not by words—took Skye out of the Alliance. Though he made no formal declaration of secession, the independent actions of this Lyran province speak loudly for themselves. Bolan Province followed suit shortly after its leader, Caesar Steiner, died in a suspected accident. [*Granted, the actions of Duke Kelswa-Steiner seem more in line with his own agenda for Skye. But I'm willing to cut him some slack, since at this time Archon Peter was MIA. –Ed*]

As for ComStar, Victor Steiner-Davion—who opposed Precentor Gavin Dow's dubious plan to invade Terra—failed to arrive to support his Com Guard troops as they invaded the Word of Blake homeworld. Thanks to failures of intelligence, coordination and leadership, the attack failed. Victor's late arrival, perhaps to claim victory after the fact, instead became a mad retreat from incensed Blakist defenders. [*That's a bit of a stretch. We know from the on-board press corps that the* Invisible Truth *was waylaid by a WOB attack. Again, it looks like you're trying to redefine history. I'm not pleased. –Ed*]

In the Chaos March, several worlds requested Word of Blake protection as war raged around them. To preserve their citizenry from further House aggression, the Word expanded its Protectorate to include most of the remaining Chaos March worlds, then followed up this action with pre-emptive strikes against major House stag-

TIMELINE OF THE JIHAD

begin gathering for Case White, a massive invasion aimed at Terra. The bulk of the Com Guard fleet and roughly eleven unengaged Com Guard divisions are called up for the offensive.

(10 February) The first batches of Blakist reinforcements reach Tharkad and New Avalon, extending the ground wars on both worlds.

(20 February) Contact with Precentor Martial Victor Steiner-Davion, personally assigned to lead Case White, is lost while he and his flagship, the *Invisible Truth*, are en route to the staging area.

(27 February) Caesar Steiner, Margrave of the Cavanaugh II Theater, is assassinated at his command post, allegedly by Free Worlds League agents.

(1 March) The Lyran Alliance's Bolan Province follows Skye's lead in declaring war on the Free Worlds and begins coordinating assault strategies with Duke Robert Kelswa-Steiner.

(9 March) ComStar's Case White invasion is launched.

(10 March) Bolan/Skye forces attack the Free Worlds League planets of Cascade, Megrez and Togwotee in the first wave of their invasion, codenamed Operation Überschatten.

(13 March) Due to widespread sabotage and an unexpectedly strong Blakist presence in the Terran system, Case White fails. (Reports of ground landings and nuclear attacks in Europe and North America remain unconfirmed.) The *Invisible Truth*, delayed until the 17th by an ambush, arrives too late to take part in the battle, and withdraws to report the total defeat of the Case White fleet, including all eleven divisions and more than twenty Com Guard WarShips. An estimated six Blakist vessels and a division of ground troops are thought to have been destroyed as well.

(14-17 March) Blakist raiders, supported by WarShips (or DropShips mounting capital weapons), attack the key Lyran industrial worlds of Donegal, Coventry and Hesperus II.

PROTECTORATE MILITIA FORMED

(1 August 3068)

Caph [VOICE OF TRUTH]—The Blake Protectorate today announced the formation of the Blake Protectorate Militia. This action was greeted with parades on every world currently enjoying the Word of Blake's benevolent guidance and selfless protection. After last month's addition of Shiloh, the Protectorate currently consists of Acamar, Arboris, Bryant, Cor Caroli, Caph, Capolla, Epsilon Eridani, Epsilon Indi, Keid, New Home, Shiloh and Terra Firma.

Hailed as an important move to increase security and stability in the region, officials with the Caph regional government in Aswan embraced the formation of the militia. Staffed largely by locals, the Protectorate Militia consists of large numbers of mechanized infantry regiments, supported by armored assets. The official statement, signed by Precentor Martial St. Jamais, further confirmed that all Protectorate Militia detachments could rely on BattleMech support of unspecified concentrations.

Funded directly by the Word of Blake, the Protectorate Militia has had a positive effect on local economies, providing work for those building the facilities and supporting the troops. On Caph alone, it is estimated that the Protectorate Militia added more than 50,000 new jobs to a region long suffering from abysmal unemployment rates. This effect is expected to drop off when the infrastructure for the militia is completed, but the steady income for those serving in or those supporting the militia, as well as the trade expected to come from the new bases, will likely keep local planetary economies humming for quite some time.

E IN FLAMES

ing bases, to stem attacks from the various Inner Sphere nations and spare their Protectorate further predation. Dieron became a focal point of this effort as the Combine's massed army collided with a smaller Blakist force, but even the capture of Hohiro Kurita in April failed to thwart the misguided Kurita advance. [*I'm beginning to wonder if you're more sympathetic to the Word of Blake. Pre-emptive strikes? That assault on Dieron was blatant, naked aggression. The Combine wasn't massing any type of strike force there. I'm thinking we need to have a one-on-one meeting soon. –Ed*]

By midsummer of that year, Duke George Hasek—perhaps taking a page from Kelswa-Steiner's playbook—used vague phraseology from the old St. Ives Compact Accord to validate a massive incursion into the Capellan Confederation. Even though the Compact ceased to exist in 3063, and conveniently ignoring the fact that the St. Ives worlds had embraced Confederation rule, the Capellan March Lord struck far into Confederation space, close enough to Sian to launch a naval strike at that world in an obvious effort to kill Chancellor Sun-Tzu Liao. Yet even with their leader lost, the Confederation has rallied, and even now works to push the Davion forces back.

THE CLAN FACTOR

The Clans, of course, also took advantage of the fog of war enveloping the Inner Sphere. Clan Snow Raven, recently arrived from their faraway homeworlds, unleashed an orgy of destruction and raids against several Combine planets on the Outworlds Alliance border, bringing their apparent Outworlds allies into the campaign. Moving without opposition along the border, the

TIMELINE OF THE JIHAD

(20 March) Clan Wolf in-Exile sends a task force to Outreach to evacuate any remaining Dragoons survivors, successfully extracting more than two companies of troops and scores of civilians despite heavy Blakist resistance. LAAF troops redeploy in an effort to shore up the Free Worlds border, despite General of the Armies Adam Steiner's admonishment of dukes Robert Kelswa-Steiner of Skye and Alder Umayr of Bolan for launching their joint invasion.

(30 March) The second wave of the Bolan/Skye offensive takes the League worlds of Colfax, Sheridan, Thermopolis and Pingree.

(April) Numerous raids—many now believed to be the work of Blakist forces or their mercenary allies—hit Addicks, Edasich, Talcott and New Valencia.

(16 April) Hohiro Kurita leads a DCMS task force to Dieron to confront Blakist forces there.

(25 April) Demeter's government submits to Word of Blake control.

(20 May) Skye/Bolan forces take Preston, Rexburg and McAffee.

(16 June) Unidentified invaders—later determined to be Word of Blake troops—invade Solaris VII, quickly overpowering any initial organized defense in the absence of the Com Guard forces relocated by the doomed Case White attack. In the confusion of the League-Alliance war, no one is certain at first who is behind the assault, but with so many stables and free agents on the world, an underground movement quickly forms to wage an ongoing guerilla war against the Blakists.

(18 June) Hohiro Kurita is captured by Word of Blake forces on Dieron. His commanders report him as "missing, presumed dead".

(19-21 June) The Word of Blake invades and conquers Altair, Asta, Fomalhaut and Yorii, using a combination of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons.

(25 June) Kai Allard-Liao vanishes while on a military inspection tour of St. Ives. Capellan officials blame Davion agents.

A SPHERE IN FLAMES

Raven fleet hit hard, then disappeared back into the Alliance near the end of the year, certain to return.

Meanwhile, the Jade Falcons seized the opportunity to launch several quick raids against Lyran border worlds. With the LAAF in disarray since Tharkad's blackout, the Lyran forces suffered major setbacks, convincing the Falcons that they can not only raid with impunity, but possibly seize the day and renew their stalled invasion. [*A stretch. The Falcons are more interested in raids—we've not seen a concentrated invasion pattern since '58. –Ed*]

IN A HANDBASKET

And so, by the close of 3068, where do we stand? Lyran and League forces clash all along the Bolan and Skye borders, with even Solaris VII caught in the League's counterattack. Davion units hit Combine worlds, citing "lost POWs" as an excuse, while simultaneously fighting a losing war against the Capellans. ComStar's strength has waned, and the Clans are once more on the warpath. Every known power in the Inner Sphere is fighting its neighbors while, in the center of it all, the Word of Blake struggles to bring more worlds into its protective fold. Indeed, theirs may be the only campaign aimed at selflessly protecting the common man, while every other conflict today serves only selfishness and greed. It is obvious now that the Star League's demise was all of our losses, as—within one year of its ending—all hell has broken loose.

[*Ok, I'm stopping this right here. I've reread this four times now and I'm getting the distinct impression that you're extremely sympathetic to the Word of Blake. Face it, Steve, they've started a massive, genocidal war, using WMDs on many worlds—which you've neglected to mention beyond Outreach. You don't even cover the massive HPG virus that afflicted more than a hundred worlds, cutting many of us off from our families and businesses Sphere-wide. Instead, you constantly paint the WoB as some misunderstood organization that was attacked without provocation and that acts only in self-defense or to protect their fellow man! You're attempting to redefine history so that the Word comes off as the tragic hero, but that only works in fiction, not journalism. We report* facts *here, not fancy.*

I've given you a lot of leeway with us, Steve, and I've warned you time and again to keep these opinions to yourself. But after what I've just read, I've no choice but to pull your current assignments pending a more thorough review of your performance by the bureau chiefs. Expect a visit soon. If I were you, I might start praying to the Blessed Blake for all the good he'll do you. –Ed]

—Transcript of INN Zollikofen Inter-Office communiqué dated 1 December 3068

BLAKE'S JUDGMENT

(11 November 3068)

Terra [VOICE OF BLAKE]—The purging of the Mori Heresy continues in victory! Thanks to one of our own, the Blessed Acolyte McGruder, the succubus herself, the Deceiver Primus formerly known as Sharilar Mori, is dead! With the help of the Sainted Parrdeau, McGruder was the executor of Blake's own judgment on the founder of the Heresy! The spawn of the Combine, the duplicitous Mori—a traitor not only to Blake's vision but even to that of the fallen brothers!—has died an ignominious death, strangled in her spider's lair by the sanctified hands of one of our own!

The other traitor, the Devil-spawned Focht, slipped away like the snake he is. But he cannot run! He cannot hide! In our effort to

TIMELINE OF THE JIHAD

(28 June) Citing the Capellan Confederation's perceived involvement with the Word of Blake, reports of massive Capellan troop build-ups near the border, and an alleged arms trade with the Blakists, all of which pose a clear and present danger to the Federated Suns, and further claiming Duke Kai Allard-Liao's unexpected (and unexplained) defection to New Syrtis, Duke George Hasek, Lord of the Capellan March, launches Operation Sovereign Justice, an unsanctioned invasion of the Capellan Confederation. The campaign's stated goal is the isolation and liberation of the former St. Ives Compact from Capellan rule, and consists of three assault prongs aimed at encircling the region with a buffer zone of AFFS troops. Skye/Bolan forces claim Shasta, Idyld and Gallatin even as the FWLM launches a successful counterattack on Preston.

(2 July) Led now by Marshall Jeremy Brett, the FWLM takes back Colfax and McAffee. Duke Hasek's Operation Sovereign Justice continues with the conquest of Minnacora, New Sagan and Capricorn III along one front, Relevow and Overton along the second, and Harloc, Decus, Purvo and Carmen on the third—all undefended worlds that link the attacking fronts together. Capellan counterattacks begin.

(9 July) Skye/Bolan forces take Niihan, Autumn Wind and Gannett.

(10-14 July) Clan Snow Raven's Swift Wing Galaxy Naval Star raids the undefended Draconis Combine worlds of Enif, Galedon and Tabayama in an apparent wave of reprisal strikes for the loss of the *White Cloud*.

(24 July) The FWLM reclaims Cascade, Gallatin and Idyld.

(1 August) By this date, the Word of Blake non-violently secures full control over the governments of Acamar, Arboris, Car Coroli, Caph, Capolla, Epsilon Indi, New Home, Terra Firma and Shiloh. The ComStar WarShip *Bordeaux* executes a daring raid on

TIME OF REVELATIONS

(26 October 3068)

Terra [VOICE OF BLAKE]—People of the Inner Sphere! The time has come to expose a vast conspiracy and unmask its perpetrators!

In spite of the Blessed Blake's efforts, war erupted when Minoru Kurita declared himself First Lord of the first Star League. Discovering that force alone could not achieve dominance over the Inner Sphere, the tyrannical Kurita clan waited for their opportunity and plotted.

Finally their chance came when their agent penetrated ComStar. Rising through the ranks, the infiltrator insidiously twisted and corrupted the Blessed Blake's great vision. Access to the HPG network allowed the Kuritas to spy on the other Great Houses and manipulate them. The Capellan Confederation—not the realm of the Dragon—felt the brunt of the Federated Suns-Lyran Commonwealth fury in the Fourth Succession War. The DCMS received equipment secretly siphoned from ComStar's own warehouses and held off the FedCom alliance in 3039. Theodore Kurita was informed that Luthien was the next target for Clans Smoke Jaguar and Nova Cat, and was ready when those Clans attacked.

The bitter truth is that Sharilar Mori, ComStar's so-called Primus, is that Kurita agent. Using her position in ComStar, she has worked ceaselessly to further her master's plans of conquest and domination!

Of-course, Mori has help—Anastasius Focht, for one. And who is Focht? None other than Frederick Steiner! Reportedly killed during the Fourth Succession War, General Steiner was captured by the Combine, brainwashed and then presented to then-Primus Myndo Waterly as a gift! With Mori's subtle prompting, Waterly accepted him into ComStar, thinking to make use of his experience in the ongoing expansion of the Com Guards.

It was no coincidence that Focht/Steiner chose Victor Steiner-Davion to succeed him as Precentor-Martial. Victor—seduced by Omi Kurita and with blood ties to Frederick—was easily persuaded to aid the Coordinator by using his influence over his siblings. When Katherine Steiner-Davion refused to be swayed, Victor used force to dethrone her and replace her with the easily controlled Yvonne and Peter.

Even the Free Worlds League has not been spared. After the bomb attack that killed Captain-General Janos Marik in 3035, everyone believed his son Thomas Marik had also died. Months later, Thomas Marik miraculously reemerged—scarred, but alive. Who would have suspected the bizarre reality—that this was not Thomas Marik? Seizing this unique opportunity, Sharilar Mori had substituted a double—an easy task when scarring and "reconstructive surgery" could explain away physical inconsistencies.

Where is the proof, you ask?

Precentor Demona Aziz knew the truth, but lacked the evidence. Instead, she fled Terra to keep Jerome Blake's vision alive. Now, after years of painstaking investigation, we have proof—and will share it with you all.

Brothers and sisters! Now you see what heretics have made of Blessed Blake's dream! Abandon those who have played you false and subverted your work for their tyrannical master on Black Luthien. Come to us! Come to Terra! We will welcome you back to the true way of Blake with open arms.

TIMELINE OF THE JIHAD

Tukayyid to extract Primus Mori and several key Com Guard officers stranded there by the Blakist WarShip blockade.

(5 August) Citing the loss of stability on Luthien and the Coordinator's ill heath, Pesht Military District Warlord *Tai-shu* Kiyomori Minamoto formally assumes command of the DCMS.

(7-14 August) FedSuns commandos and smaller 'Mech units attached to the Draconis March stage a series of deep objective raids on the undefended Combine worlds of Altais, Chichibu, Junction, Barlow's Folly, Misery and Beta Mensae V, allegedly looking for and liberating some FCCW-era POWs.

(20 August) Capellan March troops secure Aldertaine, Glasgow, Hexare, Imalda, New Westin and Homestead even as Capellan counterattacks bog down two of Sovereign Justice's three fronts.

(22-30 August) Word of Blake troops assault Liberty and Genoa, though resistance on Genoa continues.

(1 September) Jeremy Brett's FWLM counterattack hits Alchiba, Milton, Phecda, Alchiba and Wyatt. The following day, League troops strike at Ford, Giausar and Loric, endangering the Skye/Bolan supply lines. Timbiqui and Poulsbo fall to League troops on the 3rd.

(10 September) The Free Worlds League overruns Dixie and Arcadia.

(11-17 September) DCMS forces raid the FedSuns worlds of Benet III and Cassias, and capture David and Xhosa VII, in reprisal for the recent spate of FedSuns attacks.

(20 September) FWLM troops take Alcor, Denebola, Mizar and Summer. Capellan and Hasek-sympathetic troops clash throughout the St. Ives region.

(28 September) League forces assault Khon Kaen, Penobscot and Cavanaugh II, driving back Lyran forces.

(3 October) The unexpected recall of both Knights of the Inner Sphere regiments to Atreus weakens the central thrust of Marshall

A SPHERE IN FLAMES

destroy the Taint of the Steiner clan, we have destroyed his home on Orestes. We have destroyed his duped protectors of the First Tyr. We have shattered the deceived brothers of two Com Guard divisions. And we have crippled the last vestiges of the "mighty" ComStar navy by gutting the *Bordeaux*, even as the traitor escaped our vengeance! There is precious little shadow to hide in, Demon! We will return and finish our glorious cause as we let you stew in the blood you have spilled to save your own hide!

BLACKOUT ON ATREUS?

(5 November 3068)

Irian [ISAP]—Whoever stops by the stock exchange here on Irian these days gets the chance at a rare view: Where once reigned an air of serene professionalism—seemingly untouched by whatever happens outside—these mighty halls and corridors now brim over with what is best described in a single word: chaos.

The reason: Ten days have passed since the loss of all communication from Atreus, and still nobody knows any details about the cause or how long this blackout will last.

Judging from past figures, one might think that Irian stock traders would be used to such events. Not in this case, though. For the markets still struggling to cope with the surprising flare-up of hostilities all over the Inner Sphere, losing contact with government *and* the League's second largest stock exchange proved fatal. Like a flock of head-cut roosters, traders and companies all over Irian and adjacent regions literally sped in all directions. Selling and buying seems to be done on sheer impulse, with no recognizable overall trend, turning the quotation-boards into mere jukeboxes. Not even the most daring of consultants try prognosis anymore. Or, as Mikhail Favre from Seeholzer & Eagle puts it: "For once all bets really are off. Best buy yourselves a big mattress."

And the sky's not just going to clear up. IMI reports increasing signal degradation on *all* incoming HPG transmissions, announcing massive delays on message delivery due to the necessary clean-up process.

TIMELINE OF

Brett's counter-invasion of the Lyran Alliance. Capellan March troops seize Housekarle, No Return and Randar as Duke Hasek rushes to resupply troops poised near Sian.

(7 October) An apparent orbital strike, allegedly launched by one or more FedSuns WarShips, pummels the capital city on Sian. The attack kills Candace Liao, who is visiting Sian at the time, and Chancellor Sun-Tzu Liao is reported missing, feared dead among the ruins. Rather than shattering Capellan resolve, the attack galvanizes the Confederation, as even elements of Free Capella and pro-St. Ives elements decry the apparent FedSuns attack. *Sang-jiang-jun* Talon Zahn declares himself Military Regent of the Confederation. The Word of Blake captures Muphrid, Thorin and New Earth. The use of tactical nuclear weapons is alleged on all three worlds. Clan Jade Falcon seizes Graus from the Lyran Alliance.

(16 October) Contact with Canopus and its neighboring systems is lost.

FOCHT'S POWER PLAY

She's dead! I can't believe this, but that bitch is dead! Mori is no more!

God, that was lame. It's too bad for me that I don't have an editor for stuff like that. It's a literal brain dump, and you are getting all of it. But hey, it's your drachma. So let's get down to the meat of things.

I just got word from one of the people at ComStar interested in actually transmitting news. He's a staff member for the Inner Circle of Precentors, which puts him in contact with the top dogs all of the time. It also means he's part of the background, which will hopefully keep him as a source for me. In any case, here's what he sent me:

"Jim [no; that's *NOT* my real name!], you can't believe the stories about Mori's death. Our reverent leader died in the same manner as our prior Primus—an externally initiated brain aneurysm. And who was the initiator? None other than that one-eyed warmonger himself, Focht. He didn't retire to write his memoirs. Hell, he didn't even retire. I visited him once, running a batch of research material out to him. When I got there, he was just coming out of the shower after a morning of running around in that *Atlas* of his. Only a soldier still soldiering would spend a morning training in that hulking monstrosity. Well, maybe if he was a Lyran, but we all know that Focht hails from Terra.

"So Focht shows up today, surprising everybody with the unannounced visit, and he has an oversized attaché case with him. After walking into the room, Focht turned around and secured the door behind him. This surprised everybody in the anteroom, but the shouting match that followed put us into shocked silence. Nobody said anything; they just sat there and tried to make out what was going on in there. Things were getting heated, when all of a sudden a gunshot rang out. Everybody froze. Just sat there frozen. We're all soldiers, we all saw combat against the Clans. Some of it was bloody, hand-to-hand. We all thought of ourselves as veterans. Yet that one gunshot froze us all. A moment later, the doors opened up and Focht simply walked out."

There you go, folks. It's true. I verified this with other sources (at least the "she's dead" part). My only wish is that ComStar makes her burial site open to the public. I want to go and piss on her grave.

—Renegade Summer InterWeb posting by "Starling", 1 November 3068

CAN WE TRUST COMSTAR?

(30 October 3068)

Robinson [ROBINSON HERALD]—This question is less straightforward than it may seem.

The revelations released last week by the Word of Blake before the whole HPG network became useless provide far too many questions, and far too few answers.

There are people who believe that the allegations are intended to cause additional distrust against two organizations who oppose the Word: the Free Worlds League and ComStar. If the network has been shut down by ComStar as a matter of damage control, this may be true. But just as likely, the Word is interrupting transmissions to disrupt efforts against them, and to prevent people from putting a word in edgewise to their point of view.

Some people forget that the Word used to be ComStar. Some say there's still no difference, that it's all a ruse, an elaborate Operation Scorpion Version Two and that Case White never happened.

If that is true, then the allegation takes on a new meaning for us.

Certainly, having an O5P agent in the First Circuit and then as Primus would explain the favoritism ComStar has shown the Dracs over the years. The Free Rasalhague Republic? The Ghost Regiments? The Explorer Corps? OmniMechs? ComStar as agents of the Dragon.

But if there is no difference between ComStar and the Word, then revealing Sharilar Mori's "true" identity is intended to focus our attention on the Dracs.

Certainly we've got plenty of reason to come knocking. Except now we get to add, depending on one's interpretation, that their buddy, ComStar, no longer possesses the means to give them some more Ghost Regiments. They're on their own.

But if ComStar and WoB are one and the same, then the Dracs are the allies of the Word of Blake. If that is so, we had better take that particular ally out of the equation. It's been long overdue!

E IN FLAMES

THE PLAYERS GATHER

White-out.

Somebody creating a lot of noise, just to cover their own messages. It makes sense; the best place to hide a message is in plain sight. But who's behind the white-out? Only one of three groups could be responsible: ComStar, the Word of Blake or the Clans. Knowing the motives of each will help us figure out whodunit.

The Word of Blake is the most likely group behind it. They've shown no restraint in using unconventional tactics. After all, they decided the best way to get their message across about the Star League was to use a nuke on Tharkad. It's no great stretch of the imagination to see them pulling a stunt like this. But they're not the ones behind things. There's only the one HPG system, so even the Word of Blake is affected by this little mess. They're not the culprits.

ComStar is number two on the list. Borrowing some land from the Rasalhagians, managing to piss off some of the locals in the process, ComStar and the Com Guards have built their own little empire. This is, of course, a far cry from their last empire. But is it enough for them to bite their noses off to spite their face? I don't think so. After all, ComStar earns its operating capital solely from the trade in HPG messages. At least the Word of Blake was smart enough to diversify their income.

The Clans are an oft-forgotten group with HPG capabilities. Their WarShips sport the transmitters, which is flat-out terrifying. But that's not the worst of it. Word has it that the Clans still in Clan space are getting really annoyed with their brethren out here. Word also has it they have their *own* HPG network. What do these two things have in common? Have the Home Clans ironed out their differences, and are they coming back for a second round in the Inner Sphere? And if they are, what side are the local Clans going to fight on?

—Renegade Skye InterWeb posting by "Starling", 7 November 3068

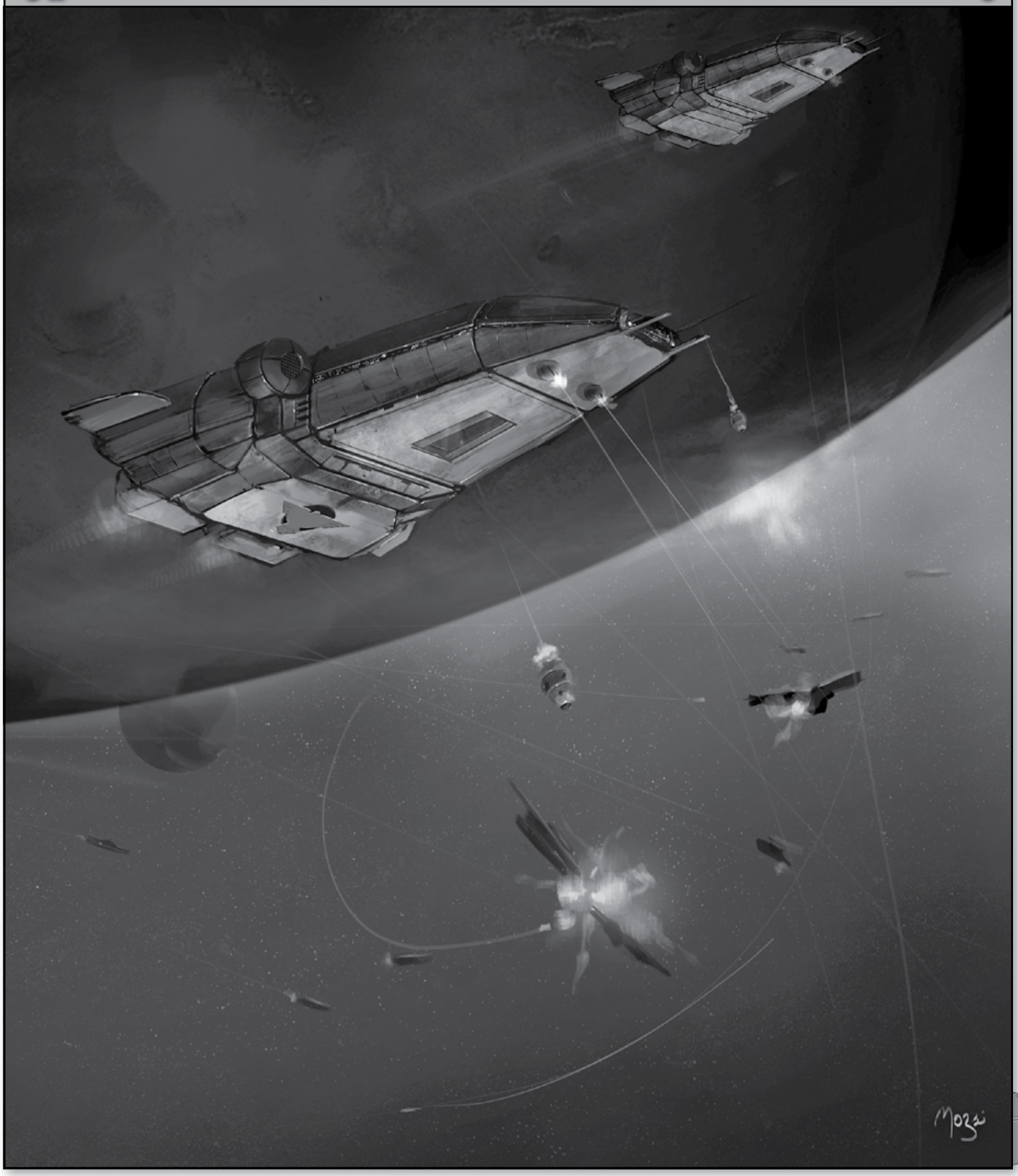
TIMELINE OF THE JIHAD

(17 October) FWLM forces continue to press forward into Lyran space, striking at Syrma and Zebebelgenubi.

(24 October) The Knights of the Inner Sphere arrive on Atreus.

(25 October) During a hastily arranged parade in honor of the returning Knights, the Word of Blake attacks Atreus. Chemical weapons reportedly kill the bulk of Parliament and the Knights themselves, and a massive naval engagement between pro-Word and pro-League WarShips allegedly erupts in the capital system. Blakist propaganda broadcast just as the attack commences declares Captain-General Thomas Marik to be a fraud, shortly before widespread disruption of the communications network begins. Across the Inner Sphere, a flood of Blakist propaganda and other interference chokes the hyperpulse generator network with "white noise".

LATE 3068: FIGHTING BLIND



LATE 3068: FIGHTING BLIND

The first months of what is now known as the "White-Out" shut down practically all communications between major worlds. Filling the HPG nets with rants, propaganda, obviously edited news reports and blatantly pro-Blake programming, the Word of Blake rendered most off-world communications virtually useless. Hardest hit were the more industrialized systems across the Inner Sphere; many worlds less important on a strategic scale were correspondingly less affected. With HPG communications corrupted and completely unreliable, the chaos and confusion added to the Word of Blake's advantage.

As ComStar worked on neutralizing the HPG problem, the Lyran invasion of the Free Worlds League began to bog down, with the League continuing its counterattack and plunging deeper into the heart of Bolan Province. The Jade Falcons went from raids to outright invasions of several Lyran border worlds, apparently taking advantage of the LAAF's complete military breakdown. The Combine began righting the Dragon's ship, returning the capital to its ancient roots on New Samarkand as Warlord Minamoto stepped up to take command of the beleaguered nation.

The less-affected Capellan Confederation and Free Worlds League continued to press their advantage by continuing their counterattacks against their neighbors. Kittery fell with Word of Blake assistance, and the Capellans rallied from the FedSuns' orbital strike on Sian to surge across the border into Duke George Hasek's Capellan March. The Free Worlds League—despite the loss of Atreus to a massive blackout and the disappearance of an entire naval group—managed to keep its focus on punishing the Bolan/Skye attacks along the League border.

Many continued to view mercenaries with suspicion, especially after mercenary rampages against civilians on Victoria, the desertion of Romanov's Crusaders and the complete lack of response from the Northwind Highlanders. ComStar suffered from ongoing Word of Blake attacks, the assassination of Primus Mori and the spreading White-Out virus. Only the Periphery nations remained untouched by the chaos enveloping the Inner Sphere, though the Canopus HPG remained unresponsive during this time.

In short, by year's end, the chaos had only continued to build.

—Michael Bosworth, INN Special Correspondent

SURPRISE ASSAULT

[*Reporter*]: "…And here we have another pair of *Shiva*s, passing over the Eighth Legionnaires' Alpha Infantry Regiment…Second Company, releasing colored smoke, in the colors of the Legionnaires…

[*The colored smoke seems quite heavy, and rapidly descends on the parade route and into the stands. Some of the infantry and their audience succumb to coughing fits as the purple and green smoke lingers.*]

"Goodness—" [*cough*] "—that was a bit thick, wouldn't you say? Er...Some of the soldiers seem to be having trouble. I see a few clutching their throats and—and collapsing…

[*Many of the parade watchers in the stands and along the sidewalks begin to panic, some rising—and then falling—amid cries, coughing fits and convulsive twitching, still enveloped in the massive clouds of smoke.*]

"They're having the same reaction in the stands... This isn't right. Oh, my god… It must be some kind of attack. The Scourge? I ca—" [*cough*] "—can't believe anyone would stoop to this level of car— Oh, God, are those clouds getting closer?"

[*Camera pans wildly, showing bodies in the streets, in the stands and on the sidewalks, many contorted in inhuman poses. A distant BattleMech in Eighth Legionnaires colors stumbles and crashes to the ground amid the panicked, choking masses. Autocannon fire can be heard over the distant roar of engines as the purple-green clouds thicken.*

Reporter comes into focus for a moment, eyes wide as his hands come away from his mouth, drenched in blood. He starts to speak, but suddenly stumbles twitching violently.

Camera wavers as the operator starts to turn, then spins wildly and falls.]

—Live holo-broadcast of the Atrean military parade, 25 October 3068, Atrean Press

WAR IN THE LEAGUE

BETRAYAL ON ATREUS!

(30 October 3068—System Error 0404—Backup Transmitted 3 December 3068)

Atreus [FWNS]—The situation here remains unclear, but there is no doubt that the Word of Blake has finally decided to show their true colors. Smoke palls stain the air in various places around Atreus City, and there have been claims of fighter strikes against the capital. Most of the damage seems to be in the northern districts, around the government complexes. There are rumors of direct orbital strikes against Parliament and the Captain-General's palace.

It is widely believed that the Blakists employed terror weapons in their assault. It appears we avoided the nuclear strikes aimed at Tharkad and other worlds, but nonetheless numerous streets have become charnel houses, clogged with bodies of civilians and soldiers who appear to have died in agony. The exact number of casualties remains unclear, but it seems likely that tens if not hundreds of thousands perished. In a cynical move, the Blakists targeted crowds gathered to greet the Knights of the Inner Sphere, who had just returned to the capital, as well as the local Eighth Legionnaires garrison. Given the number who gathered to witness the parade, the specter of a seven-figure casualty count looms over the city.

THE END OF THE LEAGUE IS NIGH!

Hooded Stranger: "...couldn't use it on a real ammo bin, could you?"

Female MechWarrior: [*shrugs, her breasts jiggling in her skimpy tank top*] "Not in this 'Mech bay—but if you think the Warrior will give you another go at it, be my guest. I think he's gonna kick your—"

Stranger: [*unfazed*] "Not to worry. The Warrior is no match for this enemy. It's going to take the help of all our people. The real warriors are those men and women fighting for our—"

[*Screen blanks, followed by a brief flash of the Tamarind Media/Channel 609 logo before a bedraggled-looking reporter appears.*]

Reporter: "Gone! They're all gone! The Captain-General is dead, possibly gassed like a dog on Atreus. The entire *Sardis* Fleet is missing! *Missing!* Not even our new hope, Jeremy Brett!" [*Reporter throws up his hands in disgust.*] "He can't be found, either. There's *no one there*, people! The ship's flying with no crew and no captain. We're alone—sitting ducks for Kelswa-Steiner and his Alliance forces to come charging in and burn us all into the ground. Not even the Word of Blake is defending our borders! Instead they've abandoned the only man with enough courage to stand up for them, give them a home. We—are—alone!"

[*The screen blanks again, followed by a black-and-white bullseye, which dissolves into snow, then nothing.*]

—Tamarind Media (Channel 609) holovid broadcast, 2 November 3068

While the massive loss of civilian life is horrific, the political and economic impact of this unprovoked assault is even more terrifying. Many business leaders attending the gala and parade and are missing in the aftermath, as are most—if not, all—Parliamentary representatives.

Though a number of high-profile government officials survived the assault and have since appeared before the media—the Captain-General and Minister of Defense among them—the federal government has been decimated. Many have rallied round the Captain-General as a focus of the still-functioning national government that remains in the Free Worlds, but the revelations about Thomas Marik's past—which some regard as a greater betrayal than the Blakist sneak attack—have seriously undermined his position.

ENTIRE *SARDIS* FLEET GOES MISSING

(10 November 3068)

Tamarind [FWNS]—Marshall Brett's hope of retaining the initiative on the Alliance front took a severe blow last week with the apparent defection of the *Sardis* battle group. The *Thera*-class carrier and her escorts, providing security for the Tamarind system since the outbreak of hostilities, carried out a sudden and unscheduled breaking maneuver at around eight PM local time, throwing orbital traffic patterns into chaos. Reports suggest that the vessels ignored hails from Tamarind Space Traffic Control and began boosting for the nadir jump point. An FWLM cutter sent to investigate was fired upon, sustaining moderate damage but remaining functional. This incident prompted Marshall Brett to take more drastic action, dispatching local fighter squadrons to challenge the renegades.

[*"We show mercy to those we once called friends, but our mercy is not as infinite as the cosmos!"*]

Though carrying only a fraction of its complement of fighters, the *Sardis* and its consorts nonetheless managed to push their way clear of the engagement zone, scarcely halting their boost out-system and forcing the loyalist fighters and carrier DropShips to withdraw due to lack of fuel. The current whereabouts of all *Sardis* fleet vessels is unknown. They may have jumped out-system via a pirate point or may remain at Tamarind, making a stealthy approach to the jump points or lurking in the system's outer reaches.

[*"Take heart, fallen brethren; had we chosen to remain at large, you would know it soon enough!"*]

Why the vessels should flee and fire upon their colleagues remains unclear. Some suggest that the Word of Blake suborned the crew, though on a vessel the size of a *Thera* that seems unlikely.

HOW DID THEY DO IT?

(18 December 3068)

Andurien [ANDURIEN CHRONICLE]—A year ago today, I was a citizen in the realm with the largest navy known to humanity. It contained some of the most advanced vessels ever built. The centerpiece was the *Thera*, a WarShip that had no equal.

Today, no such navy remains to keep the sky above me safe. In fact, I wonder if I ever had one.

The reports are almost as numerous as the pieces into which our League is crumbling. Our fleet and our military are fragmenting into regional components. Some are said to have joined the Word of Blake.

So how did they do it? How did an outside organization compromise us to this extent? It seems particularly inconceivable that our navy has been subjugated as much as it has. Members of the League navy are picked after a careful vetting process, in which not just skill is judged, but loyalty as well—loyalty to the whole Free Worlds League, not just to one or the other portions of it. Yet now, at the first real challenge our nation has faced since the last civil war, everything just falls apart again? And an unknown number of our naval vessels side with a group of religious fanatics rather than with the League government, or even a regional government?

I don't know how they could have done that. I just know that the nation I once called mine doesn't exist any more.

LATE 3068: FIGHTING BLIND

More plausible is that the *Sardis* could no longer tolerate being sidelined as it had been for much of the war to date.

[*"Still the lack of faith among the unbelievers. By now, it should be clear that none can stand in defiance of Blake's Divine Will."*]

CAPTAIN-GENERALCY IN DOUBT

(4 December 3068)

Atreus [ISAP]—Khalil Marcus, Chief Justice of the Free Worlds Supreme Court, today made a scathing attack against the incumbent Captain-General, the man once believed to be Thomas Marik.

"While the Captain-General is right in stating that the Treaty of Marik does not require the Captain-General to be a member of the Marik clan, and two of his forty-nine predecessors were not members of that family, the Succession Act of 2310 gives the Mariks the right of first refusal for the post. It is clear that in masquerading as Thomas Marik, our current 'leader' sought to gain an improper advantage by sidestepping the legal provisions that would otherwise have seen the Captain-Generalcy offered to Paul or Therese Marik. That both have gone on record as supporting the incumbent is surprising."

The blistering critique by Marcus, the premier legal mind in the Free Worlds and formerly a close confidant of the Captain-General who oversaw his oath of office, further undermined Thomas Marik's position but at the same time offered little hope to the Captain-General's rivals.

"Per the Succession Act, a sitting Captain-General can only be removed from office by the expiration of his term, something held in abeyance since the Addendum of 2671 at the start of the original Star League, or by Parliamentary impeachment, something the present situation makes impossible.

"Legally, however, the enthronement of Thomas Marik—or whatever he calls himself now—should never have taken place and is of highly questionable legal standing. Individuals such as Paul or Therese Marik or their children, Alys Rousset-Marik, and even the real Thomas' illegitimate daughter, Isis, have strong legal grounds for a challenge."

RETREAT!

Shells whistle over our heads and we can hear the repeated zing-cracks of laser weapons being discharged. The Syrma sky is crisscrossed with tracer fire and the contrails of high-flying fighters. They are not ours.

I'm here with the Twenty-ninth Berenson Infantry, part of the First Guards Battle Group, nicknamed the Amazons, who landed on Syrma last month as part of a coordinated assault with the Sixth Orloff. But the Sixth never arrived. The initial landings and pacification operations on Ezera and Lothair went well, but when Skye counterattacked, the Guards were pressed hard. Several communiqués were sent to Marshall Brett to ascertain the status of the Sixth, but no replies has yet been received from Brett or from Marshal Van Creveld, who commands the spinward section of the border.

The Guards have held out for ten days, but Colonel Briggs—a veteran of Operations Bulldog and Serpent as well as the campaign on Strana Mechty—deems the unit's position untenable. The Amazons are staging a fighting withdrawal to their LZ and the spaceports at Skopje and Strausborg, from which they plan on pulling back to the FWL lines. Force Commander Tito, a Smoke Jaguar bondsman who joined the Guards after Matamoras, commands the rearguard and is clearly disdainful of the situation. "The Great Refusal showed what teamwork can do—the Guards lost their battle, but the Star League won the war, proving the strength of their Touman—but here *we* have been left to fend for ourselves. We have been thrown to the Steiner wolves."

Colonel Briggs was unavailable for comment.

—Report filed by Liza Jiminez (FWNS) embedded with FWLM forces on Syrma, 23 November 3068

BLACK DAY AT BAD ROCK

(4 December 3068)

Galisteo [SANTA FE CHRONICLE] —Located on the High Sierra, the town of Bad Rock is no stranger to violence. However, what started as a simple demonstration against proposed restructuring of the tax system escalated into a full-scale battle that has leveled half the town.

Local ranchers have been voicing dissatisfaction with the new "Cattle Tax" since it was first proposed last year. "If'n the Cap'n-General's wanting to be fighting them Lurans, he can danged well pay for the war hisself!" said Bart Owens, eloquently voicing the view of many Trinity World ranchers.

On 12 September, when the ranchers paraded through the main street of Bad Rock in their CattleMasters and LineMechs, Sheriff Neils Fernandez called in Swann's Cavaliers to help keep the peace. The precise chain of events remains unclear, but second-hand accounts suggest that the mercenary company immediately opened fire on the protesters. The Cavaliers may have been incorrectly briefed on the situation, or perhaps they mistook the ranchers' IndustrialMechs for bandits. Whatever the cause, by the time order was restored, twenty civilians and two mercenaries were dead, with upwards of one hundred civilians wounded.

Protests over the mercenaries' actions have been lodged with the governor and with Parliament, but no action has been forthcoming. Since the incident, other confrontations have occurred between the mercenaries and the independent-minded citizens of the Trinity Worlds. While none have reached the scale of the so-called Bad Rock Massacre, the situation threatens to spiral out of control.

LATE 3068: FIGHTING BLIND

WITNESSES TO SIAN HORROR URGED TO SPEAK!

(8 October 3068)

Sian [CBS]—Loyal citizens of the Confederation! If you were in a position to witness the horrifying attack on our fair capital on the black date of 7 October, please notify your nearest government official. In order to assist relief efforts, and to ensure that as many of our Capellan brethren as possible survive to avenge this horrible crime against our nation, we require as much information as we can obtain to assess the precise nature of the strike on our seat of government. Any fragment of information may provide insight that will allow us to save more lives! If you have anything to offer, do not delay! Contact your nearest governmental office, Maskirovka branch or militia commander at once!

UNITED FRONT

(28 November 3068)

Terra [VOICE OF TRUTH]—Today marks the first anniversary of the fall of the second Star League. With that horrible tragedy, the followers of the Word of Blake faced a difficult choice: Watch as criminals and tyrants destroyed humankind's last best hope for peace, or fight for the future that was the Blessed Jerome Blake's vision for humanity.

We chose to fight. To fight knowing that this would be a war the like of which the Inner Sphere had never seen. A war to test our faith. A war of hard decisions. A long war.

But even in the darkest days to come, there were fleeting sparks of hope—glowing embers to lighten the heart. One such spark has been the unswerving support and friendship shown to us by the Capellan Confederation throughout this conflict. And so, when the Federated Suns launched yet another unprovoked attack on House Liao, we had no compunction at racing to the aid of our friends.

The Warriors of Blake are proud to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with our brave Capellan comrades in the face of unbridled Davion aggression. Together we will turn back the tide and the Capellan people will know the Peace of Blake.

THE CAPELLAN FRONT

CONFEDERATION STRIKES BACK

"This is Kim Soo Li reporting for CBS. We received a special release from the Ministry of Information. During the past few months, Capellan Special Forces units have worked with local indigenous forces on captured worlds, waging a guerrilla war and inciting insurrections against the Davionista invaders in prelude to Operation Thunderstrike, the Confederation's counterattack.

[*"Our Capellan brethren have us to thank for their ability to coordinate with their forces on these worlds. The victories they enjoy are as much our own. We will seek repayment soon."*]

"Capellan troops successfully launched Operation Thunderstrike against worlds occupied by Hasek's forces along the entire front. The Fifth McCarron's Armored Cavalry liberated the strategic world of Aldertaine after a brutal battle with the Fifth Crucis Lancers. The Lancers withdrew to St. Ives after suffering egregious losses. On Randar, the Holdfast Guards all but destroyed the Twentieth Avalon Hussars with the aid of the newly upgraded *Ilsa Hyung*, resulting in the death of General Randy Hasek-Bills.

"The planet Ares never capitulated, thanks to the valiant troops of McCarron's Fourth ACR. The Fifth New Syrtis Fusiliers battled for months to a standstill until the Blackwind Lancers broke the stalemate, as *Sang-shao* Doles' command showed no mercy to the Fusiliers. *Sang-shao* Doles, a Free Capellan officer, personally killed Hasek's sister-in-law, General Serena Thomas-Hasek.

"On Hexare, the Remshield's Dragoons and House Imarra—collectively led by *Sang-shao* Choug Vong—shatter the Fourth Illician Lancers.

[*"With Imarra occupied, Sian is weakened; we must prepare to aid the Capellans in their time of need."*]

"Stay tuned for more information as we receive it. Reporting for CBS, I'm Kim Soo Li."

—*CBS News at Six*, Sian, 21 October 3068

ALLIES RALLY ON SIAN!

(3 December 3068)

Sian [CBS]—The ancient proverb that one need only look to one's side to see one's true friends in times of trouble has been proven correct once again! Loyal Capellan citizens greeted Naomi Centrella, the stalwart ally of the Confederation, today at Sian's partially repaired spaceport. At the head of the Third Canopian Fusiliers, the heiress to the Canopian throne brings relief to the capital of the Capellan state in the form of badly needed supplies. Her visit strengthens our resolve! We shall not stand alone against the atrocities inflicted on us by the Davion war criminals!

Lady Centrella was met by *Sang-jiang-jun* Talon Zahn, military regent of the realm. After exchanging warm greetings, they retired to discuss the current Davion incursions.

With the valiant Canopians fighting at our side, victory against the aggressors is assured!

VICTORY AT HAND!

"This is Colleen Thompson with a special report from the front. We have just received information about the launch of the Capellans' Operation Thunderstrike. According to government sources, the CCAF has thrown the last of its reserves into a hopeless attempt to throw back our valiant defenders. Allegedly, Capellan units reclaimed worlds liberated by our troops, but the government assures us this is not the case.

LATE 3068: FIGHTING BLIND

SOVEREIGN JUSTICE OR HASEK'S GREED?

Someone once said, "The political object is the goal, war is the means of reaching it, and the means can never be considered in isolation from their purposes."* One must ask, then, what purpose does Hasek's war serve?

A year ago, our realm fought a bitter conflict and nearly tore itself apart because of a power-mad woman. Now here we are, our troops driving into the heart of the Confederation, killing and dying. Why? To "liberate" the St. Ives Compact from the evil grip of House Liao? No. I submit to you that this illegal war is Hasek's revenge on the Capellans for the attempt on his life. He has abrogated his duties and responsibilities as a March Lord of the Federated Suns. He has refused to answer our Princess Regent. This act alone is grounds for treason.

Hasek's "Sovereign Justice" represents his political goal: to turn the Capellan March into his own Great House. What has his greed gained? Tens of thousands dead, valuable units lost, our realm under attack—and, perhaps worst of all, Hasek's military attacks the Confederation when it should defend us against the Blakists. I call on Duke George Hasek to recall our troops and defend our nation as he has sworn to do.

—Editorial published by veteran columnist Clarence Samwells in *Kathil News Weekly*, Kathil, 14 October 3068

[**Karl von Clausewitz, 19th century Prussian General –Ed*]

KITTERY LIBERATED!

(9 November 3068)

Kittery [VOICE OF TRUTH]—Today the heretics of the Federated Suns are trembling! The Capellan March's invasion of our ally, the Capellan Confederation, has not gone unnoticed. Today the Word of Blake Militia struck their first blows against the aggressors. The supply world of Kittery, under FedSuns occupation since the early 3000s, has been liberated from its tyrannical oppressors.

Taking advantage of the relative security in the region, the AFFS left Kittery woefully under-defended, thus allowing the Word of Blake Militia to launch the first step in helping relieve the Capellan Confederation. Forces led by the Thirteenth Division swiftly assaulted the planetary defenses, and in quick strokes shattered the training battalion and then the First Kittery Borderers. In blow after crushing blow, the Thirteenth Division drove the AFFS units back, every engagement leaving more FedSuns machines broken and destroyed, the survivors rounded up to be given treatment and guarded by militia forces.

Once the remains of the AFFS forces were eradicated, the planetary government surrendered and left office. The planet's historic and legal ruling line has been reinstated, and has confirmed an oath of allegiance to the Capellan Confederation.

The Word of Blake will continue to garrison the world, leaving local administration to the Capellan Confederation. This will allow the CCAF to use its forces where they are needed, to push back and destroy the AFFS units invading Capellan space. Let this be a warning to George Hasek: Those false to the true light of humankind will be made to suffer for their crimes in the end.

"Quoting our source, 'Sure, the Capellans have attacked. We've taken some losses. But however tenacious and skilled they are, they're also overextended and don't have the forces to stop our drive to Sian.'

"Further reports indicate the CCAF counterattack was minimal and uncoordinated. Reports from various commands allege Capellan forces put up a brief struggle before retreating. Casualty reports, though not confirmed, are light to moderate. As of this report, only the worlds of Ares and Necromo are still hotbeds of resistance. Our source assured us that these worlds will fall shortly.

"Word of the demise of the Fifth Syrtis Fusiliers at the hands of the Blackwind Lancers and the destruction of the Twentieth Avalon Hussars have been denounced by government sources as well. Though they acknowledge that conditions at the front are fluid, some commands—hampered by current military operations and Blakist interference—simply have not communicated in the past few days. According to our sources, this is thought to be no cause for alarm, and was in fact expected.

"In conclusion, sources close to the government portray the Capellans' attacks as the last gasp of a beleaguered and besieged military. The final victory for Operation Sovereign Justice is indeed at hand.

"For NSNN, I'm Colleen Thompson reporting."

—*New Syrtis Network News Special Report*, New Syrtis, 7 November 3068

SAVING THE CORE

*****For Immediate Release*****

(10 November 3068)

New Samarkand [VOTD]—Effective immediately, the capital of the Dragon will be relocated to New Samarkand for the duration of the ongoing crisis on Luthien. *Gunji-no-Kanrei* Minamoto issued the following decree [*"of cowardice"*] from his command post aboard the DCS *Dieron Star* [*"A symbol of stained purity begging for destruction!"*]:

"Citizens [*"Prisoners"*] of the Dragon, although our courageous [*"paltry"*] efforts on Luthien continue, we must face the reality that in order for the Dragon to survive, we must relocate our position of honor and purity elsewhere. This must be done for the duration of the crisis [*"obstruction"*] that engulfs our beloved capital. With much agony and heartache [*"manipulation and deceit"*] I have come to this decision, with our Coordinator still ill [*"Dead! He is dead! Can you fools not recognize it?"*] and the Dragon's heir involved [*"Our guest of honor!"*] in breaking the Word of Blake siege [*"Purification!"*] of Dieron. Therefore, with the power invested in [*"Stolen by!"*] me as the *Kanrei* of our honorable forces, I have issued General Order 9, which repositions our heart and soul [*"Cowardice and false pride!"*] to New Samarkand [*"Another worthy subject for cleansing!"*], the place of our glorious [*"ignoble and bloody"*] birth.

When we have expunged the stain [*"When YOU recognize our right as your Redeemers!"*] that darkens Luthien, we will return our beloved Pearl to a level that rivals the luster she had before the tide of war [*"purification"*] enveloped her. Though the clouds of the *gaijin* weapons [*"Instigated by YOUR own troops, YOUR own command!"*] still mar her honorable skin, they too will blow away when the Dragon's breath returns to her [*"Or when you recognize the futility of your actions and succumb to the Prophecy's heir!"*]."

BLACK WATCH LOST

(30 October 3068—System Error 0404—Backup Transmitted 4 December 3068)

New Samarkand [VOTD]—It is reported that last week the Black Watch—formally an SLDF regiment—was destroyed while attempting to relieve the beleaguered defenders on Dieron.

Though the Eridani Light Horse Command, Twenty-first Striker Regiment and the Brigade's dependents at Fort Winston had been annihilated, Colonel Campbell received news that a company or more of the Nineteenth Heavy Cavalry Regiment had survived. With the First Royal BattleMech Regiment destroyed on Tukayyid, and the remaining ELH regiments out of contact, only the Black Watch was in a position to aid their former comrades.

Departing Orestes, the Black Watch (with DCMS aid) traveled to Dieron, entering the system via a pirate point. Tragically, luck was not with them, and at least one Blakist WarShip was in position for an intercept.

The Black Watch, like the other SLDF units, had never possessed WarShips. Outclassed, but apparently too far in-system to return to their JumpShip, the Black Watch made a run for the surface. Their JumpShip remained in position long enough to record the destruction of two DropShips and the uncontrolled reentry of the third before being forced to abandon the system.

The Black Watch Regiment must now be considered a complete loss.

THE DRAGON RALLIES

DIERON FREE FROM TYRANNY

(1 December 3068)

Terra [VOICE OF TRUTH]—Once a jewel in the Star League's crown, Dieron shared the fate of the other planets in the Terran Hegemony. Only Terra, protected by the Blessed Jerome Blake, was not devoured by the House Lords in their greedy pursuit of power, resources and technology. For centuries, the enslaved peoples of Dieron suffered under the Dragon's yoke, their world pillaged to support wars of conquest. The Combine's draconian culture was stamped on every street and every house.

But now, the Word of Blake has set Dieron free!

Once more the House Lords destroyed the Star League—but this time the Word of Blake was here. In answer to the cries of the people long oppressed by tyrannical rule, the Warriors of Blake descended on Dieron with cleansing fire. The Dragon did not lightly release its claws from that sad world, and the fight was hard. The Third Dieron Regulars offered fanatical resistance, using civilians as human shields against our righteous wrath. But in the end we prevailed.

In Blake's name, Dieron is free!

BENJAMIN UNDER ATTACK!

(8 December 3068)

*****Priority One Feed*****

Benjamin [VOTD]—Confirmed reports [*"Sanitized lies!"*] from the prefecture capital of Benjamin verify that the planet is under attack [*"Vengeful predation by the murderous Davions!"*] by Federated Suns forces. Casualty counts among the civilian population are high [*"Catastrophically so, in accordance with the will of Sandoval!"*] after Draconis March forces executed a military drop-in-force in the middle of Kyoto City, setting several buildings alight and destroying entire residential blocks with suppressive fire [*"Filling the air with the deaths of the innocent and guilty, brought by the indiscriminate choice of the Combine and Suns commanders, who care not for you, but for the blood-soaked mud they trample beneath them. Embrace the purity offered by Blake. Throw off your shackles of oppression!"*].

A general advisory is being sent out to neighboring worlds to temporarily detour traffic around Benjamin, as there are unconfirmed reports of a Federated Suns blockade in force around the

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THE TRUTH OF THE MATTER

To: Ruby
Re: Alternatives

An interesting tidbit of news crossed my desk about three hours ago. According to two of our agents in the ISF in Benjamin Prefecture, our most hated foe is no longer a problem.

It seems that the surprise assault by some Draconis March units—no doubt sent by that sneaky Sandoval bastard (takes after his father!)—caught our forces unprepared for such a deep strike. That, however, is not the tidbit I promised, as I'm sure you already know about those little "embarrassments," like those on Matsuida and Galedon.

Here's the interesting bit. Apparently, during the Davions' systematic destruction of the Sixth Ghost, a victim of collateral damage happened to be the Gorman Medical Facility, where—get this—Director Ninyu Kerai was being treated. Apparently, he was moved there from Dieron, where a Blakist headhunter unit almost killed the bastard. We didn't even know he had gotten out of the system!

A stroke of luck, this is. I suspect our protégé is effectively countering the Davion foolishness (a wise choice, that one), and these events will go a long way toward purging the stain that Victor placed on us by soiling our former Keeper. Not only does our "beloved" Coordinator now look foolish for stripping our prefecture capitals of their defenses, we seem to have had our one major stumbling block to power removed from our path.

So. The way lies open for us to finally succeed where that damnable Kiguri failed. I suggest we seize the moment.

Jade

—Intercepted message (dated 12 December 3068) leaked to INN by alleged elements of the Luthien resistance (authenticity not yet verified)

planet [*"Truth, lies; does it matter to you? They will tell you nothing of the truth. Your own 'Precentor Dieron' betrayed you, after all."*]. At least one WarShip is rumored to be present [*"Soon to be destroyed by the Blade of Righteousness."*], though the Office of the Admiralty has neither confirmed nor denied this report [*"They confirm nothing so they may manipulate you with their false claims and false honor."*].

Benjamin Prefecture officials have confirmed that additional DCMS forces are en route to guarantee the safety of the population [*"And to reinforce the chains you wear as slaves to the false regime!"*]. Citizens wishing to know the status of families on Benjamin are encouraged to contact their local prefecture office [*"Or you may learn the Truth by contacting the Word of Blake, so we can enlighten you."*].

LUTHIEN ARMOR WORKS IN PERIL?

At first glance, the Luthien Armor Works' annual report seems full of nothing but the standard corporate blather to their stockholders. However, though no official reports have outright stated it, LAW is in serious trouble.

The continued fighting on Luthien and Dieron—where LAW's two largest industrial complexes happen to be located—has to have taken a toll after all this time. Underground reports, in fact, hint at the massive destruction of LAW's Luthien facilities under tactical nuclear strikes. Scattered reports indicate that Guthry Island, the location of LAW's sixty billion C-bill OmniMech plant, no longer exists as a habitable surface.

Those two complexes alone account for more than sixty-three percent of LAW's BattleMech production assets, and their loss would threaten the company with bankruptcy. If reports that Quentin has also been attacked are true—another thirteen percent of LAW's profitable assets, by the way—then it is easy to foresee LAW dissolving as a corporation by the end of fiscal year 3069.

For the stockholders' sake, LAW had better make some hard decisions soon, or the DCMS will suffer dramatically with the financial destruction of the Dragon's largest weapons supplier.

Tricks with numbers can't hide the truth forever.

—Feature article, *Power Play Magazine*, Athenry Publications, December 3068

DEATH TO MERCENARIES, REVISITED

(20 November 3068—System Error 0404—Backup Transmitted 30 December 3068)

Galatea [MERCNET]—Employment opportunities in the Draconis Combine have declined sharply since Warlord Kiyomori Minamoto issued a declaration adding Greenburg's Godzillas and Camacho's Caballeros to the list of rogue commands. Regular DCMS units have been ordered to show both commands no mercy on the battlefield—an order chillingly reminiscent of the infamous "Death to Mercenaries" order issued by Coordinator Takashi Kurita during the Fourth Succession War. [*"Witness how the Dragon reverts to type."*]

In the face of claims of desertion, the Godzillas—currently bound for Arc-Royal—maintain that the DCMS tried to ensnare them in an infamous "company store" trap, and refused to sign a new contract. The Caballeros, last reported en route for the Free Worlds League, have yet to offer their side of events.

In light of these occurrences, the MRBC has downgraded the Draconis Combine's Employer Rating to D, pending a review of their claims.

[*"Work not for these capricious House Lords! The Word of Blake offers you more lucrative contracts."*]

A CALL TO ARMS

(5 December 3068—System Error 0404—Backup Transmitted 12 January 3069)

Skye [SBS]—Duke Robert Kelswa-Steiner today issued the following appeal to the people of Skye:

"Sons and daughters of Skye! Hear the call to duty! Skye is beset by her enemies! Even now, our ancient foe—the Free Worlds League—presses at our border defenses, supporting their terrorist allies in the Word of Blake!

"In order to meet this threat to our way of life, I hereby announce the formation of two new regiments. Recruitment for the Second and Third Skye Guard will begin immediately, and I appeal to all who love the Isle of Skye as I do to come forth and help defend your families, your friends and your homes. Once more I must call on the veterans who have already given so much. And now I appeal also to those who previously have been exempt from military service. I need you all. Skye needs you all. Together we will defend what is most dear to us.

"As God is my witness, Skye will never fall!"

ALLIANCE IN TURMOIL

THE SHOW MUST GO ON!

"This is Kiva Cooper with another SBC exclusive. Street investigations have looked at the reports of underground fighting on Solaris. Only this reporter has delved deep into this 'rebellion'. One must wonder why there would be rebellion; perhaps the government is killing innocent civilians? No. Are they removing our civil liberties? Liberties that we need for our jobs? Liberties that we need for our lives? Again, no. Really, we suffer no more than a few minor inconveniences. Inconveniences that preserve our liberties by keeping us safe while the last of the terrorists are removed.

"Our investigation points at nothing of this sort. *Nothing*. The truth behind these rumors isn't a few terrorists with a homemade bomb, seeking to throw citizens off productive order for chaos so that they may grab power. Not even anything *that* insipid. It's merely a publicity campaign by stables whose bottom line had dropped because of their inability to keep their feuds and battles inside the arena. This reporter asks you to respond to this irresponsible campaign with a boycott.

"This boorish attempt to equate underground cultural rebellion with genuine subversion is appalling. Rather than watch these amateurish fights, watch the Best of Solaris. History always repeats itself in the arena anyway. Or even tune into *The Steinhearts*. I'd prefer you watch a soap opera that's honest about it than these staged fights. Which do you think is more likely? That Steve McCormick is fighting out of the arenas in street battles for 300 C-bills, or that some fill-in is piloting a similar 'Mech in a similar manner while Steve enjoys the view from his penthouse?

"Again, this is Kiva Cooper, and thanks for listening to this SBC announcement.

—*Solaris City News at Six*, SBC, Solaris VII, 27 October 3068

GHTING BLIND

LAAF RALLIES AFTER STUNNING CLAN ASSAULT ON GRAUS

Rhoda Maines, DBC: "General, did this attack come as a surprise?"

General Steiner: "Not really. If the Falcons were going to attack anywhere, it would be Graus."

Maines: "But if you anticipated this new Falcon Incursion, why did you relocate so many units away from the border?"

Steiner: "Who said this strike is a part of another Falcon Incursion? I certainly didn't say that. While it would be in character for the Falcons to prey on us while we're distracted with other affairs, we have reliable intelligence that they are currently most concerned with Clan Wolf.

"Between the defenses we still have in place and the redeployments of Clan Wolf, I remain confident that we can hold the border. We've certainly demonstrated this on Graus. The First Wolf Strike Grenadiers and Sixth Wolf Guards are frustrating—quite successfully—the efforts of the First Falcon Striker Cluster and the Eighth Talon Cluster. As soon as Khan Kell's Golden Keshik makes landfall, I am certain control of Graus will be re-established."

Floyd Stanleigh, ARNN: "Are you confident in your assessment that the Falcons are focusing on Vlad's Wolves?"

Steiner: "Information is ammunition. Next."

Gabriel Jardinais, ISAP: "Sir! Rumor has it that 'Information is ammunition' is actually one of Blake's sayings? Any response to those who feel that this phrase links you to the Blakist pogrom?"

Steiner: (*Baffled*) "What? Who the hell are you, and who let you in here? I'm not going to respond to hysterical allegations like that! Next!"

Ori Castakus, INN: "Will units be diverted back to the Falcon border in response to this latest attack?"

Steiner: "That would be premature, and a waste of resources. The forces currently present in the Arc-Royal Theater have the situation well in hand. Our primary areas of focus continue to be repelling the Word of Blake attacks and regaining peace along our Free Worlds border.

"That's all for today, ladies and gentlemen."

—Excerpted from a press conference on Atocongo, General of the Armies Adam Steiner in attendance, 28 October 3068

TERRAN CORRIDOR IN CRISIS

(25 December 3068)

Terra [VOICE OF TRUTH]—In their folly, the rulers of the Inner Sphere have torn apart the great Star League and once more set upon one another, threatening to throw the Inner Sphere back into the Dark Age of the Succession Wars. Caught in the middle of all this is the region of space known as the Terran Corridor.

With the Lyran Alliance focused on the conflict with the Free Worlds League, the Jade Falcons are swooping in like vultures. Interstellar shipping routes are disrupted. Economies, already damaged by the ravages of the FedCom Civil War, now teeter on

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the brink of collapse. Bandits have again begun to raid with impunity. The very structure of society is threatening to unravel, and through it all the Lyran Alliance has ignored the calls for aid from the Corridor worlds.

With their pleas for help falling on deaf ears, the beleaguered planets of Thorin, Muphrid and New Earth wisely turned to us. Guided by Blake's wisdom, we have answered. As we have already done in the so-called Chaos March, we true followers of the Blessed Blake dispatched our militia to deliver much-needed aid to these embattled worlds of such historic significance. Regrettably, by the time our convoys arrived, the situation had worsened in many cases. On Thorin and Muphrid, all social order had collapsed from Alliance negligence, while New Earth threatened to go the same way.

Fortunately, the valiant warriors of our Sixth Division's Dawn of Truth III-Delta restored order on Thorin, where the grateful local government petitioned for entry into our Protectorate. Muphrid and New Earth, recognizing Thorin's wisdom, quickly followed suit.

Still other worlds remain outside, desperate for guidance and support. For these planets, in Blake's name, the Word stands ready to deliver the light of peace and harmony.

COMPLIANCE IS LIFE!

(13 November 3068)

New Home [NEW HOME HERALD-GUARDIAN]—I ask you, then, fellow citizen: is life really so terrible under the measured hand of the Word of Blake, as it was under the archaic and mistrustful Lyran political circus that the Blakists have so competently replaced? Is it not possible—nay, even likely!—that the classic curse of misleading Lyran propaganda, coupled with the least competent military leadership the Inner Sphere has ever seen, could have brought about the rise of a renegade faction of "True Believers" dead set on returning our beloved Home to the chaos rampant before the arrival of our liberators?

I say to you: Rise up! Rise up and embrace the safety of competent rule and administration! Rise up and show the strength of a newfound unity to the hardliners of olden days

Lest we suffer again a civil war, still so fresh in our memories of the loved ones lost at the hands of the power-hungry Steiner-Davionists, we must indeed band together for safety... and such safety as provided by the Blakists cannot be matched by a renegade Star Lordling, without the ability to enforce rule over his or her own domain.

LEAGUE FORCES SHATTERED ON SYRMA

(28 November 3068)

Syrma [FREE SKYE PRESS]—The FWLM was no match for the might of our LAAF forces today when they overwhelmed the Eastern Front and retook Zebebelgenubi from enemy hands. Leutenant-General Andrew Baines of the Fourteenth Lyran Guards commented on the triumph, "It was easier than we thought it could be—even with the Wobbie support those backstabbers had, they were no match for our people. Hundreds laid down their lives for their desire to take back what was theirs. The Lyran people and her culture will not be destroyed."

Little is known yet of the casualties as those held hostage in the city by the Free Worlds League since October celebrate in the streets at the return of their beloved Alliance forces. Tired, war-ravaged natives of Syrma stood in a small gathering outside a burning administration building where the occupying FWLM had set up an operations network. Earlier reports suggested a suicide bomber had disrupted the communications network, setting off a chain of events that aided in our retaking the city.

"There's not much left," said Lilith Shanks, a former employee of the city's courthouse as she stood amid the crowd of survivors. "But we have our city thanks to the Lyran Alliance Armed Forces."

SKYE FORCES CLAIM NARROW VICTORY ON ZEBEBELGENUBI

(30 November 3068)

Zebebelgenubi [DBC]—Off in the distance you can see shooting stars in reverse as the First Atrean Dragoons retreat off-planet. This is Vincent Wharton for DBC on Zebebelgenubi. The Skye Guard has managed to fend off an attack outside the gates of Redstorm Computers, but as the charred husks of war machines surrounding me show, it was not an easy victory. A last-ditch assault by General Maria Esteban's command lance stopped the Dragoons' charge cold. It was her death, however, that turned the tide. As two Marik lances concentrated fire on the General, the rest of their force crumbled. Less than two Dragoons companies made it off the planet, equaling the functioning units of the Skye Guards.

The true loser, however, is Zebebelgenubi. While it remains a bastion of freedom in the Isle of Skye, this world has suffered greatly for its survival. The Cor D'Azure reservoir is hopelessly contaminated with all the toxic materials leaking from the Skye 'Mechs that tried to spring a trap from it. Ninety percent of the capital city is without power at this time as well. Free Worlds troops attempted to launch a night attack by destroying the three major power plants, while the Guards retaliated by igniting the LP refinery. With funds hard to come by, the people of this region will have to soldier on, with no power, no clean water, no fuel and next to no defense. As for the Lyran Guards, even with a fleet of techs this unit is little more than a reinforced battalion with little leadership left. While spirits are high now, tomorrow may bring a bitter reality here on Zebebelgenubi.

YOUR BEST DEFENSE

(8 December 3068—System Error 0404—Backup Transmitted 24 December 3068)

Richvale [QUIKSCELL ADVERTISING]—Feeling out-gunned? Can't depend on the regular army? Mercenaries too expensive? Troubled by a noisy neighboring interstellar power? Pestered by pirates? Quikscell is proud to present the answer to all your military needs—offensive and defensive! Announcing the all-new and improved Condor Hover Tank!

Upgraded with the latest word in weaponry, this new model is faster*, hits harder, and is better protected than ever! Introducing the new Mydron Excel 5SG LB-X Autocannon—this weapon delivers unparalleled reliability, plus the flexibility to deal with hard and soft targets**. For that long-range punch, the Condor now includes the Valiant Arbalest LRM-15 system in a turret mount for full 360-degree fire! Troubled by infantry? No longer! This new upgrade boasts TWICE the anti-personnel capability of its predecessor!

The new Condor Hover Tank from Quikscell provides you with the edge you need to ensure planetary security and peace of mind—all for only 7.36 million C-bills per unit.

Be the envy of other planetary militias!

Don't delay! Order today!***

*Performance assumes standard atmospheric pressure and gravity.

**With Mydron-branded ammunition only.

***Allow up to 120 days for delivery, depending upon locale.

AND IN OTHER NEWS…

DAMOCLES' REPORT TO THE PRECENTOR MARTIAL

>>>loh1416G/ntrcpt//rr:/IS/LIC/MIIO/ISF/o017K/brnch-INN/ISP-segA7.dcrpt<<<

ROM Security Protocol: Omega Prime
DATE/TIME: 10153068—1547 Zulu Local—Caph
To: Precentor Martial Victor Steiner-Davion
From: Damocles

Victor,

I decided to bypass standard communication protocols and make direct contact with you. I suspect most of ComStar's ROM, including Precentor ROM herself, are Blakist operatives or at least sympathetic to their cause.

[*"Many hold our cause dear and will stand up to the heretics who have twisted the teachings of Blake's blessed wisdom."*]

I have come across credible information I extracted from a high-level Blakist Light of Mankind operative. Precentor [*"@#$R…la13...2439…a-34"*] caved after an exhausting interrogation session.

[*"You blasphemous bastard, you tortured her. We found what was left of her body. You shall suffer a fate tenfold of what you did to our sister!"*]

Her information, though not confirmed yet, alleges there are [*"te..Ne,i239d-7///"*] divisions of fresh troops in the [*"C.ai50..^^^*&{{"*] staging from the planets [*"////…*^*^////>.<"*] Currently there are [*"Kt10100101"*] fleets of WarShips operating in the [*"C.ai50"*]. They are planning a three-prong thrust against [*"D..11a00…v////772lon, BuNder…EiNeeRan"*] and [*"Yak11//url^^^tan"*] worlds. Their line of advance will move along the [*"%*&////…CibD…55669…01010///"*] axis.

[*"Our time and place is for us to reveal, not you, Damocles. Prepare to reap what you sow, blasphemer!"*]

Just before she expired, she rambled about secret worlds, saying "Gabriel" is one such "world," but that was her last statement.

One other note, Victor. I've heard unconfirmed reports of at least [*"thure….n…/////1177/^^^**"*] based in the Periphery. If proven true, the Word of Blake's military is nearly the size of the pre-Tukayyid Com Guards.

Choke on that for a while, sire.

—Damocles

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DOW: NORMAL SERVICES TO RESUME SHORTLY

(27 October 3068—System Error 0404—Backup Transmitted 23 November 3068)

Orestes [INN]—Acting in the role of interim Primus until the election of Sharilar Mori's successor, First Precentor Gavin Dow today issued a brief announcement on behalf of the First Circuit.

[*"The truth behind the 'Puppet Primus' has been revealed! Brothers and sisters, hear us! The time of reckoning has come for those who slew Primus Myndo Waterly and perverted Blake's vision and ComStar into the mockery it is today!"*]

"As everyone is doubtless now aware, the HPG network has fallen victim to a coordinated attack intended to deny the people of the Inner Sphere access to interstellar communications. The source of communication disruptions has been identified as a virus introduced into the system by Blakist sympathizers. As of today we have several suspects in custody.

[*"See how easily the true followers of Blessed Blake's teachings defeat the heretics in their citadels of information. Does this not prove that what we do is Blake's will?"*]

"Rest assured that even as I speak, our technicians are bringing the full weight of their skill and knowledge to bear on the task of restoring services as quickly as possible.

[*"Fools! It is we—not you—who control the HPG network now. Your best efforts will avail you nothing! Listen not to your faithless leaders! See the truth and embrace Blake's word!"*]

"We apologize for any inconvenience our customers may be experiencing."

[*"'Customers'? Misguided brethren, here we see ComStar for the hollow corporation it has made itself into, a mockery of our Divine Mission!"*]

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LET THE SPHEROIDS BURN!

To hell with the Sphere!

What have they done for us lately, other than sap resources and manpower from our continuing exploration of the space beyond our own borders? How many other realms can legitimately claim to have established new worlds in the past hundred years but us? The [House Lords and functionaries] sit on their posh thrones at their overflowing banquet tables, gorging themselves on the cornucopia of fruits from the labor of their subjects, yet how much better a life have those subjects now, than at the turn of this century?

Oh, to be sure, there have been "advancements" in the technology of warmaking and manufacture… but what of the common family? What benefit do the men and women of that Great Black Hole we call the Inner Sphere see from the labors of their last two generations of scientists? As has been the case for centuries now, the center of that black hole is none other than Terra, the very cradle of such divisive and pointless destruction as humanity has known for thousands of years.

We needn't concern ourselves with the predictable continuation of warfare in that black hole, though we might hope that a new era of peace and prosperity can be brought about by the doctrinal changes the Blakists might offer the lost children of two dead Star Leagues and countless more dynasties built on a foundation of shifting sand—including ComStar.

No, we survivalists on the Periphery have naught to do with, or to fear from, the emergence of this new dynasty; for despite anything they might offer over the course of their lives, the Blakists too, shall fall.

—From "The BullHorn", a Concordat-wide syndicated column by Mikhail Neils, 11 November 3068

ALL POINTS BULLETIN

To all private citizens, commercial, industrial, government and military agencies of the Free Worlds League. The following is an all-points-bulletin for your safety.

Be it known that: On 27 October 3068, the mercenary command known as Romanov's Crusaders abandoned its garrison assignments on Connaught. The Crusaders left the Connaught system on 4 November after ignoring repeated hails from the Eighteenth Marik Militia commander, Colonel Julie Kiel, to return to their post.

Be it also known that: As of 4 November 3068, the mercenary command known as Romanov's Crusaders is considered in breach of contract for abandoning its post without proper federal deployment orders. Arrest warrants for all known members of the mercenary command have been filed. To date, two members returning from special assignment have been apprehended by the Eighteenth Militia. Investigations into the whereabouts of the rest of the command continue.

Private citizens are urged to exercise extreme caution when interacting with members of Romanov's Crusaders, and to forward any information or sightings of this renegade unit to your local Free Worlds League Military office.

—FWLM Office of Mercenary Affairs advisory, dated 6 November 3068

AMC STATUS ADVISORY

>>>ComStar-ROM Communications intercept, reroute by need<<<

Flash traffic: Alert One…Alert One

From: Precentor Martial Cameron St. Jamais

SOJ/ROM Security Protocol: Gamma—Zebra 6699

DATE/TIME: 10263068 – 2206 Zulu Prime

////Phoenix proceeds as planned. Advancing on all fronts; enemies fleeing in total disarray, confusion.////

////This advisory concerns remaining AMC forces missed during Operation Scourge on Outreach. Four commands remain viable. If linked, will pose a clear and present danger to ongoing operations.////

////Commands listed below must be dealt with in most expedient and deadliest manner. Do not, under any circumstances, underestimate them. Each capable of causing great harm to our mission.////

Wolf's Dragoons (Delta Brigade) – Location: Kiesen, Draconis Combine

Dioscuri – Location: Morges, Lyran Alliance

The Wild Geese – Location: Unknown, last seen on Alta Vista, FedSuns

Thirteenth Stalking Horse – Location: Unknown, last seen on Alta Vista, FedSuns

Third Dismal Disinherited/Burton's Brigade – Location: Unknown, last seen on Hall, FWL

////Dragoon and Dioscuri units out of position; probability of interference: low. Disinherited/Burton units badly damaged in Hall incident (estimated at 50% overall effectiveness); probability of interference: low. Wild Geese and Stalking Horse have disappeared following Dragoon/CWiE raid on Outreach (shortly after Geese CO Alisande Faulkner was named AMC head). Our forces fought both units before. Though ultimately defeated, both caused serious damage to units and timetable. Any units encountering these forces are fully authorized to any means necessary. Do not attempt to engage in ground operations without clear tactical advantage.////

////Also note: AMC still actively recruiting via Galatea offices. Action pending.////

////Message ends.////

>>>End ComStar-ROM Communications intercept<<<

NORTHWIND SILENCED

(9 November 3068)

Galatea [MERCNET]—ComStar officials confirmed today that the HPG system serving Northwind has gone offline. ComStar tech-

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nicians tried unsuccessfully to remotely engage the HPG station from various nearby worlds. Other news from Northwind comes from the captain of the *Derry*, a *Mule*-class tramp freighter that recently passed through the system. The *Derry's* sensors picked up an unidentified WarShip in planetary orbit. The freighter's sensors also picked up a series of explosions on the planet near the orbiting WarShip. While the ship's sensor logs are examined by local ComStar personnel for verification, the report has nonetheless fueled rampant speculation that the system is indeed undergoing an "Outreach Syndrome" attack. Any merchantmen passing through Northwind are urged to take as much sensor data as possible without exposing themselves to Blakist reprisals.

[*"Again, the propagandist arm of the mercenary spews forth more lies and half-truths to justify their existence and further the heretical cause of our fallen brothers. Do they tell the whole story? Do they reveal that the* Derry *had its entire cargo confiscated for smuggling activity? Do they tell you that the "explosions" witnessed were nothing more than smoke from a raging forest fire on the planet surface—one that we helped local authorities contain? We have shut down the system's HPG for upgrade purposes, much as we have done with many of our other allies in the area.*

"Seek the Truth, dear people. Do not be deceived by the flopping remains of a corrupt Dragoon-spawned system. For the way of deception contains only pain and despair. Blake's Truth heals all."]

MERCENARY COWARDICE IMPERILS OPERATION RECLAMATION

(10 December 3068)

Taurus [TNS]—In October, what should have been the opening move in the drive to return the wayward worlds of the so-called Calderon Protectorate to the Concordat fold ended in disaster on Marknik.

The landing was spearheaded by the Third Taurian Lancers' Third Battalion, with support from the Black Angus Boys—a recently hired mercenary command. Initially, the Lancers faced only light opposition, and the LZ was secured as planned. However, before TDF armor and infantry forces could land, a counterattack by elements of the First Taurian Pride hammered into the Lancers' perimeter. Brigadier Aaron Wells called for aid from the Black Angus Boys, only to be informed by Major Angus Black that his troops had been hired to support *offensive* operations—not to conduct the defense of the LZ. Further, his "Boys" were returning to the DropShips. Without support, Brigadier Wells had no choice but to withdraw.

Protector Shraplen has lodged a formal protest over the Black Angus Boys' actions with the MRBC. In response, Major Angus Black has cited a contractual clause under which the Concordat provides for rear area security, Black alleges the Concordat breached the contract when it failed to protect the LZ.

THE VIEW FROM GALATEA

MercNet.

Whatever else you want to call it, the system that has come into mainstream use in the hiring, firing, transfer, disposition and overall guidelines for appropriate protocol and deployment of mercenaries Sphere-wide has proven the duality of its twin edges… and we mercs have only our own to blame.

With the coming of the Clans in the late 3040s it seemed the 'Net was a blessing, but as conflicts with the organization intensified, it grew clear that MercNet had become yet another focal point for clamor and blood money. How else can we explain the reality that such organizations as the tyrannical Word of Blake can still legitimately do business within the MercNet hierarchy, which was supposedly formed to prevent the abuse and perversion of our profession? Did not the Dragoons themselves oppose the direction the Blakists have taken, or has the loss of Jaime Wolf shaken them to the core so strongly that they now secretly espouse the tactics of scorched earth and WMDs *even in populated areas?* Or do they even care any more, now that they have been wounded so deeply?

What has become of us? What are we to believe will continue, or change, when the next round of hostilities opens?

Oh, how this correspondent pines for the days of old, when men were men, enemies were enemies, and MechWarriors ruled the field of battle as an elite force unto themselves…

—Roger Coriman, *Warrior Monthly*, MRBC Publications, December 3068

BLAKE'S HAND IS EVERYWHERE

>>>Encrypt/timestamp03:00hrs/09113068OR<<<

To: General Adam Steiner

From: Agent Nigel Hawkins, Outpost Somerset

Date: 9 November 3068

General Steiner—Adam—it's worse than we feared.

I regret to inform you the hand of Blake reaches further than the Inner Sphere. In addition to their strongholds on Terra, the Free Worlds League and our beloved Tharkad, intelligence received just before the bombings of our capital city and New Avalon, as well as subsequently following the White-Out, suggests sightings of Word of Blake ships between the local and the Deep Periphery. Unfortunately, those reports have been few, and several of the smaller ships sent out for deep explorations have disappeared off the radar.

I believe more Word of Blake strongholds exist within Lyran space as well—bases hidden deep on border worlds, close to Tharkad as well as the borders between the Combine and the Free Worlds League and the Periphery. It's the only explanation I can accept for their ability to have moved so quickly between planets so soon after their unprecedented attacks. We've tried tracking these ghost ships, but as I stated before, those operatives reporting such sightings vanish, leaving only their last coordinates.

LATE 3068: FIGHTING BLIND

I realize your forces are spread thin, Adam. But we need your help in weeding out these possible bases and destroying them. If not, our own safety and well-being as a people are at risk. How can we battle an enemy that lives within our own body if we allow it to fester?

I hope this message gets to you in time, and that you'll take my warnings under consideration.

Forever loyal to you and the Alliance,

Agent Nigel Hawkins, Outpost Somerset

—LIC Intelligence Brief (intercepted by unknown sources and leaked to ISAP), transmission time-delayed by communications interference until 3 January 3069

MERCENARY TRAITORS RAMPAGE ON VICTORIA!

(30 December 3068—System Error 0404—Backup Transmitted 2 March 3069)

Victoria [CBS]—Mere days after the departure of the Prefectorate Guard from Victoria to engage the Davion enemy, the loyal Capellan citizens of Victoria are suffering at Davion hands! Even though the spinward scum are unable to strike directly at proud Victoria, they have managed to worm their way into the treacherous hearts of Olson's Rangers. This mercenary command, disgraced on Acamar only three years ago, received the mercy and trust of the Celestial Wisdom when he allowed them to guard the Shengli Arms plants. How this trust was betrayed! Killing Major Timothy Rain and all other mercenaries among them with any loyalty in their hearts as they slept, the treasonous dogs proceeded to inflict terrible damage on the factories they were paid to protect! Countless loyal factory workers lost their lives at the hands of these war criminals, and the factory's defenses were used relentlessly against the efforts of Sung's Victoria Commonality Rangers to dislodge the bandits. Fleeing before *Zhong-shao* Reginald Berkley succeeded in breaching the defenses arrayed against him, Olson's Rangers made for their waiting DropShips, stealing a merchant vessel to allow them to make off with their spoils. Despite the efforts of the Victoria Home Guard aerospace assets and Sung's Air Raiders, the Olson Ranger pirates managed to commandeer a JumpShip and escape from the Victoria system before efforts could be completed to apprehend the pirates. Now en route to New Syrtis, to their new paymaster Hasek and their former commander Nicholas Olson, the butcher of Acamar, they can certainly expect a hero's welcome in the realm so eager to hire and pardon war criminals.

As proud Victorians gather to save as many from the rubble as they can, it remains unknown when Shengli may be able to resume production.

While Olson's Rangers can be certain that they will receive justice for their atrocities on Victoria, their actions cast a shadow of concern on some of the other mercenaries charged with protecting Capellan lives. Clearly, not every mercenary is a McCarron, or a Black Ace, or a Lockhardt. After the sudden departure of Wolf's Dragoons, and now this latest defection, all eyes are on Rivaldi's Hussars. How will they guard Bora?

NEWS DOWNLOADER v3.7

Date & Title	*Service*	*Status*
(20 November 3068) "Officials: Selection of New Primus Delayed Indefinitely"	[INN]	COMPLETED
(11 December 3068) "Benjamin Under Attack!" ("Davion Troops Launch…	[ISAP]	DOWNLOADING
(20 December 3068) "Rescuers Uncover Chancellor's Bunker"	[CBS]	ACCESSING

A SERVICE OF IRIAN NEWS INTERSTELLAR

CHAOS UNLEASHED: LEADING EDGE

LEADING EDGE

Journal Entry 97-3F

Missions are easy to come by, even if the MRBC is having problems with PR. Fact is, a good merc unit has contacts everywhere, not just relying on the standard avenues to bring in revenue. Yeah, it's harder work, and you need your own lawyer team to make sure you don't get shafted with the contract, but honestly? The pay and the mission options are so much better.

Case in point. We're about to hit Kittery to do a recon-in-force for our Capellan liaison. Not sure what office he's attached to, as he approached us through non-standard channels, but the pay was stellar—enough to get Steve's Arctic Fox *back up to trim, and we even had enough left over to spring for some of that new autocannon ammo the Feddies flooded the black market with a few months back.*

Too bad this contract's only for this mission. I could get used to the pay they're throwing at us. Stupid Capellans. Heh. We'll end up robbing them blind.

SITUATION

Nadir Point CC-332, Kittery
Capellan March, Federated Suns
22 October 3068

Fighting all along the Suns/Confederation border has increased in the past year, with firefights erupting pretty much on every world. The Confederation seems to be gearing up for a major push now; they've hired several mercenary bands to begin raid and recon missions along the Periphery end of the border.

CHAOS UNLEASHED: LEADING EDGE

GAME SET-UP

CBT: Use Forest Terrain maps.

AT2: Use the standard Space maps. All forces begin the track at any Velocity below 6.

RPG: Prepare for a space or ground battle, depending on group composition. The gamemaster should have a defined battleground.

Attacker

The player group is the Attacker. They may designate up to 25 percent of their total force and may set up on one half of the playing area, with one map edge designated as their home edge—and the Defender's objective edge.

Defender

The Defender is a Federated Suns unit with Regular experience. The Defender's deployed force should be 125 percent of the Attacker's total deployed force.

Half of the Defender's force (round down) enters from the edge opposite the Attacker's home edge on Turn One. The second half enters from the same edge on Turn Six.

WARCHEST

***Track Cost*:** 300 WP

Optional Bonuses (all bonuses cumulative):

+100 Heavy Rain: Per the rules on p. 153, *CBTComp* (or p. 12, *MT*). For *AT2* games, the same to-hit and piloting penalties apply, as a result of the track taking place in a dust ring around a gas giant in the Kittery system used to mask the players' approach (the debris is not large enough to follow the *Asteroid* rules).

+150 Enemy Minefields: The Defender places 1D6 + 1 minefields (gamemaster's choice) anywhere on the playing area before the Attacker deploys his units. Attacking units that begin the game in a minefield only set the field off when exiting the hex. (For *AT2* players, see the rules for space mines on pp. 22-23, *CE*.)

+150 Spirited Defenders: Increase the Defending force's experience level to Veteran.

Victory Bonuses (not cumulative):

+200 Marginal Victory: Completing one objective.

+400 Partial Victory: Completing two objectives.

+550 Total Victory: Completing all objectives.

OBJECTIVES

1. Distract and delay: No Defending unit may exit its home edge for a minimum of ten turns. For *AT2* games, exiting units may not exceed 3 Velocity, reflecting the heavier debris field of the rings.

2. Hammer down: Destroy or cripple at least 75 percent of the Defender's force.

3. Fast recon: Exit one Attacker unit off the Defender's home edge. For *AT2* games, exiting units may not exceed 3 Velocity, reflecting the heavier debris field of the rings.

SPECIAL RULES

The following rules are in effect for this track:

CHAOS UNLEASHED

Salvage

Because this mission involves fast recon, salvage is unavailable.

AFTERMATH

In and out, they said, and that's what you did. The balance of payment landed in your Galatean account before you'd even reached Kittery's nadir jump point. Seems your Capellan liaison left the ship shortly after you transmitted the recon data—so that wraps that up. You briefly wonder what operation is coming, before the final repair and refit reports flood your desk. A merc's job is never done, especially when paperwork is involved….

ADDITIONAL HOOKS

Those Capellans seemed odd—the liaison wasn't as nosey as they usually are. Granted, with the state of the Sphere these days, people everywhere have a lot on their minds… but still. Maybe with enough digging, the players can find out what's really going on in and around Kittery—and what's coming down the barrel.

Expansion Ideas

The player group may have additional riders on their contract, requiring them to blow up key supply dumps, target communication nodes or even headhunt the local defenders' headquarters. As long as their Confederation employer receives the main recon intel, it doesn't much matter. However, they need to be out of the system before November. Something big is coming down, and they really don't want to be here—or so they've been politely warned.

NEXT TRACK

Brew-Ha-Ha; Seed of Discontent

CHAOS UNLEASHED: ONE FOR THE MONEY…

ONE FOR THE MONEY…

Entry 810

We've been at the Gienah nadir jump point for almost a week now, waiting for a bunch of clowns calling themselves Hal's Heinous Halberds. Their Gazelle *decided that today was a good day to die—it's power plant just up and quit on them. Our burn in-system is delayed yet again. A full company of assault tanks is nice, but I don't think it's worth this wait. We've wasted a week now. Gienah's GOT to know what's going on by now. I can smell another disaster.*

Entry 811

Things got worse. Four JumpShips showed up and are spilling DropShips as we speak. We're being challenged and ordered to surrender. Two outfits just hijacked a Merchant and jumped out. The Halberds idiots wasted no time in surrendering. Our fighters started to skirmish with them, and plugged a Fury. Of course, five of our guys had to die to get that done. For things to suck any harder, I'd need to expose myself to hard vacuum.

Entry 812

Things got better. Turns out the commander of that JumpShip coterie is on the same mission as us, and thought we were intercepting them. The Halberds un-surrendered, and apart from the wimps who split or died, we've got a pretty decent taskforce. Eight more days till we make landfall. Gienah's supposed to be mostly undefended, which is just as well. This whole mess really soured things up; I don't think there'll be much cooperation.

SITUATION

Inbound vector
Gienah, Lyran Alliance
30 September 3068

A Mr. Askai hired numerous mercenary units from nearby Lyran and League space to attack Gienah, specifically the Gienah Automotive and Gienah Combat Vehicles sites. The strikes succeeded, largely because of the mercenaries' overwhelming numbers and the lack of an organized 'Mech force to oppose them. The Gienah militia, however, with support from corporate security forces (and surprisingly well-armed labor union workers), has managed to inflict a serious toll on the mercenaries, exploiting a lack of cooperation among the invaders.

The mercenaries are wrapping up their operations. Some secondary objectives remain, including a vehicle supply dump midway between Gienah Combat Vehicles and the spaceport. It must be destroyed.

CHAOS UNLEASHED: ONE FOR THE MONEY...

GAME SET-UP

CBT: Use at least one Urban Terrain map. Deploy four Heavy two-hex Level 1 buildings. Deploy at least four additional Medium one-hex Level 1 buildings.

AT2: Use a similar setup as for *CBT*, using the *Aerospace on BattleTech Maps* rules (see p. 40, *AT2*).

RPG: Gamemasters may prepare an appropriate environment according to the plans the players decide. The environment should include at least four hardened hangars, surrounded by chain-link fence. The players can elect to destroy the vehicles inside by collapsing the hangars using demolition charges, or by using internal fuel tanks to start a fire, or via another means of destruction.

Attacker

The Attacker consists of up to 25 percent of the player group's total force. All friendly units begin with half their ammunition load as a result of prior engagements. In addition, the gamemaster (or the players, with gamemaster approval) fields two other forces in support of the player group, both equaling 100 percent of the players' deployed force. Both support forces must have lower-quality technology and lesser experience than the players' force.

Each of the three forces enters from a different map side with a starting Velocity of 6 or lower (if applicable).

Defender

The Defender equals 100 percent of the Attacker's total deployed force and must be of lower quality than the players' force in technology and experience. For example, a Regular 'Mech force with B technology would face Green conventional troops with C or lower technology. A Veteran aerospace company would face Regular conventional fighters and anti-aircraft tank. Deploy all forces near the hangars.

WARCHEST

***Track Cost*:** 250 WP

Optional Bonuses (all bonuses cumulative):

+150 High Ambient Temperature: It's a balmy 52 degrees Celsius outside (see p. 83, *BMR*). If using *AT2* rules, consider the same effect a result of some freakish magnetic belt emissions in the area.

+150 Reinforcements: Local personnel manage to reactivate and attack with two Centipede Scout Cars per hangar if the hangars survive up until Turn Five.

+150 Disorganized: Reflecting poor cooperation between the three attacking forces, all friendly forces suffer a –2 penalty to their Initiative rolls.

Victory Bonuses (not cumulative):

+200 Partial Victory: Completing one objective

+400 Total Victory: Completing all objectives

OBJECTIVES

1. Fireworks! At least two hangars are destroyed.

2. Urban renewal: All hangars are destroyed.

3. Wipe them out! All hostile forces are destroyed or forced to withdraw.

SPECIAL RULES

The following rules are in effect for this track:

Forced Withdrawal

All Defending forces must use the *Forced Withdrawal* rules (see pp. 135-136, *DotJ*).

CHAOS UNLEASHED: ONE FOR THE MONEY...

AFTERMATH

Despite the mercenaries' disarray and the valiant efforts of the factory workers and security forces, the Gienah Combat Vehicles and most of the Gienah Automotive sites were destroyed or heavily damaged. Combat took a high toll among the mercenaries, which escalated further when various units began blaming each other for various failures, demanding compensation in salvage or funds for the damage they had suffered. The resulting skirmishes caused tremendous damage and loss of life in the town of Molfetta, and tied down several attacking units long enough for reinforcements from nearby worlds to descend upon them. Only a few of the mercenary raiders survived to retreat from Geinah and press charges of contract breach against their apparent employers in the Free Worlds League.

ADDITIONAL HOOKS

Detail-oriented gamemasters can expand this track to cover full insertion, from inbound to outbound vectors. Curious players may want to find out more about their "partners" in the endeavor, especially whether or not the supporting forces have goals compatible with the players' own. And just who is this Mr. Askai?

Furthermore, the competing nature of several of the players' allies may prompt infighting that—left unchecked—could delay or strand the players' force on planet long enough for the nearest defending reinforcements to arrive. (Though delayed themselves by communication and transport difficulties, the Kirkpatrick's Invaders mercenary command, a battalion-sized veteran 'Mech force stationed on nearby Arcadia, will arrive to hunt down any stragglers still on Geinah within three weeks of the initial attack; the Invaders' 'Mech and aerospace forces—one air lance per 'Mech company—use the B column of the Mercenary Random Assignment Table (see p. 122, *Field Manual: Mercenaries, Revised*); additional rules and information on this force may be found in *MS2*, pp. 44 and 75.)

Expansion Ideas

The Gienah plants in Molfetta are gigantic; significantly damaging them required several days. Gamemasters may set up various other objective raids as a part of this brief campaign, or the players may get an offer to hire on with the local defenders—either to defend the facilities from the other attacking forces, or to help contain the infighting that ravaged Molfetta.

NEXT TRACK

My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean; Brew-Ha-Ha; Seed of Discontent

CHAOS UNLEASHED: GRAVEYARD SHIFT

GRAVEYARD SHIFT

[*Sigma Six*]: *"Once more into the breach, eh captain?"*
[*Sigma One*]: *"Seems that way, Six. Tighten up formation."*
[*Sigma Two*]: *"I'm reading several bogies on long-range radar. We're being tagged, One."*
[*Sigma One*]: *"All right, boys, let's get ready. Dracs're here, just like the paymaster said. My mark, execute Alpha-Five maneuver."*
[*Sigma Six*]: *"Three, with me. Prep LRMs for maximum spread, then drop to the deck."*
[*Sigma Three*]: *"Roger that, Six. Getting visual confirmation now...holy crap! Are those* Onis*?"*
[*Sigma Four*]: *"Seems the Ghost is better armed than our AFFS buddies let on."*
[*Sigma One*]: *"Can it, boys. Let's make those Dracs wish they never got out of bed…Mark!"*

SITUATION

Inbound vector, Benjamin
Benjamin Military District, Draconis Combine
2 December 3068

After several weeks of rest and refit, your mercenary command went back to work. Finding someone to pay you to blow stuff up was easy. The Feddies were hiring for a secret operation that didn't involve the Confederation, and you couldn't pass up the salvage rights.

With war engulfing the entire Inner Sphere, it was a mercenary's dream—there were contracts aplenty and the pay was good, even if many higher-profile commands ended up on the nightly news getting the short end. Fact was, a merc commander had his choice of contracts, and the Feddie operation looked like a nice plum—even if it did pit you against the Sixth Ghost regiment on a Drac prefecture capital.

CHAOS UNLEASHED: GRAVEYARD SHIFT

GAME SET-UP

CBT: Use any Terrain Maps.

AT2: Use any Terrain Maps except Urban (Light Urban, Heavy Urban if using *Combat Operations*); unless the gamemaster chooses otherwise. This track uses the *Low Altitude Operations* rules (see p. 33, *AT2*).

RPG: The gamemaster may determine the terrain for the track.

Attacker

The player group is the Attacker and may deploy up to 50 percent of their total force. In addition, the Attacker receives support from a Federated Suns force equal to 100 percent of the players' total deployed force. The FedSuns force is Veteran; for its composition, roll on the Federated Suns Random Assignment Table (see p. 139, *Field Manual: Federated Suns*, or p. 225, *Field Manual: Updates*).

The Attacker chooses a starting side before the Defender deploys and may begin with any starting Velocity (if applicable).

Defender

The Defender is elements of the Sixth Ghost Regiment. The Defender's force is 125 percent of the Attacker's total deployed force and is considered Veteran.

The entire defending force deploys within five hexes of the map edge opposite the Attacker's declared starting side. For *AT2* games, the Defender starts at any Velocity below 4 (if applicable).

WARCHEST

***Track Cost*:** 300 WP

Optional Bonuses (all bonuses cumulative):

+200 Night Combat: See p. 87, *BMR*

+200 Elite Defenders: Increase the Defender's experience level to Elite.

Victory Bonuses (not cumulative):

+350 Partial Victory: Completing one objective.

+600 Total Victory: Completing both objectives.

OBJECTIVES

1. Soften them up: Destroy at least 50 percent of the Defender's total deployed force.

2. Paste them: Destroy or cripple the Defender's total deployed force.

SPECIAL RULES

The following rules are in effect for this track:

Salvage

The players' force only obtains salvage rights for enemy units they destroy. Any enemy unit destroyed by the Federated Suns support force becomes AFFS salvage. The gamemaster determines who claims what kill.

Forced Withdrawal

The Defender is operating under *Forced Withdrawal* rules (see pp. 135-136, *DotJ*).

AFTERMATH

The fighting on Benjamin was brutal, with several mercenary commands going in to "soften up" the Combine defenders. The Sixth Ghost used every scrap of their speed and maneuverability, but in the end they succumbed to the pressing Suns attack.

While it disheartened you to see such a storied force go down like a mandre-stag to a pack of wolfin, what really stung was watching the Suns forces throw down with all the gloves off. Urban fighting cost just as much blood as combat outside civilian population centers. Seems the Suns learned some nasty lessons in their recent civil war—targets like hospitals and high-rise complexes came under fire from the Davion guns, as if they were ammo dumps and headquarters. Your force watched one quartet of Suns 'Mechs decimate a hospital complex near the south end of Deber City—a rumor made the rounds that the Dracs had stashed a large ammunition depot in the underground parking complex. Depressing to watch—but at least you didn't pull the trigger. No bad dreams for your boys tonight.

ADDITIONAL HOOKS

Rescue operations aren't a military force's standard operating mode, but sometimes you have to step in and assist, even if you made the mess. While you're still technically fighting the Dracs, doing some good deeds would go a long way to help repair the damaged reputation mercenaries seem to be garnering these days.

Expansion Ideas

Gamemasters may create more complicated missions using the standard Linked Scenario rules (see p. 78, *CO*). Depending on the player group's success against the Sixth Ghost, the FedSuns commanders may use the mercenary command in other missions to help gain a solid foothold on the planet before Combine reinforcements arrive.

NEXT TRACK

Brew-Ha-Ha; Living Dead Men; Brute Force

EARLY 3069: THE FOG OF WAR

EARLY 3069: THE FOG OF WAR

As 3069 opened, war had finally claimed every Inner Sphere nation. Even the Clans experienced some of the chaos, as an enraged Clan Snow Raven fully invaded several worlds in the Draconis Combine. The Draconis March fell prey to the bloodlust as well, executing deep strikes on Benjamin and Galedon V.

Even as the Human Sphere devolved into savage warfare, bright spots began to emerge. The beginning of the new year saw Hohiro Kurita rescued from a Blakist internment camp. The first of many HPG stations was finally cleansed of Blakist interference, with the Orestes HPG transmitting "clean" data once more. The heroic actions of the crew of the LAS *Fylgia* during the disaster at Alarion gave those determined to fight the jihadists a potentially powerful weapon. Governments began reassembling some structure and focus, with the Lyran Alliance putting out the call to begin new exploration missions along the Periphery borders.

Yet these oases of normality failed to erase the other horrors being broadcast across known space. Several industries, after surviving the first eighteen months of brutal war, saw whole factories and complexes destroyed. Some of the better-known companies began putting out soft warnings of layoffs, financial hardship and longer transport times. These came along with darker, more worrisome reports of some worlds being quarantined or even full loss of communications beyond the White-Out, suggesting that somewhere, whole planets were dying.

Through it all, the Blakist agenda continued. More worlds fell to the Jihadists, especially in the Combine's Dieron Military District. To some, it seemed the End had truly come upon Humankind.

—Michael Bosworth, INN Special Correspondent

THE CHANCELLOR LIVES!

*****For Immediate Release, Top Priority*****

(1 January 3069)

Sian [CBS]—*We interrupt your program to bring you this special report*

CBS has just received confirmation from the Ministry of Information that our blessed leader, Sun-Tzu Liao, lives! Less than two weeks ago, our Divine Chancellor rose from his command bunker deep beneath the ruins of the Imperial Palace, rescued by the surviving members of his Blood Guard.

The Celestial Wisdom was trapped without power, and with very little food or water, yet emerged in astonishingly good health, and has—according to the report—made a complete recovery since his ordeal. The Celestial One officially resumed his divine duties today, and is working feverishly with *Sang-jiang-jun* Talon Zahn to rid our beloved nation of the Davionista barbarians.

CBS has also been informed of a new military campaign, dubbed "Operation Celestial Vengeance," named by our returning leader. Evidently devised personally by Chancellor Liao while trapped beneath the ruined palace, the counteroffensive, in Zahn's words, "shall purge our nation from Hasek's desire to destroy our people and their heritage."

The Chancellor released the following statement soon after his rescue:

"The path of fire down which I journeyed cleansed my soul. Out of the darkness I emerged…I experienced my own *Xin Sheng*. My life belongs to the Confederation and the Confederation is my life. We, the people of the Confederation, are one. Together, will shall rise up with steel resolve, and resist those who would enslave our beloved nation. Capellans, throw off your yoke of occupation. Make the enemy pay the ultimate price."

For this CBS special report, I am Kim Soon Li reporting. *Yóng yuǎn Liào Sūn Zǐ!*"

SWORDPLAY

FAITH AND HOPE

(Opening passage)

Oh Holy Father, let this journal be used in spreading the reaction of the good people of the Capellan capital to those who wish to know history.

(p. 25—22-12-3068)

Sian is abuzz today with news that we are starting to turn back Hasek's invasion. I have seen the population go from a collective state of depression to near euphoria. The will of the Capellan people is strong, there is no doubting that. And though the Word of Blake's attacks against the other Great Houses have so far left the Capellans alone, Hasek's recent invasion has brought the mood down. Strangely enough, people here are not asking why Hasek is invading. Rather, they ask why he is not fighting the Word of Blake on New Avalon.

(p. 49—26-12-3068)

Rumors of Sun-Tzu Liao surviving the bombardment of the Imperial Palace abounded almost immediately following the bombardment by Hasek's ship. As is the natural flow of such things, the rumors peaked and have dropped off. Surprisingly, though, a resurgence has occurred in the past day or two, with the source of the news being even more interesting: the clean-up crews. It seems the damage to the Palace was less extensive than people were led to believe.

(p. 93—1-1-3069)

Were I a gambling man, I would have placed money down that Sun-Tzu had survived the attack. After he appeared on Capellan Broadcasting today, I would have donated my winnings to the orphans' fund. The timing of the news was…well-planned. Morale

EARLY 3069: THE FOG OF WAR

was in freefall, and the propaganda machine needed something big to stop that. Hasek's invasion was troubling, true, but the loss of Sun-Tzu affected people all over the Confederation. His return will reinvigorate the entire population. Whether that new energy will be well-directed or wasted has yet to be seen.

—Excerpted diary entries of Father Antonio Leary, Sian Jesuit Ministry, Sian

HASEK'S INVASION UNRAVELS

(26 January 3068)

Denbar [CBS]—This is Robert Li reporting for KDBR, an affiliate of Capellan Broadcasting Services, with the latest military brief from Sian by *Sang-jiang-jun* Talon Zahn.

[*Cut to: Recorded press conference, Sian pressroom, dateline: 24 January. Zahn stands behind a green marble podium, flanked by Death Commandos.*]

"I have no time for questions; therefore, I will give you situation report and status on certain units and worlds.

"CCAF forces have stopped Hasek's invasion cold."

[*Applause erupts. Zahn smiles and waves for quiet.*]

"Hasek's Capellan March forces advanced as far as Hexare and Imalda with their central thrust, while their northern and southern advances faltered. They captured worlds from Ares to No Return, Aldertaine, Overton and Glasgow. The worlds of Carmen, Housekarle, Sendalor and Homestead were also lost.

"But on 8 October, we launched Operation Thunderstrike after months of preparations, while the First Death Commandos battalion was deployed to aid local forces on occupied worlds. Within weeks, the Remshield's Dragoons and House Imarra, together with additional Death Commando forces and select Home Guard units, liberated Hexare and Imalda, our first priority targets. CCAF units are working to liberate other worlds.

"In the St. Ives Commonality, both Janissaries commands, with divided loyalties, battled for their worlds. Elements of the Second Janissaries currently control Warlock. As a side note, the Blackwind Lancers returned home to defend the world of Ares.

"Sadly, I must report the destruction of House Ijori and the Fifteenth Dracon on Overton during the fighting there against the First Federated Suns Lancers RCT. Their heroic sacrifice was not in vain, however, as the Lancers withdrew after suffering tremendous casualties, while a few survivors from House Ijori managed to hold the field.

"As of this moment, the Davion advance in our realm has been halted. The people of the Confederation may rest assured that more victories such as we've seen on Hexare and Imalda will come soon.

"Thank you for coming; that's all I have."

CHANCELLOR TO WED!

(22 February 3069)

St. Ives [ISAP]—Mere weeks after his recovery from a devastating attack against the Celestial Throne, celebrations began today on many Capellan worlds in response to the announcement by Chancellor Sun-Tzu Liao of his intent to marry Naomi Centrella. Many have anticipated the engagement for a number of years now, and it will likely further strengthen the alliance between the Capellan Confederation and the Magistracy of Canopus.

This event, so shortly after the Chancellor's reappearance, and the announcement of the existence of his unknown heiress, Ilsa Centrella-Liao, has done much to further improve Capellan morale. Davion forces continue to suffer reversals in Capellan space, and previously pacified worlds have once again become enflamed against the invaders.

Most surprising is the impact of this news in the St. Ives region. Naomi Centrella has made herself quite popular among the people of St. Ives during the past couple of years, and many respect her for her troops' defense of Denbar. Approval of the engagement is very high.

CCAF DESTROYS DAVION INVADERS!

(28 January 3069)

Sian [XSFP]—Honored Citizens of the Capellan Confederation! Our valiant Janshi have regained control over the worlds of Homestead and Housekarle. On Homestead, Warrior House Lu Sann succeeded in destroying the hated Ninth Rangers of the Illician Lancers with assistance from the Third Confederation Reserve Cavalry. Meanwhile, the terrorists of the Jie Fang Legion finally met their end on New Westin at the hands of the Fifth Confederation Reserve Cavalry, supported by the valiant Death Commandos.

It is indeed a great day as our hated enemy continues to receive his just deserts for the atrocities committed against the Capellan people. These war criminals will soon be pushed out of Capellan space, and our St. Ives brothers can soon sleep free of danger. May our brave Capellan troops pursue the Davion pirates all the way back to their den on New Syrtis!

XIN SHENG! XIN SHENG! XIN SHENG!

LINE OF SUCCESSION SECURED!

(20 February 3069)

Sian [CNA]—Capellans everywhere rejoiced after our Celestial Wisdom announced today that the line of succession has been secured with the formal adoption of Ilsa Centrella-Liao! Coming so quickly after the glorious return of our beloved Chancellor, this news further buoys our spirit, and strengthens our resolve against our Davion enemy!

EARLY 3069: THE FOG OF WAR

STRIKING BACK!

(26 February 3069)

Frazer [CBS]—A mere two days after the Protectorate Guards landed, all resistance from the local militia ended. As the planetary leaders surrendered their world, Frazer reentered the Confederation to which it has always belonged. Two firefights saw most of the militia armor destroyed, and the planetary spaceport has been secured along with the local HPG.

The Strategios and the CCAF have drawn the attacking Feddie troops deep into the Sian Commonality, hopelessly extending their supply lines, all while gathering our own forces for an attack at the exposed belly of the Capellan March. These are only the first attacks of Operation Celestial Vengeance, a campaign to reclaim our rightful lands from the Davion aggressors.

Almost before the fighting ended here on Frazer, the Protectorate Guards prepared for departure, already planning their next attack while leaving a detachment of troops here to safeguard the planet until further garrison forces arrive. Engineering elements of the infantry troops are already at work repairing the light damage caused by the fighting and the wrecks of the burned-out vehicles. Even the dead soldiers are given proper treatment, to show that the Confederation respects the local population, working smoothly to ease the transition into the Capellan Confederation with the least amount of change and hostility.

For CBS, this is Frank Otto with the Protectorate Guards on Frazer.

GALAX ASSAULTED

(20 April 3069)

Galax [GALAX WORLDWIDE NEWS]—This is Malcolm Justman reporting for GWN aboard the Rescue DropShip *Marcus Garvey* at Lagrange Point Delta. Over the last four days the *Marcus* has recovered only a handful of survivors from the thousands employed at the Federated-Boeing facility. From their accounts has emerged a picture of a brutal assault that ripped through the Port Simon Shipyards.

Supported by at least two WarShips, a flotilla of Blakist assault DropShips spearheaded the attack. The hastily launched FSS *Intrepid*, Federated-Boeing security forces and squadrons from the Sixth Crucis Lancers Aerospace Brigade met the attack, but were overwhelmed by a numerically superior foe. Survivors report that the Blakists stripped the yards of any hull capable of moving under its own power, including the FSS *Melissa Davion*. Once the prizes were clear, the remaining structures were demolished by capital weapons fire. Federated-Boeing's corporate HQ—the famous Floating Tower—was destroyed along with the construction slips and manufacturing plants.

Meanwhile, a smaller Blakist force executed a high-speed attack on Galax itself. The Crucis Lancer aerospace forces intercepted the attackers as far out as possible, with recent reports of Blakist chemical weapons attacks still fresh in everyone's minds. The Lancers' defense was successful; only two crippled enemy fighters even reached the planet, burning up over the Megaplex ground installations.

But the victory is hollow. Though Galax lives, with the loss of the Port Simon yards, the Federated Suns has sustained a crippling blow to its ability to build and repair DropShips. Experts fear this will precipitate an economic crisis similar to—

[*"It is our charge to protect the flickering flame of the candle of knowledge. Like moths, the unbelievers who are drawn to the light shall be burned in its cleansing fire."*]

KATHIL ATTACKED!

[*Camera shakes with the sudden bright flash of heavy energy weapons discharging in its direction. Black 'Mechs move into view amid a smoky urban battle zone. Camera zooms in to spot the Death Commandos' skull insignia on the approaching 'Mechs.*]

[*Hayes, off-camera*]: "This is Inman Hayes, just outside the Yare Ground Station…" [*Weapons discharge*] "You're witnessing the destruction—" [*Massive explosion*] "—of the Kathil shipyards' microwave power station. Death Commando 'Mechs have systematically destroyed the site and its defenders…"

[*Camera rises momentarily to glimpse an aerospace fighter streaking past.*]

"…The militia tells us that the attacking force is comprised of the Second McCarron's, House Dai Da Chi and…" [*An intense blinding flash washes out the picture.*] "*…Holy shi*—! Control room, what the fuck was that?"

[*Technician, audio-only*]: "We're working on it…"

[*Producer, audio-only*]: "Inman, we had a live feed from the K-F Yare Shipyard. Listen... "

[*Female reporter, audio-only*]: "We are now under attack by Dai Da Chi ships. Their main target appears to be the *Simon Davion*…" [*klaxons blare*] "Hey, chief! What's going on?"

[*Chief, audio-only*]: "Capellan bastards just lunched a nuke at us."

[*Reporter, audio-only*]: "A n-nuke? What do we do?"

[*Chief, audio-only, faint*]: "Make peace with your maker, lady."

[*Reporter, sobbing*]: "…Sam, tell my wife and kids I lo—" [*Screeching sound. Static.*]

[*Filtered voice*]: "*Our Capellan allies have destroyed the heretics' WarShip. Give praise to Blake*!"

[*Hayes*]: "Shit, is this confirmed?"

[*Chief*]: "Too much interference, Inman, but we have confirmation that the Caps destroyed the militia."

[*Hayes*]: "God damn Hasek! Chuck, let's move! We've been seen!"

[*Chief, nervous*]: "Get out of there, son!"

[*Hayes*]: "We are, Sam! We—" [*Flash. Explosion. Screams. The image blanks.*]

—Live special news broadcast aired by KNN, Kathil, 15 May 3069

TRAVEL ADVISORY: GALAX

*****For Immediate Release*****
(9 June 3069)

Numenor [FSBS]—Beginning this week, the AFFS has placed a travel advisory in effect for the Galax system. No JumpShip is to enter or depart the system without clearance from the AFFS. So far no explanation has been given, simply a statement that travel restrictions will remain in place "for the duration of the local emergency".

Even Federated-Boeing vessels are being denied access to the Galax system, where HPG communications—intermittent since the Word of Blake attack in April—have now ceased.

FISTS AND FEATHERS

RESTORATION!
(16 January 3069)

Skye [FREE SKYE PRESS]—Despite weeks of speculation by critics [*"Truth seekers"*] that the ongoing Lyran defense [*"Skye aggression"*] has bogged down, reports are now coming in of successful counterattacks that have liberated several Lyran worlds. Contrary to League claims, LAAF forces have freed Alcor and Mizar. Officials from the Duke's Department of War have also confirmed that Mizar contained League slave camps and execution pits. Summer's brief capture by League forces ended earlier this week, where similar atrocities have also been found [*"manufactured"*].

ARCHON'S PLEA: NEVER YIELD!

"Fellow Lyrans,

"I come to you a bruised and battered leader, hiding among the ruins of our once proud capital. Mere hours ago many of my bodyguards sacrificed their lives to keep me safe from capture, while under the guns of our once great icon, the LCS *Invincible*.

"But no matter how desperate it seems here, we fight on. This is my example, my lesson to the rest of the Alliance. The lesson of perseverance.

"During the torturous Succession Wars, we persevered. When the Clans invaded and claimed world after world, we persevered. When brother turned against brother mere years ago in the civil war, we persevered. And with the help of our Lyran heroes such as Adam Steiner, Morgan Kell and Duke Kelswa-Steiner, we will persevere once again.

"Resist with all your might, as we do. Fight the Word of Blake with no reserve, no surrender and no remorse, as we have. They will not stop short of our destruction, so neither should we with theirs.

"My people, through these dark days, the Alliance *will* persevere!"

—Message from Archon Peter Steiner to the Lyran Alliance, sent during the attempted breakthrough of the Blakist blockade of Tharkad, 18 March 3069

THE FOG OF WAR

Evidence was also released [*"manufactured"*] today by the War Department that revealed similar atrocities [*"Mannequins and tattered remains of League defenders!"*] on Syrma and Zebebelgenubi. One "execution pit" [*"bloated propagandist hype"*] on Syrma, outside the logging town of New Delphus, contained more than 350 [*"so-called"*] victims—many of whom showed signs of torture [*"combat"*] prior to death. As more worlds are reclaimed from the League, more of these "death camps" are being discovered [*"Manufactured and sold to the cattle citizenry!"*].

Duke Steiner commented briefly on the discoveries before [*"Acting!"*] breaking down. "This only shows that our decision to go to war to protect our borders was the right one to take [*"For his own power-mad ambitions."*]. Those warmongers in the so-called 'Free Worlds' League attempted to scour Skye, much the same way their Blakist allies scoured [*"attempted to free"*] Tharkad.

"We didn't start this war, but by God, we'll finish it. I promise you this: Skye will do what is necessary to safeguard her citizenry from such horrors [*"Including lies, deceit, and treachery. In other words, continue to be Lyran!"*]. Vengeance will be ours [*"As it suits his purposes."*]."

FALLEN IDOLS

"This is Bob Deal, and welcome to another edition of *Battlefield Justice*, where warriors convicted of treason are given a second chance for a pardon by defeating their foes. Only the Word of Blake would be so forgiving and you are the ultimate winner as we see some great fights. We're high on the Raven's Nest in the Cathay Arena to give you an unfettered view of the action. Today Steve McCormick of the so-called Solaris Defense League will pilot a donated *Valkyrie* against an *Axman*, a *Crusader* and a *Wasp*.

"McCormick jumps and fires at the *Wasp*, trying to take down the weakest opponent first, but the *Wasp* also jumps and sends out a volley of missiles that hit the *Valk*, as the *Crusader*'s missiles on either side prevent him from altering his trajectory. One change you may have noticed to the arena is that the trees have been trimmed to only a few meters in height, allowing for unprecedented coverage of battles here—as well as more action!

"Shrugging off the missile attack, McCormick is pummeled by SRMs from the closing *Crusader*, but he returns fire with his lasers and pivots closer to the larger machine to keep it between him and the *Axman*'s big cannon.

"Oh my! The *Crusader* drops to the ground as the *Wasp* fires from behind and the *Axman* lets go with the cannon. Just as he fires, the *Valkyrie*'s leg disintegrates and the 'Mech twists toward us as the *Wasp* shreds it from behin—

"Christ! Missiles incoming! Get back! *Mommy*—"

—Unaired audio telecast of a Blakist-sponsored arena duel, dated 11 February 3069 (smuggled off-world by Solaris resistance)

EARLY 3069: THE FOG OF WAR

OUR ACHILLES HEEL?

Efforts last week by General of the Armies Adam Steiner to rescue Archon Peter Steiner-Davion are commendable, and the sacrifices of the men and women who executed his orders must never be forgotten. One can call the assault many things: Daring, for its intent to break the blockade without WarShip support. Inspiring, for its ability to penetrate the Word of Blake's blockade. Useful, for its ability to extract a morale-boosting message from the Archon before being turned back by the *Invincible*. But one word cannot be used: Successful. The Archon remains beyond the reach of his people.

The power to deny is the power to control, and it follows that with Word of Blake's continued ability to deny our leader any access to his nation basically places Archon Peter Steiner-Davion under their de facto control.

We cannot let this continue. If we cannot break the blockade of Tharkad—and, indeed, without either the *Yggdrasil* or the *Fylgia*, we cannot—we must rescue our head of state through other means. We must install a new one. We cannot let the Blakists continue to have this level of control over our nation!

—Syndicated commentary by "Big Brother," Brotherhood Publications, 24 March 3069

AVENGERS FALL BACK

(2 April 3069)

Arc-Royal [DBC]—As before, the Jade Falcons waited like vultures, until they perceived that the fighting on other fronts had weakened us enough. Then they attacked.

Facing a repeat of the Clans' predatory tactics, the LAAF responded in kind, recalling the Thorin FTM from Gibbs—where its aborted September 3067 demobilization began—and dispatching them along with the Knights of St. Cameron to punch through the Falcon Occupation Zone at Baker 3. With their lines of communication threatened, the Falcons would be forced to shift troops from other fronts.

However, Khan Pryde apparently learned her lessons well. Expecting to face the Tenth Provisional Garrison Cluster, the Avengers instead ran into the Seventh and Eighth Talons—both front-line units with experience battling Inner Sphere forces. The Thorin FTM (also known as Archer's Avengers) bore the brunt of the Clan attack on the LZ, squeezing in between the two Clusters like a vise.

When it appeared the Avengers would be overwhelmed, the Knights of St. Cameron struck at the Seventh Talon's rear, hardly slowing as they annihilated the Clansmen who had so cavalierly dismissed them as a threat. When the Knights then hit the Eighth Talon's flank, the assault distracted the Falcons enough for the remnants of the Thorin Militia to make a run for their DropShips, their retreat covered by the mercenaries.

No official casualty figures have yet been released, but rumors suggest that more than fifty percent of the Thorin FTM fell in the battle, and that Avengers commander General Archer Christifori is himself among the missing.

DESPERATE GETAWAY

(13 April 3069)

Alarion [ANN]—With the destruction of the First Alarion Jaegers today outside the nuclear ruins of Craiova, Alarion's last defenses have been destroyed. The Word of Blake still has not sent any ground forces down to the surface, but as a new plague continues to decimate the population centers of New Jordan, it has become clear that they are avoiding their own bioweapon. Little is known of this weapon, save that it is apparently bonding to many of the native and imported lifeforms here, but is only lethal to humans. The planetary government has ordered all civilians who have yet to show signs of the epidemic to seek shelter in designated quarantine areas.

I have little hope to offer. Almost all the news is horrible. The Bowie Industriplex is as much a radioactive memory as Craiova, and orbital bombardment destroyed the Alarion Naval Academy. Port Sydney is no more. Despite the valiant actions of the Sydney Defense Squadrons and the Alarion Jaegers' First Air Wing, Word of Blake WarShips destroyed the yards yesterday—after pillaging as many vessels as they could, including the still-damaged LAS *Robert Kelswa*.

The WarShips, including a *Dante*-class destroyer believed to be the *Montpelier*, are believed to be responsible for deploying the nuclear weapons that have already claimed the lives of many millions, including planetary Duke Anatoly Serfass. But simply laying this world waste was apparently not enough. The Word intends to exterminate our planet, make it perpetually uninhabitable. I do not know why. I relay these facts so that they may be of use to those who will stand against the Word of Blake and make them pay for their crimes.

Only one ray of sunshine exists amid this horror. Under the command of Admiral Helena Danvers, we know that the LAS *Fylgia* managed to escape extermination and capture at Blakist hands. Blasting clear from her moorings hours after the Blakist ships emerged from the Tiber-Alarion LaGrange point, the *Fylgia* slipped away from her pursuers, denying the Blakists the most valuable prize we had. During the fighting, the *Fylgia* did not fire her naval autocannon, or any missiles, suggesting she has not yet been fully equipped. The Word of Blake surely knows this, so I say this for the benefit of any who might hear me: the *Fylgia* will be a powerful weapon against the Blakists. Use her well, for she may truly be Alarion's final legacy to humanity.

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BRETT PULLS BACK

(20 April 3069—System Error 0404—Backup Transmitted 17 May 3069)

Marik [MARIK COMMONWEALTH TODAY]—In a move widely anticipated since the Blakist assault on the Free Worlds, FWLM troops in the Lyran Alliance have today begun a staged withdrawal from their occupied territories. A number of worlds have been completely abandoned, though in all cases the withdrawal took place in good order. On only one world did the League military see any fighting with Lyran troops.

"These redeployments aid our strategic goals," said a spokesman for Marshall Brett, "freeing up troops from garrison duty to allow us to meet more pressing threats." The spokesman did not elaborate on the nature of these threats, but they are likely to include the Word of Blake, whose mix of military action and diplomacy has allowed them to carve a swathe through the Free Worlds. The destination of the withdrawn troops is likewise unknown, but some are expected to move to the capital, replacing those slain in the Blake Militia strike last autumn. Domestic conflict within the Free Worlds is also a growing problem, even without Blakist involvement, and some of the troops may be bound for peacekeeping operations.

Fighting continues along the Free Worlds-Alliance front, but these redeployments suggest the FWLM, or at least Brett's battle group, is shifting to a defensive stance. Whether such a move will placate the Steiners or encourage them to further military action remains unclear. Diplomatic relations between the League and the Alliance remain precarious, but Brett's move may provide the groundwork for an armistice along the Steiner-Marik border.

ALARION OFFLINE!

(29 May 3069)

Arc-Royal [ISAP]—LAAF analysts voiced concern today over the status of the Alarion HPG network. Having suffered a crippling attack against the orbital shipyards less than two months ago—where the LAS *Fylgia* made a daring dry-dock escape—the provincial capital has lagged farther and farther behind in standard communication schedules, alarming many officials in the public and private sectors.

Possible causes for this blackout stem from the devastating surface attacks during the Word of Blake strikes that destroyed the Alarion shipyards, including unconfirmed and widespread use of nuclear and biological weapons. Coupled with classified reports from some of the military traffic that recently passed through the system, the situation has many government officials worried.

In related news, the Alarion Provincial Travel Panel—provisionally headquartered on Buena—has issued a general advisory for all free merchants to steer clear of the Alarion system while the appropriate government agencies investigate further. Any unauthorized vessels entering the Alarion system will be subject to the appropriate fines and penalties as detailed under the Alliance Transportation Code of Conduct Act.

EXPLORERS WANTED

"Lyran Alliance Seeks Explorers to Investigate Void Between Known and Inhabited Worlds."

Now isn't that a bit out of character, folks? It strikes this reporter as odd that during the present hostility toward mercenaries in the ongoing battles with Blakist forces, General Adam Steiner is calling for explorers willing to investigate dangerous voids—and he's opened this call to mercenary units.

You have to wonder about the significance of this call, so close on the heels of Steiner's failed attempt against the Tharkad blockade. In the past year, many of our brothers and sisters have been retreating to the unexplored voids, such as the Deep Periphery, just to escape persecution. And many have not come back.

My advice: Answer this call at your own risk, but ask for high compensation if you do.

There can only be two reasons for the Lyran leaders to risk lives and the swiftly diminishing contents of their wallets on "explorers" in the deep. Either they suspect some WoB bases are floating around out there and they'd rather risk merc necks to root them out, or—and this seems the most improbable—General Steiner is desperate enough about the state of his defense to look for missing ships like the *Fylgia*. I mean, hey, the Blakies found the *Invincible*, right? How hard can it be?

You make the call, ladies and gents. Is it worth it? This reporter thinks not.

—Libardo Bertolino, *MercWarrior VidZine*, MercNet Broadcasting, 5 May 3069

CRUMBLING LINES

To: Kmd-Gen. Tabitha Bjorn (Cmdr. LIC Propaganda Branch)
From: Kommandant Scott Parker (Norns Data Analyst)
Re: Troop Performance Review (July 3068 to June 3069)

General,

Per your request, I have appended the completed troop performance review. However, I can also give you a summary here. While our forces have achieved a few victories on the FWL front, the picture elsewhere is less encouraging.

With the Great Refusal and the success of operations during the FedCom Civil War against the Jade Falcons, the general impression was that we had taken our measure of the Clans and could now face them on something approaching an even footing. However, combat reports following the Falcons' renewed aggression show that our troops are not performing as they have in the past.

Unfortunately, the LAAF is facing a crisis in morale that is having a detrimental impact on efficiency. The troops on the front

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lines are receiving daily news of Blakist predations. We are asking them to defend the Alliance, yet the Alliance appears powerless to defend their homes. Worse, the infrastructure upon which the LAAF depends is teetering on the brink. Even commands in critical positions are starting to suffer supply problems.

I am at a loss as to how we can put a positive spin on our current situation. Frankly, we need a miracle.

Scott

—LIC Military Analysis Report, dated 30 June 3069 (leaked to INN via undisclosed sources, 16 August 3070)

DRAGON RECLAIMED!

*****For Immediate Release to All Outlets*****

(20 January 3069)

[VotD]—Rejoice, people of the Combine, for our victory [*"downfall"*] begins this day! The Dragon's son, the [*"broken"*] Pillar of the Dragon, Hohiro Kurita, has escaped the clutches [*"embrace"*] of the [*"Blessed"*] Blakists! As he did on Teniente, as he has done on Edo, the Dragon's heir once again defies the Yellow Bird and takes his place [*"as a broken figurehead"*] at the forefront of our liberation [*"Backward slide into chaos."*]!

Early on the morning of January 4, an elite [*"lucky"*] DEST squad penetrated the Word of Blake compound [*"rejuvenation center"*] that held [*"as an honored guest"*] the honorable Hohiro. Utilizing the [*"traitorous"*] help of a few surviving members of the Black Watch that had been captured [*"sequestered"*] there, Lord Kurita defied [*"foolishly rejected"*] his Blakist overseers [*"guardians"*] and escaped their prison [*"shelter"*]. Though wounded [*"By your own troops as he left them behind!"*], he is on his way to New Samarkand to rejoin the Coordinator and the Kanrei to formulate the Blakists' demise [*"Vacuous statements from a vegetable and a traitor."*].

To honor Hohiro's return, the Coordinator has declared that the first of February shall be known as the Day of Dawning [*"For our Knowledge is your Salvation!"*]. All businesses may take the holiday off, and all cities are encouraged to celebrate the return of the Dragon's heir. The Dragon has shown itself to be immortal and nothing can stand against its might, not even the Word of Blake. [*"If you buy into this vapid, self-serving neo-ancestry hoopla, you need our assistance in elevating you to a higher standard of thinking. Your day of decision is coming, Dragon. Choose wisely or choose death. Either way, we will accommodate you!"*]

THE DRAGON BESIEGED

GHOSTS OF THE BLACK WATCH

(3 January 3069)

Dieron [DIERON UNDERGROUND PRESS]—People of Dieron, take heart! The despised invaders claimed they were dead, but the warriors of the Black Watch have survived! Even now they are fighting beside the brave citizens who have taken up arms against our enemy.

Even with their ranks sorely depleted and their comrades in the Eridani Light Horse annihilated, these "Ghosts of the Black Watch" have vowed to continue the fight alongside the heroic DCMS warriors who battle the invaders. Time and again the Word of Blake and their money-warriors have felt the lash of their fury. With the aid of volunteers and the heroic DCMS, the Ghosts have struck at Blakist patrols, supply depots and detention camps.

In the most daring operation yet, the Ghosts overran the Yomichi Valley "re-education center". Overwhelming the Blakist "warders," the Black Watch helped free hundreds of prisoners—including many Third Dieron Regulars captured when their regiment was destroyed in the first lightning attack last year.

The Ghosts' activities have become too much for the invaders to ignore—substantial rewards are being offered for information on their location, as well as that of freed prisoners.

ENTER THE WORD

(21 February 3069)

Benjamin [ISAP]—For the past three months, troops hailing from the Federated Suns have attempted to gain total control over Benjamin. Despite the efforts of the Sixth Ghost Regiment, which landed here only a few weeks ago, the Davion forces were succeeding. All this changed yesterday, when orbital bombardments launched by Word of Blake vessels inflicted massive destruction on all military forces, Davion and Kurita. The bombardments have since ceased, and the WarShips appear to have withdrawn, but their brief visit caused substantial damage to the civilian infrastructure.

Of particular note was the sacrifice of *Sho-sa* McKinnon, who left Abraham City with the remainder of his force, hailing the Blakists and daring them to destroy his unit in the open, away from the city the enemy had begun to systematically annihilate. Such selfless bravery in the face of inhuman atrocity must be commended and remembered.

With the Blakists seemingly gone for now, the remainder of the Davion and Kurita forces have called a truce, apparently dividing the world into zones under their respective control, along with demilitarized areas where both sides have promised not to tread. Peace has finally come to Benjamin, but at a terrible cost.

MORE WORLDS FREE FROM KURITA TYRANNY!

(21 March 3069)

Terra [VOICE OF TRUTH]—As of last week, the freedom-loving peoples of Al Na'ir, Imbros III and Saffel have been liberated. The former Terran Hegemony worlds welcomed the arrival of Word of Blake Militia task forces on Al Na'ir and Saffel. On Imbros III, the mercenary command Mobile Fire was charged with removing Minamoto's dictatorial heel from the necks of those who have suffered under Combine tyranny for so long.

Al Na'ir proved an uncompromising battleground for the brave warriors of our Third Division. Fragmented groups of Combine supporters continued to hold out in scattered habitats and mines. Bloody Skies III-Mu and Force of Thought III-Delta waged a campaign that quickly devolved into a cave-by-cave and room-by-room advance.

In comparison, the drive to liberate Saffel went quickly and bloodlessly. Unlike Al Na'ir, the pro-Combine factions chose not to use the local population as living shields, allowing the valiant warriors of Blake to eliminate them with minimal collateral damage.

Other former Hegemony worlds can expect to be liberated from centuries of Combine tyranny in the coming months.

CRY OF THE RAVEN

[Sho-sa *Ischach Mulvaney*]: "*Tai-sa* Ourho, my battalion is in position."

[Tai-sa *Tomi Ourho*]: "*Domo*. Remember, *Sho-sa*, strike at them once, then withdraw. We are closing on your position, but may not arrive in time to support you. It will be difficult for you to serve the Dragon while dead."

[*Mulvaney*]: "Understood, *Tai-sa*. Forgive me, but I thought the Snow Ravens were a weak Clan, whose prowess paled in comparison to the Smoke Jaguar or Ghost Bear Clans? Why all this caution?"

[*Ourho*]: "Pale though they may be, weak they are not. Even the weakest of their warriors can match skills with our veterans. And these are likely some of the most skilled warriors that Clan fields. But they have not yet learned what it is to fight us. We will teach them at their expense."

[Sho-sa *Connie Chang*]: "*Tai-sa*, they have adapted to our tactics. I anticipate we will lose the air to them soon."

[*Ourho*]: "Understood. Sell yourselves dearly. *Sho-sa* Mulvaney, our scouts indicate their first Star will be upon you soon."

[*Mulvaney*]: "*Hai*! They have just crested the ridge! Two *Koshi*, one *Uller*, one *Puma* and a design I do not recognize. No Elementals. They are closing on our position fast. Second Company has engaged them! The *Puma* has fallen! All troops, withdraw! To your APCs!"

[*Static for a few moments*]

[*Ourho*]: "Status report!"

[*Mulvaney*]: "Commander, they are equipped for anti-infantry duty! They have engaged and destroyed most of the APCs, and are proceeding to destroy the battalion! We need support *now*!"

[*Ourho*]: "Stand your ground. We will be there in five minutes."

[*Mulvaney*]: "We will *not*! They have already decimated Second Company, and First and Third have taken heavy casualties! *Iie*! *Air strike*! Take cover! *Take cov—*" [*Transmission lost at source*]

[*Ourho*]: "*Sho-sa*, report! Mulvaney!" [*Pause*] "Ourho to Eleventh Ghost, the militia are no more. Form up to engage their screening force. *Chu-i* Rucker, bring your *Jenner*s to the front. The Omnis are in anti-in-

COUNCIL OF GEMS

[*Obsidian*]: "What is our status regarding Luthien?"
[*Pearl*]: "Not good. The LAW facilities are total losses."
[*Sapphire*]: "*Iie*!"
[*Pearl*]: "*Hai*. Every last megaplex has been destroyed, thanks to the Blakists' indiscriminate use of tac nukes."
[*Ruby*]: "Unfortunate. Solvency?"
[*Sapphire*]: "I have a few ideas. We should talk privately."
[*Pearl*]: "*Hai*."
[*Obsidian*]: "Diamond, you are quiet this day. What is in the box you brought?"
[*Sound of snaps*]
[*Diamond*]: "Gentlemen, Emerald is no longer a problem."
[*Silence*]
[*Jade*]: "As it should be."
[*Diamond*]: "*Hai*. Now. What is the word of our other *ronin*, our mole in lofty places?"
[*Ruby*]: "She has gone to ground. She knows we are not pleased with her and her lover's actions."
[*Pearl*]: "Damnable bitch. If she had just remembered her place…or he his, we would not have this problem."
[*Obsidian*]: "What's done is done. She has done us a service, after all, since the Pillar's attention is directed at them and not at us."
[*Diamond*]: "She *is* us, however."
[*Ruby*]: "*Iie*. A shadow, nothing more. Though they may find her—and our recent placement of Jerrar into the position will guarantee that—they will not find us. After all, it is why we selected her."
[*Sapphire*]: "I'm not comfortable with him there. He's too new. He could slip up, make a mistake. And that may well damn us all this time."
[*Ruby*]: "I trust my judgment. And Jade's. His record is spotless, which elevates him in the Coordinator's camp."
[*Jade*]: "His part is more of the knife pointed at our protégé. To remind him of our presence. We still hold the power over him. His daughter, for one."
[*Diamond*]: "As long as the Order does not know, we are safe. If they ever link the bitch and him together…."
[*Ruby*]: "That connection is long dead and buried. And when she is gone, the last link to him and us is done. We have nothing to fear now except—"
[*Obsidian*]: "From what I've seen, *that* isn't something we need to worry about. The Blakists at least did something right there…."

—Recording made on Pesht, attributed to unknown parties (date unknown, circa March-April 3069), supplied to INN via ISAP sources

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fantry configurations, so they should be light on anti-'Mech weaponry. Second Company will support, but you will pin them down."

[Chu-i *Rucker*]: "*Hai*, *Tai-sa*…."

—Intercepted communications from Valentina, 11 March 3069, relayed to ISAP via undisclosed sources

VICTORY, AT COST

To: *Gunji-no-Kanrei* Minamoto
CC: Hohiro Kurita
>>File 280469ISFI-*TS*decrypt complete<<
>>file attached: //TSAAISF#SXRT3-Cabra Dulce//<<

Honored *Kanrei*:

We have received an update from our agents on Galedon V via JumpShip courier, which explains why it has taken so long to hear of the status of our counterattack in the system. Apparently, during one of the final stands made by the AFFS troops, the Suns forces blew up the HPG station in an attempt to distract us from their withdrawal. Fortunately, *Chu-sa* Huchinag saw fit to prepare a detailed report for us and sent it through standard ISF channels, as is his duty.

In short, we have successfully thrown the invading March forces off Galedon V. No damage has been done to the shipyards, though the fighting ravaged several cities. The Suns troops have made several defensive stands in the cities ringing the DropPort, using our citizenry as shields.

However, what I'm most interested in bringing to your attention isn't the status of the counterattack. That you can receive via standard DCMS communications. What caught my attention isn't something an ordinary officer or even a Warlord would pick up. It appears in the last portion of *Chu-sa* Huchinag's report—I have highlighted it for your attention. It seems a particularly fierce battle occurred in the Outermark Hills. That reference is important because, as you are now aware, an extensive old graveyard site is located there. Specifically, the *Cabra Dulce Memorial Site*.

The location of Bunker SX-RT3.

Chu-sa Huchinag reported that he was "concerned about the momentum of the offensive, because the DCMS is down two whole companies of troops from a mysterious, fast-spreading flu outbreak."

Kanrei, Lord Kurita. I fear that the fighting with the Davions has unleashed a far deadlier curse than what the Blakists are doing elsewhere.

Permission to formulate options is hereby requested.

Your servant,

Director Shakir Jerrar

—Intercepted ISF communiqué (authenticity unconfirmed) dated 28 April 3069, as reported on Oshika pirate interwebsite "DragonWatch"

BLAKE'S HAND AT GALEDON?

Hey, anybody going to Galedon V, I hope you got your shots first. It was already a nasty place to visit, but it sounds like the whole planet went from bad to worse. Seems the place got hit by a virus, and not the electronic kind, either. Reports of the locals' condition have not been forthcoming. But what would you expect from the DCMS and the Dragon? These guys are tighter with their information than a Capellan moneylender with his purse. But I've managed to piece together some info.

First off, we can rule out the esoteric bugs. It's not Ebola or *yersinia pestis*. Those are just too nasty for their own good. Nice for local dispersal, but for widespread use, they're *too* efficient. No chemical attack, either. UrbStryc-A, sarin gas and all their cousins require too much for a planet-wide attack. And it's definitely not something like Chungalomeningitis. *That* little bug just causes weight gain, loss of hair and a severe bend toward Libertarianism.

No, I'll put money down that somebody tailored this bug from something already in Galedon's biosphere. And judging from the amount of electrolytic base being imported, I'd have to say it's an influenza strain.

The real question is, why would the Word of Blake do this? Call me goofy, but I believe the Word was sincere when they said they were just trying to return order to Luthien. But that's one for another day. In this case, I have to wonder about their motives. Has the Word given up on positive relations with the Combine? Have they decided to wipe that branch of humanity off the map as well?

Can they handle another front in their war?

—Renegade Freedom InterWeb posting by "Starling", 1 June 3069

BARGAINED AND DONE

FALLING STARS

(19 January 3069)

Black Earth [INN]—Everyone has seen the trids of the big space battles; massive ships passing by one another, close enough to make out gun ports and portholes. But in reality, space is big, ships are pinpoints of light, and the flash of explosions makes fireflies look like blimps. Most space combat is seen and recorded by radar and tactical computers. But for every maxim there is an exception. For this reporter, the death of the *Kerensky's Blues* was one such exception.

On the edge of oblivion, I was among hundreds to witness the fury of the Jade Falcons as they descended on Black Earth. The Blue Star Irregulars fought well, but could not halt the onslaught. They sounded a retreat, surrendering the world to the Falcons, hoping to

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[Blizzard]: "Roger that, Control. *Sir Guthrie* is now locked and we are preparing for supply transfer."
[*Ramora Control*]: "*Terror*, your supply ship has arrived and is on station. Prepare for docking maneuvers."
[White Terror]: "Acknowledged, Control. We are ready and waiting."
[*Control*]: "*Spur*, your supply ship has been delayed. New transport inbound three point five hours."
[Spur]: "Understood. We shall watch herd over these other merchant vessels then, *quiaff*?"
[*Control*]: "*Aff*. Though I doubt we will see anything unusual this far inside the Alliance."
[James McKenna]: "*Oswald*, we are having trouble opening your cargo doors. Can you confirm if there is a system problem on your end?"
[Oswald]: "Roger, *James*. We're manually overriding the doors now..."
[*Control*]: "*Madagascar*, why are you killing velocity? Continue on vector to the *Terror*. We have a tight schedule to keep; this Star is to be back on duty in less than twenty-three hours."
[Madagascar]: "*Dragon's ire kindled. Raven's time of reckoning. Fire and flame to hell.*"
[Terror]: "What the—? That *Mule* is opening her cargo bay doors…"
[*Control*]: "*Madagascar*! What is the meaning of this?"
[Spur]: "…Multiple target locks! We are being actively targeted by multiple missile launchers! From that *Mule*!…"
[*Control*]: "…Raven's Wing Star launching…ETA two point four minutes. Missile launch! Missile launch!..."
[James]: "…Kerensky's blood! We have massive explosion from the *Oswald*, it just vented into ou—" [*Staggered static. Squeal. White noise.*]
[Terror]: "…reading heavy radiation and EMP waves from the *James*...massive heat spike—"
[Blizzard]: "…*Sir Guthrie*, detach imm—" [*High-pitched squeal. Popping static. Whine. Silence.*]
[Spur]: "…multiple hits, decks three and five are venting to space… "
[Terror]: "…all bays, target that *Mule*! Blow it to atoms!..."
[*Control*]: "…*Blizzard*, please respond! By McKenna's mane! She just blew in half from a massive internal firestorm! It is the supply ships! They are sabotaged! Attention Raven vessels! Destroy all merchant ships, they are all sabotaged!..."
[Dakota Railroad]: "…Now wait a damn minute, Control…Evasive action! Damn you to hell, Snot Birds!..."
[Terror]: "…the hell?! No! Security to Collar Two! Subdue the *Bucolic*! They are going t—" [*Explosion. Shattering sound.*]
[Napoleon]: "…no, I swear! We're not traitors! Spare us pl—" [Explosion. Static.]
[Spur]: "…forward laser batteries, hit that *Mule* again! It cannot be that armored! Broadside batteries, clear the area of all merchant vessels, I will NOT have another *stravag* sneak attack…"
[*Control*]: "…*Spur*! *Madagascar* is accelerating on a collision vector! Move, dammit, move!..."
[Spur]: "…heading five-five-nine! Full thrust! Break that damn yoke if you have to, I will *not* have this ship destroyed by a damn Miraborging Spheroid!..."
[*Control*]: "…Raven's Wing, fire everything you have now! Divert that *Mule*!..."
[*Wing One*]: "…too late, Control! They are not going to….*Spur* has been hit! Repeat, *Spur* has been hit! That *Mule* just accelerated and rammed…."
[*Control*]: "…Wing One, what the hell is going on…?"
[*Wing One*]: [*Silent pause*] "*James McKenna* destroyed. Her spine is broken. *Blizzard's* IFF is dark, I am reading heavy radiation in an expanding cloud—by the Founder, most of that *Cameron* is just gone. *Spur* is on vector three-two-six; her bridge and front is a giant charred hole. *White Terror* is just—there is nothing but heavy radiation and a gaping hole right through her primary drive, I am scanning no power… I am reading several lifeboats near the *Spur*, only a few by the *James*. How the—what the—who would dare do this?"
[*Control*]: [*Pause*] "The Combine. They did it with the *White Cloud*. They do it again because we have raided their worlds. Eye for an eye…
By Kerensky, they will pay."
—Intercepted comm traffic over Ramora, Outworlds Alliance, 5 January 3069, relayed to INN via ISAP

"Alliance Reclaims Summer, Mizar!" [FSP] COMPLETED

(23 January 3069)
"Falcons Retake Blackjack, Roadside" [ARNN] DOWNLOADING

(8 February 3069)
"War for Benjamin Heats Up" [ISAP] ACCESSING

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give them this victory so the battle-worn mercenaries could fight another day. We rode to the jump point aboard the *Loyal Son*, an *Overlord*-class DropShip, under the escort of the *Kerensky's Blues*, the Stars' own captured Clan *Fredasa*-class corvette.

A small fleet of JumpShips and DropShips—Irregulars and civilian—was assembled at the nadir jump point, waiting for the final dockings to make their outbound leap.

Then the Falcons struck.

A *Congress* and a *Vincent Mark 42*, the names of which I did not know (though we were probably close enough to see them at one point), made a rare and dangerous in-system jump to cut us off. The *Blues* cut us loose, and valiantly interposed herself between the Falcons and the retreating DropShips.

Missiles and lasers flashed between both sides as the *Blues* burned forward, bearing on the *Vincent*. In a burst of autocannon fire, the *Vincent* faltered even as debris trailed from our champions' *Fredasa* like the guts from some high-tech piñata. The *Congress* ignored these combatants and came through swarms of fighters like a giant among gnats to shatter DropShips and JumpShips alike with her massive guns. Even under fire, we managed to dock with our JumpShip, just in time to see the *Congress* turn our way. She looked as big as my fist in the portholes…

But then the *Blues* came charging forward, maimed, guns blazing, risking her life to force the more massive *Congress* to veer off and deal with a greater danger. As we made the transition to K-F space, it struck us all that only we aboard the *Loyal Son* remained of the Irregulars' departing task force, aboard the only JumpShip the Falcons had yet to strike. We never saw the *Blues* or any other JumpShip emerge with us over Blue Hole.

But as long as we live, none of use will ever forget the brave souls who traded their lives for our own.

THE CAT STIRS

From: Sub-director Matsuke Dieron
To: *Gunji-no-Kanrei* Minamoto
Re: Clan Nova Cat

My Lord,

I hope New Samarkand treats you well.

Alas, it is my duty to report the following:

The Nova Cat Clan continues to deny your orders to redeploy their forces to meet the insurgents and the Blakists. They will only commit to "defending the integrity of the Combine-Dominion border", as Khan West had indicated to you before.

But the recent debut of the *Ocelot* BattleMech, and rumors of additional new designs in the making, proves that the Nova Cats are far from dormant. It seems they are simply unwilling to pick sides in the disturbance. But it could also be that without the Star League, they no longer feel restricted. It is entirely possible that they are using our current troubles to build up, intending to strike at us when they perceive we are weak enough.

WOLVES ON THE MOVE

General Report #8A-T3
To: General Reinhart Vossler, MID
CC: Kmd-General Johann Strauss, LIC
16 May 3069

Sir:

The following intel report came from the LIC office on 5 Apr 3069. We must have missed it with all the craziness on the border with the Falcons, not to mention all the HPG problems. Not much is in the report, but I thought you should have it anyway for informational purposes.

Hauptmann Newman Kristoff

******8A-T3 Intel Update-LIC******
5 Apr 69

According to latest analysis and on-site field agents, Clan Wolf has begun moving forces into Falcon-held space, with lightning strikes on Cusset and Biota. Both worlds fell with minimal losses to the Wolves, with Falcon resources taking severe damage. Recommend continued surveillance at this time, as Wolf intentions are unknown regarding occupation. Please advise.

Agent 93

—Excerpt from LAAF military intel briefings (declassified 11 December 3070)

If this is true, it may be critical that we strike the first blow. While a war with Clan Nova Cat would likely unite our people, and while the Nova Cats have suffered in recent conflicts, they can do substantial damage to our military and infrastructure if we allow them to strike us at a time and place of their choosing.

Naturally, efforts are underway to ascertain the Cats' true intentions and the reason for their military buildup. They *could* be benign, but until we know for certain, would it be wise to err on the side of caution, and begin to mobilize for operations against the Nova Cats?

—Intercepted ISF intel briefing (veracity unconfirmed), dated 3 April 3069, posted to Xinyang Interweb forum by "TheKatsKatana"

THE RAVEN'S FLIGHT

[*Khan McKenna*]: "Our current status here prevents a full presence to carry out vengeance."

[*Galaxy Commander Arianne D'Amone*]: "Beta Galaxy still stands ready to deliver our judgment [*"Holy cleansing"*]."

[*saKhan Broderick Sukhanov*]: "Eager for the bloodletting, are we, Arianne?"

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[*D'Amone*]: "With all respect, saKhan, you did not see the inside of the *James McKenna*. You did not float among the bodies of our brothers and sisters, poisoned by massive radiation. You did not watch as four—*four*—of our [*"inferior"*] WarShips were gathered together like so much junk in an Ironhold training pit!

"If you *had* been there, jettisoning our Clansmen into the sun because we could not keep such radioactive material near our salvage teams, you would understand the depths to which I am willing to go to assuage our stained honor."

[*Star Admiral Lydia Sukhanov*]: "Agreed. Only with the blood of the Combine can we even begin to repay such treachery. The last enemy who dared attack us with nuclear weapons was eliminated from existence."

[*McKenna*]: "It is decided, then. By the will of our own [*"heretic"*] Founders, we must act. Now. Decisively. To prove to these Spheroid barbarians that the [*"corrupted"*] Raven will brook no cowardice, no treachery. The previous Invading Clans may have waved their hands at such temerity. We will not. Our vengeance shall be swift and permanent this time. We shall tear the flesh off the Dragon's hide, and dig our talons into its weakened innards. Fighting with the Davions on Galedon recently ended; that shall be our final prize."

[*D'Amone*]: "Galedon? A worthy price for our blood-soaked honor. Taking [*"burning"*] a district capital will make a statement to these *surats* they will not soon forget."

[*McKenna*]: "First, we shall claim *isorla* along the way, for ourselves and for our Alliance 'friends'. Then, on Galedon, we shall make our rage truly felt. We will make them understand that we are not weakling Nova Cats or paralytic Falcons. Scorch our feathers and we will burn entire worlds."

[*saKhan Sukhanov*]: "So it is said, so it will be done [*"By Blake's will."*]. Carry forward, Storm Crows, and gorge on the flesh of the feeble serpent. *Seyla*."

—Intercepted (alleged) Snow Raven transmissions dated 5 April 3069, transmitted to ISAP by Voice of Blake

IMMINENT FIRE

(1 June 3069)

"Lower castes of Galedon. I am Star Admiral Lydia Sukhanov, commander of the Storm Crow Naval Pursuit Star. Five months ago, vile assassins struck a dishonorable blow at our Clan. We have traced the path of one of the ships involved in these atrocities to this world. It is here that we will exact our vengeance in blood. You have one week to evacuate this planet. On June seventh, the day that your *dezgra* nation struck with such cowardice at us, we shall raze this world and any who remain on it. Thus is the nature of the insatiable wrath your vaunted Dragon has called upon itself!"

—Intercepted communications from Galedon V, relayed to INN via ISAP from undisclosed source

PASIG FALLS!

(15 June 3069)

Pasig [ARNN]—The scene is utter chaos. Not only is the Exiled Wolf Clan's Second Wolf Legion retreating off-planet, civilians by the drove are trying to do so as well. Even though citizens of border worlds have throughout history often faced enemy occupation with stern resistance or stoic apathy, rarely do any of the non-nobility flee, as life rarely changes that much from one Successor State to another. But here on Pasig, faced with the prospect of Clan rule, fears of the Jade Falcons' infamous harshness have local residents in a mad rush to get away.

Behind me, a collision of military and civilian bodies clogs the Jonathan Steiner Spaceport, the only major hub of interstellar travel on-planet since the Falcon WarShip *Jade Talon* obliterated the primary spaceport, along with the entire capital city of Meriden. We have 'Mechs and cargo trucks trying to board the *Karakorum*, the giant *Mammoth*-class DropShip to the east, while people with only a handful of belongings try to embark on the *Monarch*-class *Franciska Donnahue*.

Just last week, a second-class ticket to Deia might've run a mere 2,199 kroner, but today those tickets sell for 20,000 and up. Most ships won't even take electronic credit, insisting on hard currency, precious metals or gems. There are even rumors of children traded for passage, by families desperate to escape the Falcons. And life isn't any better in the cities, where utilities have failed as those entrusted with their maintenance join the exodus.

The pandemonium may only increase as the hours count down until the inevitable Falcon occupation. With no guarantee that outbound traffic will even be allowed safe passage beyond the system, a sense of overwhelming desperation hangs heavily on everyone here.

For the Arc-Royal News Network on Pasig, I'm Thomas Beggs.

AND IN OTHER NEWS…

BUZZ-KILL

To: David Hyde, Public Relations Dept
Fr: Thomas Yedde, VP/Corp Dvlpmt
Subject: Press Release

David—

Here's how I need you to handle our little "crisis" right now. We can't let the truth out, it'll just cause a mass panic and our stock will take a nosedive. Rework this with your usual magic and disseminate it internally and externally:

"Magliss Spirits—Detroit is experiencing a temporary interruption of export services for the time being, especially on orders placed within the last sixty days. While we anticipate a resumption of service in short order, we want to make sure our customers know that we have their business at heart when we experience such occasional service

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THOMAS SPEAKS!

"These are difficult times. Enemies within and without struggle to crush the Free Worlds. In some areas they fight with 'Mechs and bombs, in others with diplomacy and blackmail, and elsewhere with whispers and lies. Fear and mistrust are key weapons of the enemy, adding shadow legions to his force and allowing a battalion of troops to appear as a regiment. The enemy turns us against each other, using secrets and suspicions to undermine our relationships. I am aware that many such rumors, started by the Blakists, concern me and my position. In the interests of truth and justice, let me be brutally frank:

"I am not Thomas Marik, and yes, I was trained by ComStar. I am not, however, an operative of the Word of Blake, nor am I privy to their battle plans. I do, however, have some insight into the mind of the Blakist leader and in conjunction with the LCCC will use that to counter their attempts to subvert the League.

"I do not seek to elevate myself to become dictator of the Free Worlds, an oxymoron if ever there was one, nor did I—unlike some heads of state—engineer a crisis on my own capital for political gain. What I have done and what I am doing has only ever been for the good of the Free Worlds.

"The Chief Justice has expressed doubts over my legal position, but the fact remains that I have been sworn in as the Captain-General of the Free Worlds and have the support of the Marik family in my current retention of the office. I will not, as some have suggested, resign and throw the League into chaos. That said, I have no desire to retain the post if the people do not wish me to lead, and with that objective in mind I propose the restoration of Parliament as soon as is practical. I call on all Free Worlds to choose new representatives to send them to Atreus where they and they alone, the voice of the people, will decide my fate and that of the League.

"Until that time I shall remain at the head of the FWLM and the federal government, defending the integrity and rights of the population to the best of my abilities."

["*Listen not to the forked tongue of a man who knows no true identity of his own! The real Thomas Marik was a true believer, a saint worthy of the Blessed Blake, whose spirit is more a part of the League than this pretender could ever claim! Children of the Free Worlds, the truth cannot be found with one who knows not his own face in the mirror!*"]

—League-wide public address by "Thomas Marik", Captain-General of the Free Worlds League, 17 April 3069

interruptions. We ask that our clients be patient in the interim and as such, we will be extending the standard 180-day billing cycle to 300 days to compensate for the delays."

Add the usual crap about our goals being honesty, integrity and corporate awareness. Make sure it's clouded—as usual—in "company speak," so we can avoid any possible legal problems that may stem from this.

Thanks!

TY

—Magliss Spirits inter-office memo erroneously sent to Pan-Periphery Press, 23 January 3069

ONE QUESTION TOO FAR…

[*Wilson*]: "Marcy Wilson here, for INN. I've caught up with Marion Leaford and her Merry Maids in Blaster's Booze Palace. Marion, how do you justify your…occupation?"

[*Leaford*]: "It keeps me in ammo, men and shots. How the [*deleted*] do you justify yours?"

[*Wilson*]: "I get news the people want."

[*Leaford*]: "And I get the [*deleted*] people want. Nobody turns down our discount trids. People haven't decided to tithe to end piracy, they must not mind much."

[*Wilson*]:"Aha, and what of rumors that you often freelance?"

[*Leaford*]: "We just look for the biggest score and move on. Short memories are good in our biz."

[*Wilson*]: "And what of the rumors you work for the Word of Blake?"

[*Leaford*]: [*Pause*] "I try to stay away from big guns like that."

[*Wilson*]: "Are you sure? We have pictures procured from reliable sources showing you meeting with a top Blakist operative."

[*Leaford*]: "Ah, son of a [*deleted*]! Blaster, open the pit."

[*A heavy, metallic grinding sound is heard.*]

[*Wilson*]: "What? Wait! Stop! You can't do this! People have a right to know the truth!"

[*Leaford*]: "Welcome to Astrokaszy, you stupid [*deleted*]! This is the *really* real world, not your [*deleted*] perfect collegiate world. Stew on that for your last few [*deleted*] hours of [*deleted*] life!"

—This final broadcast from INN's Marcy Wilson was transmitted to her DropShip in orbit over Astrokaszy on 12 February 3069 (Edited for content)

CAESAR'S CHALLENGE

(17 February 3069)

Illyria [ABBEY WEEKLY REPORT]—"The League claims weakness while secretly pursuing their ill-hidden agenda of territorial expansion." Attributing the strife currently wracking his Marian Hegemony to its larger neighbor, the Free Worlds League, Caesar O'Reilly stopped just short of blaming Thomas Marik or Jeremy Brett personally, but his implication was clear. Brett, whose Tamarind Theater abuts the Marian state, is known to keep a wary eye on the Hegemony, particularly after its recent military con-

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quests. Brett's penchant for military intervention is well known, particularly his unsanctioned action against Arcadia during the FedCom Civil War and his transformation of "defensive operations" in the wake of the Skye-Sirius clashes into a full-blown invasion of the Lyran Alliance.

The exact status of FWLM operations remains unclear, particularly in the wake of the ongoing communications difficulties, but while Marshal Brett has focused his attentions on the Lyrans, it is clear he has maintained a watchful vigil over the League's Abbey District and the plethora of independent worlds that surrounds it. But Hegemony officials see a more sinister intent.

"He is a wolf, seeking new prey," said Imperator Gladding, taking a more direct approach than his master. "[Brett] seeks to carve out his own petty state, and those worlds along with ours fall into the territories ceded to him by the Captain-General as the price for his continued support. Thomas' position is so weak now that he sells his own people as well as outsiders to buy off his power-hungry warlord."

Neither Thomas Marik nor Jeremy Brett has had an opportunity to comment on the Marian accusations.

NIMAKACHI PLANT DESTROYED!

(4 March 3069)

Tematagi [CNI]—After months of raiding the other Commonality worlds, the pirate band known as the Order of the Faithful has finally struck at Tematagi two weeks ago. Using a pirate point, the Order set down after a two-day burn. Fielding approximately a full BattleMech regiment, they advanced on the Nimakachi plant, overwhelming the Orloff Grenadiers detachment and Nimakachi security forces in a matter of hours. The next two weeks saw the destruction of the entire Nimakachi plant, leaving behind nothing but rubble. While it is clear that the Order made off with salvage and whatever they might have pried from the factories before obliterating them, no additional attacks were mounted against the people of Tematagi.

However, with the destruction of the Third Battalion, the Eighth Orloff is now stretched too thin to cover the worlds of the Commonality against an opponent as large and well equipped as the Order. Only the Coterie has been successful to date in keeping nearby Campoleone safe, but—say some—even they appear ill suited to resist a force as large as what just hit Tematagi.

It is disturbing to note that many of the designs fielded by the Order appear to be brand-new Word of Blake constructions. Far more disturbing is the latest expression of Marik neglect of the Commonality. Said one Tematagi native, "We've been ignored… left to fend for ourselves against pirates and Hegemony ambitions. Even when we finally *do* get help, they send us the Eighth…worse than bandits because they don't leave after they're done. Now we face a threat [the Eighth] clearly can't handle, and it looks like we're on our own again."

ORESTES HPG HUB RESTORED

(15 March 3069)

Orestes [INN]—Normal operations were restored to the Orestes HPG system today with the broadcast of this address from Primus Gavin Dow:

"It is with the greatest pleasure that I announce the restoration of the Orestes HPG system.

"ComStar's dedicated technicians have labored ceaselessly to counter the senseless act of vandalism that denied all humanity access to interstellar communications. Rest assured that we shall take steps to prevent any recurrence of such an event. I have already directed Precentor-Martial Steiner-Davion to work with Sasha Richardson—the interim Precentor ROM—to devise more stringent security measures, and I implore the leaders of the Inner Sphere to support us. Without ComStar's skilled technicians, the HPG network can never be restored.

"Now that Orestes can be heard clearly again, our technicians on other worlds with which we have intermittent contact will use the instructions I am sending along with this message to restore more worlds—and to pass the word onward.

"Meanwhile, I am dispatching JumpShips to contact those worlds with which we have lost all contact. I am confident that the Herculean task of restoring communications between the stars will be completed within eighteen months."

COM GUARDS IN DISARRAY

(2 April 3069)

Arc-Royal [DBC]—Once seen as the proud defenders of the Inner Sphere—men and women who fought and died, proving their mettle on the bloody fields of Tukayyid—the Com Guards today face grave threats to their existence. The greatest threat, however, comes not from the Clans, or even the Word of Blake, but from within.

Morale—already battered by the savage casualties suffered by the divisions stationed in the Chaos March—sustained yet another blow from the Case White debacle. The subsequent revelation that their Primus was in fact a Kurita agent (not the usual wild accusations thrown about as propaganda, but a disclosure accompanied by irrefutable evidence), and the subsequent disruption of the HPG network, all combined to precipitate an almost universal collapse of faith.

During this "White-Out", ComStar desertions climbed to an alarming level, with the Guards experiencing a virtual epidemic. Many disillusioned warriors simply quit. Some went home; others refused to abandon their vocation and instead chose the mercenary life, and some have enlisted with the Inner Sphere's other armed forces. Of greater concern, an indeterminate number appear to have concluded that their former comrades in the Word of Blake were right all along.

EARLY 3069: THE FOG OF WAR

The simple fact is that the formations Precentor Martial Steiner-Davion can call upon today are perhaps one-third the strength of the forces he commanded in 3067, if not lower. Rebuilding units left under-strength by casualties or desertion will be no easy task, and ComStar has reported that recruitment is at a virtual standstill.

STRANGE ALLIANCES

ARM: Is this thing secure?

CM: As secure as dad's people can make it

ARM: Why does the "truth about Uncle Tommy" not surprise me? He always was a cold fish, always ready with a smile and a platitude while coldly plotting. One part of me wants to hang him out to dry, but despite so many years of trying to do just that, I'm not sure.

TBM: You're too close to the situation. He can be a complete bastard, but Tom's always worked for the good of the Free Worlds. One of us could step forward and lodge our claim, but how many people would follow us on a League-wide basis? Okay, some of us have regional authority, but none of us have the experience or influence at the same level or scale as Tom. We need him, even if only for the moment.

CM: There's a vocal group here calling for his removal, but dad and I agree that's a bad idea at this juncture. He might not be a Marik, but he is competent and respected, even by his political enemies. If we collapse the house of cards, we'll be playing into the Blakists' hands, fragmenting the League even more than it is at the moment. We need to leave him be.

JB: We need to do more than that. We need to make it clear to him, and to the people, that we are behind the Captain-General. We need to express our "utmost confidence" in his leadership and ability to get us through this. I can fight wars with guns and 'Mechs. We need Tom to fight with words and ideals, no matter how much that may offend familial sensibilities.

CM: I can speak to him privately and assure him of our stand, but I'm not in a position to do the media thing.

TBM: I'll do it, or Jerry can.

JB: I'm the warlord, dear. You're the diplomat.

TBM: But people know and trust you.

—Communications log attributed to Marik family officials, dated Mar-Apr 3069, found in the ruins of the Hall HPG station, leaked to ISAP by unknown sources

RALLYING CRY

"People of the Free Worlds, we live in dark times. Many claims and accusations have been made, leveled at individuals and organizations throughout the League and abroad. Some are the whispers that always accompany the chaos of war. Others are designed to feed distrust and division, making it easier for the culprits to advance their own schemes.

"But whether these claims are true or not, we cannot allow them divide us. The chain of command must be respected, and we must unite against the chaos. Yes, the Word of Blake claims the Captain-General is not who he says he is, and he has acknowledged this claim. But after spending half my life working with him to defend the borders of the Free Worlds League, I can attest to his commitment to the people and the state. Do we trust Thomas Marik, or an organization that has made indiscriminate use of chemical, nuclear, and—for all we know—biological weapons?

"I call upon all citizens of the Free Worlds, all troops of the FWLM, to work together in this time of strife and conflict. There is no better reason to come together for the greater good of the people, no matter the forces that strive to divide us. Our strength lies with our diversity as a people and a nation.

"Do not let small-minded and self-centered individuals drive a wedge between us. Do not give them what they want by turning your backs on the League and the government. To quote an old saying, 'we must hang together or we will hang separately'.

"To that end, my wife and I attest to our unequivocal support for the Captain-General and the Federal authorities in this time of crisis. Tamarind stands with Atreus and shall do so until the League falls."

—Marshall Jeremy Brett's courier dispatch to all FWLM units and media outlets, 28 June 3069

ADER v3.7

	Service	*Status*
	[ISAP]	COMPLETED
(1 March 3069)		
"Necromo Bombarded, Cossacks Destroyed"	[FSNS]	DOWNLOADING
(16 March 3069)		
"Al Na'ir Assaulted, Millions Killed"	[VotD]	ACCESSING

A SERVICE OF IRIAN NEWS INTERSTELLAR

CHAOS UNLEASHED: MY BONNIE LIES OVER THE OCEAN

MY BONNIE LIES OVER THE OCEAN

[Brynhild]: *"Bogies inbound, vector nine-nine-two."*

[*Kander Command*]: *"Roger that,* Brynhild. *Comms, contact the mercs, let them know the Falcons have taken the bait."*

[Brynhild]: *"Still not sure this is wise. If those Falcons blow that bunker, there's a good chance the fault line underneath will rupture; we'll be sinking the Cokery Isles."*

[*Kander*]: *"A risk worth taking,* Bryn. *We can't afford any more combat on the mainland—the ecosystem's all screwy already with that reactor meltdown last year."*

[Brynhild]: *"What the hell difference does a few more rads make?"*

[*Kander*]: *"Apparently you fail to recognize that we're a water world? Any more rads may accelerate the pollution rate—and send Blue Hole Bottled into bankruptcy."*

[Brynhild]: *"Ah, the meat of the matter. Once again, a corporation dictates our battles. Only in the Alliance."*

[*Kander*]: *"Can it, Feddie. Falcons incoming."*

SITUATION

Kander Sea, Southern Hemisphere
Blue Hole, Lyran Alliance
9 January 3069

Blue Hole's in trouble. Ever since the Falcons' serious raids last year, the entire Alliance border with the Falcon OZ has held its breath, waiting for the inevitable assault. With General Steiner's reshuffling of the LAAF, local commands have taken it upon themselves to prepare for the inevitable.

The government bureaucrats hit on a plan that only corporate stiffs could love—place a large bunker of military supplies deep on the coastal shelf near the Cokery Isle chain—a large series of flat rocks that served as landing ports for Ryan Cartel water ships centuries ago. By luring the Falcons there with the offer of a *batchall*, the corporate "strategists" hoped they could blow the bunker at the right time, taking out several Falcons and setting off an earthquake that would sink the Clan DropShips. Hired mercenaries would keep the Clanners busy until the appropriate moment.

All seemed to be going well—until someone discovered that delivery problems would delay the arrival of the necessary explosives for another month.

CHAOS UNLEASHED: MY BONNIE LIES OVER THE OCEAN

GAME SET-UP

CBT: Use Wetlands Terrain maps (Coastal if using *Combat Operations*). Place one Hardened Level 2 building in any water hex of Depth 2 or greater (building will be underwater).

AT2: Use Wetlands Terrain maps (Coastal if using *Combat Operations*). Place one Hardened Level 2 building in any water hex of Depth 2 or greater (building will be underwater). This track uses the *Aerospace on BattleTech Maps* rules (see p. 18, *AT2*)

RPG: The base to defend is underwater. Gamemasters should have a blueprint handy for reference as well as an idea of topography for the surrounding area. Base security is protected by an advanced sensor suite (add +5 to all TNs).

Attacker

The Attacker consists of elements of the Jade Falcons' Alpha Galaxy. The Attacker's force should equal 100 percent of the Defender's total deployed force and is a mix of Veteran and Elite warriors. For every complete Star, one unit has Elite experience and four are Veterans.

Defender

The Defender consists of up to 75 percent of the players' total force. In addition, the players' force may add five sea mines of any type (for ground games; see p. 22, *CE*) or three AA gun emplacements (for *AT2* games) for every ten units fielded.

WARCHEST

***Track Cost*:** 500 WP

Optional Bonuses (all bonuses cumulative):

+300 Contemptible Birds: Add 25 percent to the Attacker's deployed force.

+300 High Winds: See p. 152, *CBTComp.*

CHAOS UNLEASHED: MY BONNIE LIES OVER THE OCEAN

–500 Fist Full of Dollars: Add one *Jormungand*-class blue-water cruiser (the BHS *Brynhild*) to the defending force (see p. 171, *Handbook: House Steiner*; for Support Vehicle rules, see pp. 86-138, *CE*).

Victory Bonuses (not cumulative):

+550 Partial Victory: Complete two objectives.

+900 Total Victory: Complete all objectives.

OBJECTIVES

1. Denial: Keep the underwater base from being captured or destroyed.

2. Bird-hunting: Destroy or cripple at least 75 percent of the Attacker's force.

3. Prove yourselves: Destroy or cripple at least 25 percent of the Attacker's force underwater.

4. Don't sink the *Brynhild*: If the *Jormungand* is in play, it must survive the track.

SPECIAL RULES

The following rules are in effect for this track:

Aerospace Bomb Racks

Aerospace forces on both sides have access to time-delayed bombs, which function as bombs for purposes of rules and damages, with the option of how deep the bomb may go underwater before exploding. Depth times may be changed during the End Phase. If carrying split loads of ordinance, players should note which racks carry which bombs on their record sheets.

Torpedo Launchers

Non-aerospace units that have access to torpedo racks may mount them in place of the appropriate LRM/SRM launchers as normal. The Jade Falcons do not have access to such weapons. These racks can be fired only against targets at or below the water's surface.

AFTERMATH

It was a bad plan from the start—but what do you expect from desk generals? The mercenaries' zeal might have hurt the Falcons, but only a week after the "Battle of the Tides" (as a local media wonk reported it), the government of Blue Hole surrendered to the Clan.

ADDITIONAL HOOKS

Delivery problems… or something more sinister? And just how flimsy is the excuse of "protecting the environment," anyway? Sounds like someone in the business district has something shadier in the works….

Expansion Ideas

A running naval battle along the coastal plains and wetlands can be linked together for a final stand in or around the underwater bunker. Perhaps the explosives were indeed delivered and it's only a matter of time….

NEXT TRACK

Brute Force; Living Dead Men; Stirring the Anthill

CHAOS UNLEASHED: SEED OF DISCONTENT

SEED OF DISCONTENT

"It's extremely important you shield the objective craft from the system defenders. One of our agents will attempt an insertion from the craft, but we need to make sure we have a clear orbital path for a HALO drop."

"What about the militia? What kind of force are we looking at?"

"Honestly? We don't know. We lost all contact with Thraxa several months ago. We don't know if it's a Hegemony force sitting there or worse, a Word of Blake militia. Best be prepared for anything."

"Not a lot of detail here. Not sure I like it all that much. That and the active scanning will pretty much announce our presence to everyone on the planet."

"Understandable, major. We do appreciate the risk you're about to take, and if the insertion goes well, we'll be able to garner a better picture of the whole situation."

"As long as we're not decoys like your other two crews. Can't say being a duck in a shooting gallery is my kind of life."

"Maybe not, but it's the life we have chosen. MIM is good for a reason. And while your loyalty lies with your bank account, some of us have deeper morals."

"Whatever floats your boat, missy. As long as we get paid on time."

SITUATION

JumpShip Bella Cortez, *Nadir Point*
Gambilon, Magistracy of Canopus
28 February 3069

Contract details: Escort several civilian landing craft into hostile airspace around Thraxa. Hold off local defense forces until orbital insertion is secured and retreat. Supplied forces will provide transportation to and from system*. Early termination of convoy will invoke "failure to complete" clauses and forfeiture of payment balance.

Current intelligence: Unknown. System is currently under blackout.

*This clause is non-negotiable.

CHAOS UNLEASHED: SEED OF DISCONTENT

GAME SET-UP

AT2: Use at least two Space maps for this track. Designate one short edge the objective.

RPG: Though this is primarily an *AT2* track, gamemasters can modify it for use with *CBT: RPG* games.

Attacker

The Attacker is the player group; they may use up to 50 percent of their total force. In addition, three Mark VII landing craft with Elite crews (run by the Magistracy Intelligence Ministry) are attached to the Attacker's deployed force. Before play, the Attacker designates one of these units as the objective (for resolving Objective Two, below).

The Attacker enters from the edge opposite the objective edge at a Velocity of 5 or lower. The MIM shuttles enter at the beginning of Turn Two at a Velocity of 4 or lower.

Defender

The Defender is made up of elements of the Thraxan militia and mercenary commands. The Thraxan militia should equal 25 percent of the Attacker's total deployed force and are Green. The mercenary commands equal 75 percent of the Attacker's total deployed force and are Veteran. The Defender's units may be determined from Word of Blake, Magistracy, Hegemony and/or Mercenary Random Assignment Table (respectively, see 131, *Field Manual: ComStar* (or p. 219, *Field Manual: Updates*); p. 146, *Field Manual: Periphery* (or p. 229, *Field Manual: Updates*); p. 146, *Field Manual: Periphery* (or p. 229, *Field Manual: Updates*; p. 122, *Field Manual: Mercenaries, Revised*) with a Tech rating of B or lower.

The Defender begins the track within 4 hexes of the objective edge at any velocity.

WARCHEST

***Track Cost*:** 500 WP

Optional Bonuses (all bonuses cumulative):

+200 Asteroids: Place 2D6 asteroids on the map and use the *Asteroid* rules (see p. 47, *AT2*).

+300 System Defense: Add an *Alliance*-class space station (Green experience) to the Defender's force.

+300 More Mercs!: Add another mercenary force equal to 50 percent of the Attacker's total deployed force, with Regular experience.

Victory Bonuses (not cumulative):

+500 Partial Victory: Complete Objective Two.

+750 Total Victory: Complete both objectives.

CHAOS UNLEASHED : SEED OF DISCONTENT

OBJECTIVES

1. Get in, get out, no sacrifices: Avoid more than 50 percent casualties (destroyed or crippled units) by the end of the track.

2. Successful insertion: MIM Mark VII landing craft must survive and exit the designated edge.

SPECIAL RULES

The following rules are in effect for this track:

MIM Mark VII Landing Craft

In order to execute a successful insertion, the MIM unit must perform a combined total of five successful sensor sweeps to determine the best insertion path. To execute a successful sweep, a MIM craft must declare at the Initiative Phase whether it is performing a sweep or not. If a sweep is declared, during the End Phase, roll 2D6. A successful sweep is achieved on a roll result of 10 or better. If the craft does not fire any weapons during the turn, add a +2 bonus to the roll. Once five successes are logged, the designated objective craft may exit the playing area through any hex along the designated map edge.

AFTERMATH

Good thing you've got an ace hacker in your circle of friends. Otherwise you'd never have known how the MIM screwed you and your unit over. The entire operation was a fake from the start. MIM knew what was at Thraxa all along and staged the whole thing to keep the militia's attention away from the real mission. While your boy can't scoop up those particular details, you do know that some type of op went down during your playtime with those militia punks.

Guess the merc cliché is right: "Great House, great pay. Periphery will ruin your day."

ADDITIONAL HOOKS

So what operation went down while you were dancing with the militia? And what is the MIM up to, especially running operations against their own people? Could this be tied in with the silence from Canopus?

Expansion Ideas

A series of feints and raids can help identify the opposing forces or stretch them out. Conversely, the battle could spiral down into the atmosphere and become a dogfight as the MIM agent executes his mission.

NEXT TRACK

Living Dead Men; Brute Force; Stirring the Anthill

CHAOS UNLEASHED: BREW-HA-HA

BREW-HA-HA

[*Monteray One*]: *"HQ, I'm getting an odd signal over the horizon. Really bizarre."*
[*HQ*]: *"Patch it through."*
[*Monteray Three*]: *"Sure bet someone's coming and wants us to know it. Looks like those kooks in the Coterie were right after all."*
[*HQ*]: *"Boys, that's the worst rendition of 'Baby Mack Attack' I've ever heard. Didn't know it even still existed."*
[*Monteray Four*]: *"Nuevodiscola should've died with the damn dingo."*
[*HQ*]: *"Well, e-com analysis shows it's a modified ECM wave. Whoever it is, they're coming in to play."*
[*Monteray One*]: *"Roger that, HQ. Mongoose Lance, prep for high-angle scanning run on vector two-four-oh. Pass and scan, people. No heroics."*

SITUATION

Mather Swamp, Lowellstowne
Tohelet, Free Worlds League
6 May 3069

Subcontracting work out is tough, but pays off in spades if the timing is right. As your command passes through the Free Worlds League, a member of the mysterious Coterie contacts your CO to assist with defenses in the apparently defenseless Rim Commonality. Seems the Eighth Orloff is the only unit in the area, and several pirates and hard-luck mercs have taken advantage of that fact by executing heavy raids. The bandits have absconded with enormous amounts of foodstuffs and basic supplies, more than those groups would normally require. This means someone's coordinating the raids, and piling up a large amount of the fundamentals for an army or a world in crisis. You haven't heard of any planets in crisis around here, so most likely someone is building an army.

The Coterie seem to think that the large peat farms outside Lowellstowne make a viable target, so here you sit, babysitting some hardened muck. Ah, the mercenary life!

CHAOS UNLEASHED: BREW-HA-HA

GAME SET-UP

CBT: Use Hill/Mountain Terrain maps. The gamemaster may place at least one building (gamemaster's preference) anywhere on the map that the players' force must defend.

AT2: Use Space maps. The gamemaster may place at least one small space station (gamemaster's preference) anywhere on the map that the players' force must defend.

RPG: The gamemaster should prepare his choice of environment for the player group, with an object or person that the players' force must defend.

Attacker

The Attacker consists of elements of Reed's Brew, and fields a force equal to 75 percent of the Defender's total deployed force. Reed's Brew is a Veteran mercenary command and rolls on the D column of the Mercenary Random Assignment Table (see 122, *Field Manual: Mercenaries, Revised*).

The mercenaries start on the map edge farthest from the gamemaster-designated target.

Defender

The Defender consists of the player group and the small planetary militia. The players may use up to 50 percent of their total force; the militia equals 25 percent of the players' deployed force and is Green.

Set up the Defender within eight hexes (or 250 meters for *CBT: RPG*) of the gamemaster-designated objective.

WARCHEST

***Track Cost*:** 600 WP

Optional Bonuses (all bonuses cumulative):

+150 Brute Force: Add a number of mercenaries equal to 50 percent of the Defender's total deployed force. These units enter later in the track (as determined by the gamemaster).

+250 Sharpshooter: The gamemaster designates at least 25% of the units in the Attacker's force as Elite.

Victory Bonuses (not cumulative):

+450 Partial Victory: Complete one objective.

+800 Total Victory: Complete all objectives.

OBJECTIVES

1. Defend target: The gamemaster-designated target must survive the track.

2. Information: Capture or cripple one mercenary unit.

3. Eliminate the threat: Destroy or cripple the Attacker's force.

SPECIAL RULES

The following rules are in effect for this track.

Reed's Brew

Reed's Brew isn't suicidal but they are out to prove that they're more than just a "party patrol". They will begin to withdraw only after they take over 50% losses.

AFTERMATH

The battlefield hadn't even cooled before several small cargo craft bearing members of the Coterie arrived on-station to assess the damage. While you were tangling with the "Beer Can Brigade," another merc force hammered Lowellstowne and "liberated" several containers of seed and cattle from one of the giant land train terminals. The fighting started several fires that took most of the next day to corral.

As for you and your team, the Coterie representative just smiled, handed you the confirmed transfer order and politely asked you to leave. While you had no problem complying, you couldn't help but wonder what was going on….

ADDITIONAL HOOKS

What exactly are these raids about? Does some secret army out there need such a massive amount of supplies—or is someone attempting a covert colonization effort? How does the Coterie fit into all this?

Expansion Ideas

In addition to the obvious stretching of the encounter with Reed's Brew into multiple scenarios, players may also wish to look more in-depth into how the Coterie knows where these attacks will occur.

NEXT TRACK

Brute Force; Living Dead Men

LATE 3069: DEATH FROM ABOVE

LATE 3069: DEATH FROM ABOVE

The latter half of 3069 fared no better than the prior six months. In most places, things got worse. Humanity's slide into the abyss seemed to accelerate, thanks to the Blakists. Kathil, Galedon and Alarion fell silent, prompting many to believe that the Blakists had found the will and the means to annihilate entire thriving worlds. Along the Confederation-Suns border in the Chaos March, more worlds fell off the HPG net amid reports of heavy fighting between mercenary, Capellan and Davion troops.

The Word of Blake began broadcasting supposedly "secret" Clan transmissions, adding to the public belief in Blakist invincibility. Rumors of reeducation centers and internment camps came to light—not all of which were apparently run by the Word of Blake. The Blakist juggernaut in the Chaos March continued, though a tremendous victory for the Lyrans at Skye showed that the jihadists could be beaten.

Chaos continued to grow, as more and more units broke their chains of command to ineffective or shattered leadership in order to pursue their own agendas. The Free Worlds League became a prime example, as provincial boundaries widened and commanders received often-conflicting orders. Old allegiances and hatreds once more reared their buried heads, further fragmenting the ailing League. Though some stepped forward to take charge, the recent unmasking of deception by a man for decades believed to be Thomas Marik left many unwilling to keep their trust in the Marik line.

Yet hope remained, if only as a weak flicker. During these months, elements in the Free Worlds first proposed a cease-fire with the Lyran Alliance. Meanwhile, the return of an imprisoned Duke Kai Allard-Liao gave hope to a Capellan citizenry besieged on both sides by renegade forces of the Free Worlds League and the Federated Suns.

In the larger view, however, it became clear that the Inner Sphere could not soon extricate itself from the multiple conflagrations in which its nations had gotten embroiled, while in the center of it all the Word of Blake continued its brutal campaign to remake humankind in its own image.

—Michael Bosworth, INN Special Correspondent

RAIN OF FIRE

(20 June 3069)

Galedon V [THE DRAKE]—First the Clanners came. Then the Fedrats captured us, before we were "liberated" by the DCMS. Toward the end of the fighting, people in areas surrounding the Ru-Sangaku fell ill, affected by a disease nobody could identify. The DCMS took steps to quarantine the affected areas, and it looked like things were under control.

Then the Snow Ravens returned.

Brutally, and for no apparent reason, they decided to level this planet. For the first week after their arrival, they allowed civilian transports to depart, but with few DropShips and even fewer JumpShips here, who could leave? Then, four days ago, they started the rain of fire. First hit were military installations and the capital. Only ruins remain of that ancient city, founded at the birth of human existence on this planet.

The swift breakdown of central authority and order (most government types left as soon as they could) has made this place a living hell. The so-called Curse of Galedon has broken out in new places, spread from the dead at the hospitals and by people escaping the quarantine zones. We have no way to check who has the disease, and as city after city dies under Raven guns, people have taken to the woods and hills to survive. Armed and paranoid, they take no chances. They drive off or kill anyone approaching their small encampments. Some are picking over the urban ruins for food and supplies. Steady streams of vehicles run from the few towns that have so far been spared, but it's only a matter of time before the Clanners turn those guns their way.

Galedon was a thriving place; now it's a hellhole from which there is no escape. The DCMS can't break the naval blockade, and the Ravens are bent on exacting their vengeance upon us. The Yellow Bird has come to roost here.

May the powers above help us.

WRATH AND FIRE

WAYWARD BROTHERS AND SISTERS SEE THE LIGHT!

(15 July 3069)

Terra [VOICE OF BLAKE]—In the words of the Blessed Blake, "the truth shall set you free." Certainly since the revelation of the Heretics' treachery, the thousands who have chosen to once more embrace the true Word of Blake have proven this wisdom. Finally they understand the mockery made of the once-noble Order of ComStar by the perfidious Frederick Steiner—under the assumed identity of Anastasius Focht—along with his impudent nephew and their replacement "puppet" Primus, Gavin Dow. Finally they see how they were led from the true way.

Repentant of their error, they returned to the fold. We welcomed them with open arms and joyful hearts. Our brothers and sisters, you have come home at last!

The Word of Blake calls to all those still enslaved by the evil and self-serving villains who twist Blake's name to hide their ambitions. They desire only to dominate all of humankind. Throw off the cloak of lies they have woven around you! Come back to us! Come home to sacred Terra and join us in the great mission of fulfilling the true words of the Blessed Blake.

LATE 3069: DEATH FROM ABOVE

WMDS AND THE CLANS WHO USE THEM

…Guys, I told you this would happen, and it's gone down just like I said. The Snow Ravens—just more damned Clanner bastards!—planted chem and bio weapons underground on **Galedon**, in biodegradable containers. Just as sure as the **Ghost Bears nuked Edo** a few short years ago. Now we see that such actions are not "accidents" attributable to just one Clan in the bunch. Hell, they didn't even need nukes, and probably have a vaccine to neutralize the damage they did. Not like the dead will have anything to gain, as the Clan comes back and occupies their world without a fight. They planned it all out in advance—all you have to do is be willing to see it.

If the Clanners were as "honorable" as they pretend, the rest of them would gang up and jihad against the dishonorable ones and restore their own standards. We CAN'T just sit back and do nothing, cuz the **Blakists** and their anti-prophetic babbling are no better. They won't fight the Clans unless it suits their own purposes! Just look at the "rumors" of fighting on **Kessel**; the Blakists no doubt had something to do with the "supposed" **nuke use there**, and they've been sapping Combine and Federated troops there for months now!

It's crazy, and I DO mean crazy… Hell, I'll come right out and say it. I think the Wobblies are just pawns for the Clans, doing their dirty work Sphere-wide and covering for **other atrocities** that those bastards (and I HOPE some of you *bastard* Clanners read this!) would have had to do themselves anyway!

I tell ya, when I'm 18, I'm gonna enlist, and help make this {CENSORED} right.

Peace/out

{Consumer Advisory: Censoring provided by MechaSoft Parental Programming (all rights reserved); The content of User: consPIracy666buff's personal journal does not reflect the views of Delacruz Web Services or any of its worldwide subsidiaries.}

—Excerpted from a private blog by consPIracy666buff on the Delacruz InterWeb, 23 July 3069

FIELD STUDY REPORT (CONFIDENTIAL): ALARION

To: General Adam Steiner
From: General Ytzak Arran, M.D.
Re: Alarion Biowarfare

A formal report is due out next week, but this abstract puts much of the information in a military/lay format and removes most of the scientific writing for simplicity. It begins with a synopsis of events as we know them, then offers information on the bioagent and conclusions.

During the assault on Alarion, the planet was bombarded by nuclear weapons. Nuclear fallout forced the population into the domed cities initially used during colonization of the planet. This move coincided with an outbreak of the Alarion Flu. Crowded conditions helped the flu spread rapidly throughout the cities; this strain resisted the usual antivirals, and so was much deadlier than ever before.

Meanwhile, the Interstellar Red Cross JumpShip *Sister of Mercy* met a DropShip from Alarion and found the entire crew dead. Once apprised of the situation, the LAAF medical unit quarantined both vessels. Luckily, only the boarding team of the *Sister of Mercy* died. The remainder of the crew was unaffected. Medical personnel discovered an unknown virus in the victims and in the DropShip. Alarion was placed under immediate quarantine and we confirmed with the planet that the contagion raging on the surface was not the Alarion Flu, but some kind of bioagent released during the nuclear assault.

Further analysis shows that this virus is a descendant of the Terran hanta virus, which is normally transmitted from rodents to humans. Analyzing its RNA proved that it was engineered on a world containing life forms unknown to the Inner Sphere scientific community. The virus transfers not only from rodents to humans, but also from human to human, with many other local animals suitable as carriers. Initial symptoms are fever and muscle aches, followed by coughing and shortness of breath. Death occurs within two to three weeks of infection. We have sent information to Alarion, but with the recent collapse of local infrastructure there, it is unlikely anyone will survive the quarantine. The planet should be off limits for at least a year until further studies can be done to ensure its safety, but I fear the planet may be unsafe for far longer.

—Lyran Emergency Management Corps (LEMC) report to General of the Armies Adam Steiner, 19 August 3069 (Declassified 1 April 3070)

OFFICIALS: GALAX IS DYING

(29 August 3069)

New Syrtis [FSNS]—Several highly placed sources in the Federated Suns government revealed today the true nature of the calamity at Galax, and the need for the recent negative travel advisory. A lethal disease has been sweeping across population centers on Galax, and efforts to enact local quarantines have so far consistently failed. Even the old biospheres used when the atmosphere was toxic have proven ineffective shelter from the disease.

Initial research suggests, but cannot prove, that the illness is transmitted to humans who come in contact with local fauna, where it remains dormant for extended stretches of time. It is contagious during this dormant period. Scientists do not yet know the length of this time frame, but it may explain why even the ancient biospheres cannot quarantine the sickness: at least some inhabitants are already infected before entering. After the first several hours of infection, the pathogen begins to produce an enzyme that destroys hemoglobin, until an insufficient amount is left to absorb oxygen into the bloodstream. Patients initially suffer

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from shortness of breath, followed by the effects of suffocation, and finally unconsciousness brought on by lack of oxygen to the brain. The brain deteriorates further from oxygen starvation until the patient dies.

While not identical to the plague affecting Alarion, it seems clear that this disease, too, was delivered by the Blakists during their recent attack on Galax. The odds of an illness seemingly tailored to destroy all human life on a planet spontaneously coming into existence mere weeks after the Blakists struck are beyond abysmal. It is clear that the Word of Blake intends to depopulate critical worlds such as Galax, apparently unwilling to render the planet useless through conventional means, but more than willing to commit genocide. If they only require an opportunity to release a tailored bioweapon to kill a world, the defense of every planet has become nearly impossible.

QUARANTINE ALERT: GALEDON V

*****For Immediate Release*****
(15 September 3069)

New Samarkand [VOTD]—Until further notice, the entire system of Galedon V is under Level Five Quarantine protocol. No civilian traffic may enter the system under any circumstances. Vessels doing so will be subject to immediate seizure by on-site DCMS forces. All communications with the planet are suspended unless authorized. Persons with business and/or family on Galedon V are to work with their local System Environmental Services office for the time being.

Quarantine protocols are in effect due to unusual ecosystem patterns on the planet. In order to prevent possible infection of other systems, these protocols will remain in effect until the danger has been safely contained and no possible contamination risk remains.

SUMMER'S NIGHTFALL

[*Roberts*]: "…and we're here on Promontory Hill overlooking Curitiba, where behind me you can see the muster area of the local Com Guard garrison. Precentor Narami Nichigama notified the local militia force late yesterday that he would be adding elements of the Ninth Division to the planet's defense. As our viewers may recall, the inbound aggressors were positively identified as Word of Blake DropShips only yesterday morning."

[*Excited shouting off camera. One figure runs into the background, pointing to the east.*]

[*Roberts*]: [*Turns and looks, briefly touching his earpiece*] "Craig, can you get that?"

[*View shifts and zooms in on several contrails burning their way through the atmosphere.*]

[*Roberts*]: "Commander Griswalt informed us this morning that the incoming ships are standard troop carriers, so the population is to expect some heavy fighting in and around several key areas near the capital's industrial sector. Most of the DropPort and the Boolan Complex have been evacuated and citizens in Curitiba are urged to remain indoors for the time being. Shelters have been—wait, what's that?"

[*View pulls back slightly as smaller smoke trails are seen radiating from several of the inbound ships.*]

[*Roberts*]: "There seems to be some confusion on the military band…apparently, what we're seeing are not 'Mech drop pods but possibly fighters, though they seem to be too—"

[*Camera follows a pair of contrails moving fast toward the ground, enlarging as they approach the lens on an oblique angle.*]

[*Roberts*]: "Wait—are those missiles?"

[*View pulls back as the missile contrails intersect with the city skyline and explode.*]

[*Roberts*]: "Oh, sweet Mary…."

[*Camera locks onto forming mushroom cloud as more missiles hit the capital. View shakes and pitches over as ground rumbles from shockwave. Multiple screams are heard in background.*]

[*Roberts*]: "Craig! Are you okay? Get out of here, man! There are more missiles headed this way, toward the Com Guard camp…. Oh. My. Go—"

[*View goes white with intense glare, then static.*]

—Recording salvaged from SkyeStar Six communications satellite, Skye Broadcasting, 27 September 3069

THE SACKING OF GLENGARRY

(18 December 3069)

Glengarry [INN]—Last night, the Chancy Plateau was the scene of desperate fighting as Blakist troops advanced on the Grey Death Technologies manufacturing plant. Defending the factory was Brewer's Legion—a security force deployed by Defiance Industries to protect their investment in GDT.

[*"The Blessed Blake charged us with the preservation of knowledge until such time as humankind was ready. In their folly, the Gray Death Legion let loose a genie of destruction that has ravaged the Inner Sphere for the last four decades."*]

Consisting of an under-strength combined-arms battalion, the Legion began the battle in well-established defensive positions. But even though they count former members of the destroyed Gray Death Legion among their number, the Gray Death's legendary luck eluded the defenders. Facing superior numbers, the Legion was pinned down by concerted BattleMech assaults, leaving them vulnerable to a flanking strike by fast-moving hover transports carrying battle-armored troops.

Their position compromised, the Legion attempted to fall back to the manufacturing plant, but only a handful of infantry and dismounted MechWarriors made it to the protection of a heavily reinforced security bunker. Despite the hopelessness of their

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position, they refused to surrender, holding out for several hours before squads of Purifiers stormed their position.

Hans DuVaull, Baron von Glengarry, has been highly critical of the LAAF's failure to defend worlds in the Terran Corridor. The sacking of GDT is the latest in a series of attacks launched by the seemingly unstoppable Word of Blake.

LIBERATION!

"We're here with Roman's Mounted Fusiliers on Warlock, standing just outside the Capitol building, site of the last major battle between the Lancers and rogue elements of the Second St. Ives Janissaries. Around me, the wreckage of battle still burns, as salvage vehicles drag away the shattered hulks of BattleMechs crippled on both sides.

"It was here on Warlock that the Janissaries' Combat Command Gamma turned on the Second Rangers' infantry regiment and destroyed their sister unit. Claiming their support for Hasek's invasion of the Confederation, the renegade forces subsequently offered the planet's military industrial output to aid the Davion invasion.

"Two days ago, the Fusiliers grounded their DropShips around Warlock's capital, where the treasonous Janissaries had erected defenses. After forming up, the Fusiliers drove the Janissary skirmishers back toward the city and eventually overpowered Gamma despite admittedly stiff resistance.

"Under artillery and aerospace barrages, the Fusiliers forced the remaining traitors to the center of the capital; where both sides then fought the bloodiest battle of the campaign. For nearly five hours, the rebels resisted to their bitter end, taking with them a number of valiant loyalists. None of Gamma's members survived, but sadly, nearly thirty percent of Roman's Fusiliers lay with them.

"Calm has descended on the capital as funeral pyres mark where 'Mechs, vehicles and buildings collapsed amid the fighting. In the days to come, it will be the civilians of Warlock who restore true normalcy to this world, once more returned to the haven of Confederation rule.

"For CBS news, this is Tessandra Ling reporting."

—Tessandra Ling, CBS reporter embedded with Roman's Mounted Fusiliers, Warlock, 30 July 3069

SURGING AHEAD

AGAINST THE FLOODGATES

(10 July 3069)

New Syrtis [FSNS]—The sudden and unexpectedly successful Liao invasion of the Capellan March has forced Duke George Hasek to commit his reserves in a bid to stem the green tide.

Two months ago on Jaipur, the Twelfth Vegan Rangers' Gamma Regiment (hastily brought in from Wappingers to relieve the Fifth Syrtis Fusiliers) faced elements of the Second St. Ives Lancers. Not expecting the badly under-strength mercenaries to offer much resistance, the Lancers' command company pressed the attack, only to be annihilated in a deadly crossfire by Gamma's heavy and assault companies. With the Capellans momentarily off-balance, Colonel Desantis pressed his devastating counterattack. Though outnumbered, the Rangers were concentrated into a powerful phalanx that smashed right through the Liao ranks, overrunning their headquarters and killing *Sang-shao* Lucas Tolek. With the death of their commander, the Second lost all cohesion and fled the field.

Despite their victory, the exhausted Rangers could not capitalize on their success and crush the beaten Capellans. With the subsequent arrival of the First St. Ives Lancers, the initiative swung back to the invaders, forcing the seriously outnumbered Rangers to fall back from Jaipur.

With the Rangers' Alpha Regiment tied up on the Draconis border, and their Beta Regiment recalled to New Avalon, Colonel Desantis cannot expect aid as the Capellan forces continue to flood across the borders.

DUKE OF ST. IVES FREED!

(3 August 3069—originally filed 15 June 3069)

Today we can report another glorious victory for the Capellan people! Kai Allard-Liao, Duke of St. Ives, has been rescued from the clutches of the Davions! The valiant Death Commandos once again proved their devotion to the Celestial Wisdom by extracting his cousin safely. Duke Allard-Liao wasted little time condemning Hasek for his criminal abduction intended to help him sow discord in the St. Ives Commonality to further prosecute the Davion war of aggression against the Capellan people. The Duke is expected to join the war effort at the head of our valiant St. Ives brethren as soon as he recuperates from his ordeal.

"Dow: Formation of New First Circuit Und

(30 March 3069)

"Report: New Avalon Defenders Push Back Word a Second…" [FSNS] DOWNLOADING

(1 April 3069)

"LAS Fylgia Sighted at Noisiel" [BNN] ACCESSING

A SERVICE OF IRIAN NEWS INTERSTELLAR

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THE DRIVE TO NEW SYRTIS

"Task Force Light Horse—comprised of both St. Ives Lancers regiments and the Third McCarron's Armored Cavalry—shattered all organized Davion resistance here on Taygeta almost twenty-four hours ago, after some of the fiercest fighting of the campaign left the FedSuns' Third Ceti Hussars and the Vanguard Legion mercenary command in retreat.

"All forces are standing down for resupply and refit, in preparation for the final stage of 'Operation Celestial Vengeance,' the invasion of New Syrtis. Since departing St. Ives, we have witnessed the fall of Haappajarvi and Jaipur to this task force. Unconfirmed reports also have the worlds of Hadnall, Spica, Velhas, Frazer, Ridgebrook, Verlo, Sirdar and Hobson firmly in CCAF hands. The drive to New Syrtis has seen more than thirty Capellan March worlds invaded or raided by our forces.

"CCAF troops surround New Syrtis now with three task forces on Taygeta, Ridgebrook and Hobson. This thrust, so deep into Davion territory, seems to have occurred in part through the lack of any reasonable interior defenses. A sitrep given by task force commander *Jiang-jun* Tristan Bothel indicated that Duke Hasek apparently stripped most of his forces to launch his ill-fated invasion of the Confederation.

"'We are now poised to invade New Syrtis and bring the war to Hasek's front door,' Third McCarron's commander Otto Kung stated in a briefing today, adding that, 'We are the Celestial One's sword of vengeance and shall be thrust into the bosom of the Capellan March, to succeed where Hasek failed.'"

"Reporting from Taygeta for CBS, I'm Josef Zane."

—Josef Zane, CBS reporter embedded with the First St. Ives Lances, Taygeta, 28 August 3069

SHATTERED LINES

"Never before in the history of our great nation have we suffered so many defeats so swiftly as we have in the past three decades. To make matters worse, George Hasek's war has proven the greatest disaster since the fall of the first Star League. I stand before you today enraged by Lord Hasek's lunacy. His complete disregard for FedSuns law and abrogation of the responsibilities of his noble position has left every world in the Capellan March defenseless….

[*"Hasek follows the Heretic Prince's path."*]

"Almach, Valexa and Ashkum were attacked by an elite Capellan task force consisting of Warrior House Dai Da Chi and the Second McCarron's Armored Cavalry. Each world's defending unit died under the Capellan onslaught. Industrial, agricultural and military industries, along with the infrastructures of each world, have been destroyed. On Valexa, the returning March Militia unit never even made planetfall before Capellan nuclear weapons annihilated them in space.

[*"Our Capellan brethren acted hastily…we shall investigate this and see what we can salvage."*]

"On Kathil, Death Commandos supported by Dai Da Chi and the Second McCarron destroyed the shipyards, GM's mega-complex and all local militia forces. This same story is playing out on a number of our worlds. We are *losing* this war. Hasek deployed our military to the Confederation on a worthless cause. He is on his own, and so are we.

[*"Only we can help; soon the unbelievers will seek us out for redemption!"*]

"People, how much more do we need to suffer before the removal of that idiot on New Syrtis? Our families and worlds are suffering because of his unsanctioned war. Can anyone help us now?

"For KNZA News 12, I'm Alfred Whittington, Senior Editor, and this was my opinion."

—Alfred Whittington, Senior Editor, *Novaya Zemlya Tonight*, NANS affiliate, 2 September 3069

ANNIHILATION ON TALON

(12 September 3069)

Wernke [NANS]—Wernke planetary officials this evening confirmed reports of a brutal nuclear assault on Talon, perpetrated by the Blackwind Lancers against two of the planet's largest cities. Horrific damage and massive civilian casualties currently beyond estimation have been described to our reporters. In the words of planetary governor Liam Carabas:

"…The Lancers used nuclear weapons to destroy the two largest cities on Talon, including the site of Kallon Industries. The death toll is expected to exceed two million, with twice that number wounded—most of them seriously. From what we know, it seems the defending garrison, the Thirty-ninth Avalon Hussars, died in the first of five nuclear strikes and the Lancers' follow-up ground assault. There are no reports of survivors at this time.

"Kallon Weapons Industries no longer exists. From what we can discern, the factories were the Lancers' primary target. When the Hussars moved to engage the rogue Capellans, the Lancers launched their first nuclear attack. Afterward, they apparently sent in ground personnel to place a large device deep within the complex before detonating it.

"The surviving Hussars fell back to the twin cities of Carver and Shamrock, where the Lancers launched two more massive WMD assaults to level both cities. What remained of the Thirty-ninth's 'Mech forces vainly attempted to stop the Lancers, but were annihilated. The Lancers then withdrew from Talon, leaving behind a burning world with a poisoned atmosphere. We have declared a planetary crisis for Talon and our militia is scrambling now to evacuate any survivors here to Wernke. Please keep these men and women in your prayers. Hasek's war is costing us more than it's worth. Thank you."

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THE BATTLE FOR NEW SYRTIS

[*O'Tanner*]: "Things are calm here in Saso City right now, even as the main fighting continues between invading Capellan forces and the FedSuns defenders in the surrounding countryside. But that was not the case only six hours ago, as elements of the Capellan forces landed in the park you see just behind us...."

[*Camera pans to show a* Thunder Hawk *lying on its back across a cobblestone road encircling a wide park. Its armor is shredded and black smoke still pours from its mangled torso. One leg is gone; its left arm is a ruinous stump. Further inside the park stands the burnt-out husk of an* Overlord-*class DropShip, Capellan Confederation markings still visible.*]

[*O'Tanner*]: [*Off-camera*] "The Capellan forces, whom sources tell us were part of the Third McCarron's Armored Cavalry, intentionally grounded one of their DropShips in this park, their assault 'Mechs pouring out of the bays with all guns blazing as they fell upon the defending elements of the Third Ceti Hussars and the Fourth Donegal Guards. Struck along their flank and rear, and pinned between the Third MAC and the Confederation's main thrust against the city, the defenders took a heavy toll as they bent under the Capellan attack, pulling back from the outer suburbs to concentrate their fire.

"A suicidal attack run by the Hussars' remaining aerospace lances against the Third MAC's DropShip crippled the vessel, and the arrival of the armored infantry from the Sixth Syrtis Fusiliers—apparently from positions on the city's east side—finally turned the tide. Hasek's forces pushed the MAC back to their burning DropShip, destroying all who refused to surrender.

"Reports from outside the city say that the Capellans are conducting a fighting withdrawal from their week-old offensive. Only time will show if this is just a respite, or a prelude to something more."

—Roger O'Tanner, INN, New Syrtis, 21 September 3069

THE ADVANCING HORDES

WOLF WATCH

Disturbing news, my Khan. Agents within the Dominion have reported that the *Rasalhague* has been declared fully operational and is now underway to Alshain's zenith point. The ship was loaded with a full crew and half her estimated maximum fighter complement under intense security, unusual for a standard deployment. At least a Galaxy has been transferred off-planet as well, presumably traveling with the *Rasalhague*. Several of her attendant vessels are non-combat DropShips. I suspect that if the WarShip is headed to the standard jump point, she is joining up with the small fleet of JumpShips currently on station there.

In addition, the Alshain yards have finished their expansion project. Shortly after the *Rasalhague* left her moorings, the *Great Bear* entered in her place, presumably to undergo continuing repair work. The *Leviathan* arrived in-system only yesterday and has made course for the planet as well. Service laborers and technical crews have been increased at the yards, so the evidence points to the conclusion that the *Leviathan* has arrived to begin her upgrade.

I will forward any news on the *Rasalhague*'s destination when I am able. It is currently the Watch's first priority.

Loremaster Katya Kerensky

—Wolf Clan Watch report dated 12 October 3069 (relayed to INN via ISAP, 5 December 3069)

THE CURSE OF GALEDON

From: Sherri Dineson, ISAP (Irurzun Office)
To: Jackson Heckinger, INN-Proserpina
Date: 1 August 3069
Re: Unconfirmed Raven Incident

Jack,

I have been unable to confirm the accuracy of the following transcript. My source in the ISF *claims* it came from a DropShuttle assigned to the *Mountbatten*, one of the Raven WarShips that hit Galedon. The location of the incident is unknown, and the date is simply given as "mid-June." Might be unwise to rely on this report without independent verification. Certainly, the editing is curious. Regardless, it appears that the "Curse of Galedon" has spread beyond that world.

>>>EXCERPT AD7671-881-XHR-001<<<

[*MOUNTBATTEN*]: "Trothkin of the Storm Crow Naval Pursuit Star! The epidemic continues to proliferate among those vessels that took on Galedonian bondsmen. Medtechs on all our ships confirm that by now the *Ark Royal*, the *Storm Crow* and the *Nestling* are overrun by this plague. " [*DELETED*] "…we cannot risk further contamination. As much as it pains me, I see no alternative but to Reave the contaminated vessels."

[*ARK ROYAL*]: "*Neg*! You have lost your mind, Star Admiral! Surely it will be sufficient for us to hold in space until a cure is found?"

[*MOUNTBATTEN*]: "*If* a cure is ever found! We *cannot* risk the safety and well-being of our entire Clan, neither with your contamination…" [*DELETED*] "…For the sake of all, we must purge this disease that has been inflicted on us!"

[*ARK ROYAL*]: "Lunacy! I reject your faulty reasoning, and refuse to let you destroy me, my crew and the *Ark Royal*!"

[*STORM CROW*]: "The *Storm Crow* also rejects your conclusion, Star Admiral. Our destruction is not necessary."

[*MOUNTBATTEN*]: "*Seyla.* Then prepare for combat, trothkin. Your Trial of Annihilation begins now…"

>>>END x/x<<<

LOOMING APOCALYPSE

*****For Immediate Release*****
(17 August 3069)

New Earth [VOICE OF BLAKE]—Attention, citizens of the Inner Sphere! We bring you this from the dark chambers of the Clans, where they plot your destruction! Hear this and tremble! And know now that the only saving grace you have in this time of petty war and self-serving nobles is the comfort and protection of the Word of Blake!

>>>Begin Transmission<<<
[*Kael Pershaw, Jade Falcon Loremaster*]: "And now, my Khans, we will entertain nominations for ilKhan. Yes, saKhan Troy Boques of the Blood Spirits."
[*Troy Boques, Clan Blood Spirit*]: "Clan Blood Spirit nominates Khan Garret Sainze of Clan Fire Mandrill for the position of ilKhan."
[*Marthe Pryde, Clan Jade Falcon*]: [*Filtered, indistinct*]
[*Brett Andrews, Steel Viper*]: "What was that, Khan Pryde? Surely you would like to share your obvious derision with the rest of us?"
[*Pryde*]: "Derision? *Neg*. I am merely commenting that we would be better served with one of the low-life Spheroid warriors the Ghost Bears seem content to absorb into their Touman."
[*Aletha Kabrinski, Ghost Bear*]: [*Filtered, hearty laughter*] "On this, I agree. One of our Rasalhagian bondsmen has more blood of warriors in him than most of the Mandrill Kindraa."
[*Garret Sainze, Fire Mandrill*]: "So rather than second my nomination, you choose to insult a fellow warrior of Kerensky? Have we sunk so far, that you so-called 'Spheroid Clans' deem yourselves superior to us, the true holders of Kerensky's vision?"
[*Marialle Radick, Wolf*]: [*Filtered*] "*Aff*, because it is true. Though *we* hold more dearly to the spirit of the Great Father. You are more like rotten children, feeding off the spoils of the parents."
[*Dante Truscott, Star Adder*]: "Is that so? Then we will surely elect one of our own to resume the invasion that you so extravagantly botched for almost twenty years. And *this* time, we will not only defeat the Spheroids but you stagnant Clans as well."
[*Radick*]: "You will find the way through the Wolves wrought with your own Clan's destruction."
[*Kabrinski*]: "Try and fail, like the Horses before you."
[*Ariel Suvorov, Goliath Scorpion*]: [*Filtered*] "The Horses? The Horses apparently do not think this Council is even worth their time. They have once more failed to attend—in person or virtually. Perhaps one of the Home Clans has indeed lost its way."
[*Angus Labov, Diamond Shark*]: [*Filtered*] "Maybe. Maybe not."
[*Truscott*]: "As you should speak, Shark. Your massive mercantile movements from Kerensky's home have not gone unnoticed, either."
[*Pershaw*]: "My Khans, enough!" [*Coughs*] "We have let this again devolve into arguments and petty bickering. There is a nomination on the floor; is there a second?"
[*Karianna Schmitt, Blood Spirit*]: "I, Khan Karianna Schmitt of Clan Blood Spirit, second the nomination of Khan Garret Sainze of Clan Fire Mandrill."
[*Pershaw*]: "saKhan Connor Rood of the Ice Hellions."
[*Connor Rood, Ice Hellions*] "I nominate Khan Marthe Pryde of the Falcons for the position of ilKhan."
[*Pryde*]: [*Hysterical laughter*] "Surely you jest, snow ferret."
[*Rood*]: "Why not? You tell us we are too weak and stupid to lead such a grand Crusade, so who better to lead us then the Khan who has beaten down the Lyran Alliance twice now? What have the Wolves and Bears done but scuffle with the Horses? By your own words, Marthe, you are the best choice."
[*Pryde*]: "*Neg*. I refuse the nomination on the grounds of foolishness. I know the path of my Clan and we will follow it, not lead you stupid children with us to steal our glory. If you persist in your foolish ideas you will face me in a Trial of Grievance."
[*Radick*]: "In that case, Loremaster, I would like to nominate Khan Stanislov N'Buta."
[*Silas Kufahl, Coyote*] "I second the nomination. The Adders have proven the right to lead a new Crusade. After all, aside from the Falcons, they were the only ones to defeat the Spheroids in combat during the Great Refusal."
[*Labov*]: "Interesting. So that throat wound you received did not take away the Coyote power of braying incessantly, as we originally thought."
[*Pershaw*]: "Any other nominations?" [*Silence*] "Then nominations are closed." [*Coughs*] "We will now allow Khans Sainze and N'Buta five minutes to address the Council on their fitness to be ilKhan…"
>>> End Transmission<<<

They are coming for you all, but the True Believers shall be saved.

Peace of Blake to you.

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BACK TO BASICS

"Attention, Jade Falcons!

"Today the warriors of Clan Wolf have arrived to take this world from your weakened talons. Your facile attempts at glory end here, for we have come to show you the way back to the path of the warrior.

"Tremble in your nests, Falcons. I, Galaxy Commander Sandra Vickers, along with my entire Kappa Galaxy, will enjoy wresting Rasalgethi from your misguided ways. I have taken Orkney and Jabuka from your sibkin and will enjoy teaching you the true art of war as seen through the eyes of the true children of Kerensky.

"We do not request or require safcon. You may attempt to stop our assault and die with some honor, or you can turn tail and run like your brothers did on Jabuka.

"With what forces do you defend this world? Take as much time as you need—I am in no hurry to leave. The Wolves are on the prowl and we have come to stay."

—Decrypted transmission intercepted from the Rasalgethi system, 6 October 3069

THE TRUTH REVEALED

Josef,

I've intercepted this note. There was no report attached. Considering how old it is, I'm surprised we haven't heard yet that Dante got glassed by the Ravens. Pass the word to the usual suspects. This won't stop at Dante; too much has happened for that.

OvKhan,

It is difficult to contain my rage. The attached report by the OAI confirms without doubt that terrorists on Dante planted nuclear bombs aboard the vessels of the Swift Wing Star. They used our contempt for the Kuritas' dishonor against us. I do not regret our actions in the Combine, but to hide behind others when inflicting such a vicious attack makes it even more cowardly. The extent of these Spheroids' depravity is astonishing. What are we doing here? Certainly we must exact punishment against the scum on Dante, but once that is done, what remains for us here? I doubt our path, and seek your guidance.

Marten

—MI2 internal memo, dated 28 August 3069 (declassified for FSNS, 15 December 3070)

DANTE BURNING

To: Marshall Daniel Darwith

Re: Intercept 522-99FHHOA-3

Dan, I'm not sure what to make of this. Our boys monitoring the Alliance picked this up from DeepSat G-2. It's partly faded out and our tech boys are trying to boost the signal for more information, especially the tag files so we can see who this was going to. But the content we did pick up is interesting, to say the least. Seems the Alliance has other problems right now besides the Combine. Don't know if you want to inform the Regent or not, but that's not my call to make.

—Marshal Romulus Colcetti

>>>Audio attached<<<

[*Static*] "…ently the Birds have figured out who pulled off Operation Purification. We made sure our volunteers did not return to this mortal coil, but somehow the Ravens have backtracked the entire cleansing to us. We suspect a Combine agent is somewhere in the network. The Ravens arrived in orbit yesterday afternoon and began firing indiscriminately on known population centers. If they sent a message to the planet, we don't know, other than the massive fire they're pouring into the cities. For the moment, our main base here at the Sixth Ring is safe, but I wouldn't consider it survivable, especially if our network is indeed compromised. We are scattering as we can, but it's impossible to leave Dante at this time; the Ravens are destroying any ship that lifts. We've dampened our reactor in the mountain, but it's only a matter of time before their sensors pick up residual neutrino traces.

We knew this wouldn't last, but I hoped we'd have enough time to move more of our network. I suggest you put Causation on hold until we can assess the damage done by this attack—and I warn you, it will be considerable. I place long odds on us ever being operational again. Personally, I think you should write us off. At least the Ninth Ring survives elsewhere….

At least I can go to my fiery end with the knowledge that a bunch of neo-Luddites managed to take out an entire Clan WarShip Star. Fortunately, the Ramora Virus was inst…" [*Static*]

>>>Audio Ends<<<

—MI2 internal memo, dated 29 September 3069 (Declassified for FSNS 15 December 3070)

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INCOMING FIRE

[*Outcast Five*]: "…Copy that, Special, moving to nav one-bravo to reinforce Jazz Command."
[*Outcast Special*]: "Roger Five. Make it speedy; Jazz says the zone's hot. Special out."
[*Pause. Distant rumbles.*]
[*Five*]: "*Mon Dieu!* Special! We have co—"
[*Thunderous explosion. Static. A high-pitched squeal. Silence.*]
[*Special*]: [*Muttering*] "What the hell—?" [*Louder*] "Outcast Five, this is Special; say again last transmission, over…"
[*Silence. Popping static. Explosion.*]
[*Special*]: [*Muttering*] "There it is again…" [*Louder*] "Outcast Five, this is Special; sitrep!"
[*More popping static.*]
[*Special*]: "Jericho, this is Outcast Special. Request flyby of nav one-bravo and Jazz Command, sector three-zero. Possible Cappie arty mission in progress. Please advise on situation and render support, over."
[*Jericho Leader*]: "On it, Outcast. Standby…"
[*Silence.*]
[*Jericho*]: [*Muttering*] "Mother of God…"
[*Special*]: "Jericho Flight, sitrep!"
[*Jericho*]: "O-outcast Special, this is Jericho…we can't *see* nav one-bravo… There's smoke everywhere. This can't be right. Verify position, over."
[*Special*]: "Sensors read you dead over designated sector, Jericho… sector three-zero, nav one-bravo is right below you, over."
[*Popping static. Distant thunder.*]
[*Jericho Alpha*]: "Oh, hell! Orbital fire! That came from above!"
[*Special*]: "Say agai—"
[*Jericho Leader*]: "They're shelling everything! Outcast Special… there's *nothing* here! No friendly *or* hostile IFFs! It's just a wasteland down there… They're dead… *All* of them…"

—Transcript of AFFS comms traffic on Halloran V, 13 October 3069

FOR VENGEANCE OR JUSTICE

TIKONOV UNDER FIRE?

"Good evening, I'm Jason Flynn with breaking news from the front. We just received reports from Capella that Tikonov's HPG transmitter ceased operations some time yesterday. Rumors claim Duke Hasek's army may have assaulted the planet and silenced communications to keep the Strategios unaware of the true extent of Davion aggression along the Chaos March border. But the Tikonov shutdown may also merely be part of the massive HPG outage in and around the coreward border of Word of Blake operations.

[*"We have claimed these worlds at the behest of their peoples, for their protection and salvation. It is a great day for the Word of Blake and a testament to Blake's will and prophecy. We shall stand firm in our resolve. We shall stand and face the wrath of the evil Succession Lords to defend the defenseless as the righteous warriors of Blake's will. Blessed be the Word of Blake!"*]

"Now I want to bring in retired *Sang-shao* Alexander Knight, our military analyst, about the current success of CCAF operations in the Capellan March. *Sang-shao* Knight, thank you for being here with us tonight. What is your expert opinion of Capellan success in Operations Thunderstrike and Celestial Vengeance?"

[*Knight*]: "Thank you for having me. Jason, in my opinion, it's simply phenomenal. Hasek and his generals seriously underestimated the resolve of the Capellan people and its military."

[*Flynn*]: "With the recent revelations from the Chaos March border, can the CCAF's advances against Hasek's troops benefit from these developments?"

[*Knight*]: "I don't believe so. Hasek sent troops across the border as a diversion to tie down any reinforcements. However, the bulk of his military participated in operations to liberate the St. Ives Commonality."

[*Flynn*]: "Thank you, *Sang-shao*. At this time, we'll break for our sponsors. Please stay with us…"

—Channel 2 News Special Report, KDBR (a CBS affiliate), Denbar, 15 September 3069

OUTRAGE!

It would appear we're rid of those thrice-damned Snow Ravens for a while. Let them choke on the Blakists. They deserve each other. One of our automated listening posts intercepted the transmission below. It took us this long to decode it. We're lucky the post just happened to be close enough to pick up that HPG communications circuit. It's partial, but we're lucky we got even this much.

>>>Transmission Begins<<<
[*Static*]
[*Lynn McKenna*]: "…trying times. This Word of Blake has cost us dearly, and they will pay for it sevenfold. Our fury is as righteous and just as it was when the Not-Named assaulted our holdings, and this time we will enact the punishment directly. But as I near the Inner Sphere, we must not let rage blind us. The campaign before us requires a stable base of operations and a proper infrastructure to support us. It is *imperative* that we accelerate our efforts to coordinate with the Outworlds Alliance. They have proven to us time and again that the essence of the Inner Sphere is not all corruption. In order to execute our planned revenge against those treacherous Spheroids…" [*Static*] "…we…" [*Static*]
>>>Transmission Ends<<<

—Communications intercept released by the Drake (veracity unconfirmed), Kaznejoy, 11 October 3069

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LIAO INVADED BY BLAKIST TROOPS

(5 November 3069)

Capella [CBS]—CBS has just received confirmation of a Word of Blake attack in progress against the Confederation world of Liao. The following is a transcript from CBS field reporter Jason Vedmeyer, currently embedded with the Dynasty Guards on Liao.

[*Vedmeyer*]: "I'm sending this report to you from the HPG station here on Liao. Just over a year ago—and after six months of hard fighting against the Eighth Syrtis Fusiliers—the Dynasty Guards, supported by Hell's Black Aces, reclaimed another world imperiled by Davion aggression. The CCAF high command left the Guards in place, replenished by captured equipment, to defend against any further attacks by Hasek's forces.

"Invasion eventually came, but it wasn't the Davions who darkened Liao's skies. This time, the invaders were the Word of Blake. Three days ago, a Blakist force calling itself the Twenty-first Division, 'Divine Right and Justice,' landed several kilometers outside the planetary capital. Alerted to their presence, the Dynasty Guards deployed and waited for the Blakists, while the mercenary Aces harried their still-inbound DropShips. The elite mercenary force inflicted several losses before falling back.

"Elements of the Twenty-first subsequently attempted to move on the capital but were immediately engaged by the Guards and defeated. Drawing on lessons learned in battle against the Fusiliers, the Guards unleashed a massive artillery barrage in concert with the Aces' aerial attacks. The entire Dynasty Guards then hit the Blakist division on three different flanks, decimating them and forcing their retreat. With several Blakist units still operating in the system, however, the Guards believe another invasion of this hallowed world is inevitable.

[*"Victory shall be ours! We will overcome all Heretics!"*]

"Reporting for KGSH Eyewitness 12, I'm Jason Vedmeyer."

CLASH OF TITANS

(13 October 3069)

Halloran V [FSNS]—Thousands, if not millions, are dead this hour and damage reports are still coming in as the battle for control over Halloran V escalated dramatically with the entry of Word of Blake naval forces, apparently engaging both of the forces already engaged below.

The attack came just days after elements of the Sixth Confederation Reserve Cavalry landed within 100 kilometers of the planetary capital of Gethin and advanced on an AFFS depot in that region. After the Capellan forces destroyed militia defenders, ransacked the base and leveled the compound, Major General Perry Nichols called up the rest of the Halloran Militia to intercept the attackers. Though Nichols' troops were outnumbered, they managed to hold back the Sixth until reinforcements arrived from the First FedSuns Armored Cavalry, who landed on the city outskirts under heavy aerospace cover and moved to engage the Capellans.

Over the next two days, both forces sparred on the outskirts of the capital, with the Sixth suffering serious casualties before the Cavalry finally caught the Capellans out of position. But before the Confederation troops could surrender, a Blakist WarShip that had slipped past the planetary sensor grids saturated both sides in a devastating orbital bombardment.

The bombardment continued for several hours as the hovering WarShip turned its guns on nearby cities and towns, ending around midnight local time. Officials estimate that the attacks decimated the Capellan and Allied units, who were last seen helping each other with casualties and salvage, while millions of Halloran civilians have been killed, injured or rendered homeless.

WORD OF BLAKE INVADES CONFEDERATION

During war, confusion is a tool an enemy uses to distract or blind an opponent. Such is the case in this war. Initially, based on electronic intelligence and other information, our military leadership believed that the Davion military was solely responsible for the attack on our coreward front. While we know Hasek's forces did cross the border last year, we now have proof of a new enemy who invaded our sovereign nation in a despicable act of blatant treachery.

The Blake Militia launched a massive invasion of our territory from their worlds in the Chaos March. To date, excluding Liao, the Word of Blake has assaulted Pleione, Ponzan and Gan Singh. We do not yet know exactly what is happening on each world. We have confirmed the attacks via reports from our ISAP writers on each planet, but we lost all contact when the HPGs went down.

Those who escaped tell of unbelievable atrocities. Wanton acts of violence against civilians with conventional arms and weapons of mass destruction have proven that the Word of Blake, not the Federated Suns, is our greatest enemy. We implore the Celestial Wisdom to turn his blessed eyes on the new threat posed by the religious technophiles of Terra. Our people, our nation, stand at the brink of the abyss. The Word of Blake is a clear and present danger to the Capellan Confederation and we should resolve to meet them with everything we have.

—Jamal Washburn, ISAP, Styx Times Journal (Sunday Edition), 21 November 3069

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DAILY BRIEF

*****For Immediate Release*****
(30 November 3069)

This is a routine summary report provided to all Lyran media outlets to give an accurate picture of the war effort against the Free Worlds League and their Word of Blake allies. You may use any part of the following as a confirmed source from the War Department of Skye.

Skye/Bolan Front Update:
Systems captured from FWL:

Autumn Wind, Gannett, Megrez, Niihan, Pingree, Preston, Thermopolis, Togwotee, Rexburg, Shasta and Sheridan. Allied forces have also reclaimed Alcor, Mizar, Summer, Syrma and Zebebelgenubi—all Alliance worlds temporarily lost to FWLM forces.

Systems lost to the FWL:

Giausar, Preston

Systems still under attack by FWL forces:

Alchiba, Arcadia, Cascade, Cavanaugh II, Colfax, Denebola, Dixie, Ford, Gallatin, Idyld, Khon Kaen, Loric, McAfee, Milton, Penobscot, Phecda, Poulsbo, Solaris VII, Timbiqui and Wyatt.

The Word of Blake recently attempted to invade Menkent, Skye and Summer, though LAAF forces repulsed all three attacks. Unfortunately, the capital of Curitiba on Summer was leveled by nuclear weapons. Relief forces and aid have been dispatched from Skye. The Blakist task force that subsequently threatened Skye was savagely repulsed by the LAS *Fylgia* and her escorts with minor losses to the defending Skye fleet. Menkent suffered minor damage from a few random orbital attacks, but local aerospace defenders managed to throw back the enemy before the Blakists could inflict serious harm.

Fighting along the Bolan front is at a standstill as Duke Umayr of Bolan prepares for another push into the League to exploit FWLM confusion evidenced in many League border provinces. The Skye/Bolan push headed by Duke Kelswa-Steiner is clearly going well. Additional reinforcements and mercenary units are en route to embattled worlds.

For further information, contact the Skye War Department at ComStar account SK-5229-WDS-4.

—Kommandant Lee Parroti, Skye War Department

AND IN OTHER NEWS…

DEFIANCE

"Lies, damn lies and the Captain-General's truths. The Pretender of Atreus wants us to trust him, to believe that he had our best interests at heart while he staged a coup d'etat and lied through his teeth for more than thirty years. This wasn't one bad decision, one white lie to cover up an indiscretion, one act of cronyism. It was three decades of habitual deceit and manipulation, of attempts to gather power into his hands. Look at the Addendum to the Incorporation. To the reformation of the FWLM. Tell me then that he hasn't sought to bolster his own position at the expense of others.

"Some people have said his track record gives him the justification to rule and that the Marik clan supports him in this. It is true that some have come out in support of the impostor, but only because they were swayed by his promises and lies. They have forgotten too soon that "Thomas" was more than willing to sell off his daughter—whom we now learn isn't—to safeguard the Capellan border, and had no use for her once Sun-Tzu cast her off. They have forgotten the fate of Kristen Marik, her daughter Ana and her son Janos, all because Thomas put the Free Worlds before "family." To me, that is not forgiveness. It is weak-willed capitulation—and with it, I believe, goes the Mariks' right to govern the Free Worlds. Any who choose to support the fraud over their own family are traitors to the League and their own blood.

"The Act of Succession gives the Marik clan the right of first refusal of the Captain-Generalcy but it does not give them an absolute claim to the post. With their steadfast support of an illegal impostor, they have to all intents abrogated their right to nominate a candidate to the office of Captain-General. Therefore, by default the post should fall to the head of one of the other founding states: Oriente and Regulus.

"Christopher Halas is bound by blood to the fraud, and thus his candidature is suspect. That leaves Regulus as the only true bastion of League freedoms. With that in mind, and following my directive regarding the fraud's efforts to convene a fake Parliament to legitimize his post, I enact the provisions of the Succession Act and merge all federal authority with the post of Prince of Regulus, and assume the post of Captain-General. Henceforth, no federal bodies or troops are to accept the orders of the individual claiming to be Thomas Marik, nor shall they offer him succor. Instead, they shall deliver up said individual to Regulus for trial under Free Worlds law."

—League-wide address by Kirc Cameron-Jones, Prince of Regulus (Captain-General), 7 August 3069

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NEW MARIK CAPTAIN-GENERAL INSTALLED

(10 August 3069)

Atreus [ATREUS CHRONICLE]—"The traitor who illegally held this office has been removed from power and a true Marik sworn in." This curt announcement by the Minister of Intelligence represented the first official confirmation that the man people had until recently believed to be Thomas Marik has been deposed, though it had been obvious since the small hours that a military operation was underway in the Capital. "Captain-General Corinne Marik has been confirmed by DNA matching as descended from the Marik bloodline, and received the acclamation of senior members of the Marik clan on Atreus."

Though having little reason to doubt the veracity of Paul Marik's assertions, or the ascension of his daughter—a development some factions have touted for more than a decade—sources close to the throne suggest a darker motivation. The curious wording of the pronouncement seems designed to obscure the fact that this *was* a coup d'etat and that Parliament has not ratified Corinne's installment. It also seems likely that despite the phrasing, a small clique of the Marik clan selected her; the present communication difficulties make it a challenge to consult with family members on Marik, Tamarind and elsewhere.

The vastly bolstered troop presence on the streets of the capital has discouraged mass gatherings for or against the events in the Palace. With a de facto state of martial law in effect, travel is only possible for those with official passes. How long these restrictions will last is unclear.

PUPPET MASTERS

[*Paul Marik, center frame*]: "… acclamation of senior members…"
[*Reporter, off-camera*]: [*Whispered*] "There, to the right, the trooper…" [Camera shakes and re-orients]
[*Paul Marik, off-camera*]: "…of the Marik clan on Atreus. Thank you."
[*Reporter, off-camera*]: [*Whispered*] "You recognize the armor? Doesn't look like FWLM standard issue."
[*Cameraman, off-camera*]: [*Muffled*] "Some Irian Skunkworks job?"
[*Official, off-camera*]: "And that concludes the news conference. Additional briefing documents will…"
[*Reporter, off-camera*]: [W*hispered*] "It's familiar. I'm sure I've seen something like it before."
[*Official, off-camera*]: "…be available in the lobby."
[*Reporter, off-camera*]: [*Whispered*] "Quick, zoom in on the torso. Further. Tighten on the logo…" [*A Marik eagle springs into view.*]
[*Cameraman, off-camera*]: [*Muffled*] "Hello. Is that what I think it is...?" [*The shot pans a little to reveal the broadsword behind the eagle.*]
[*Reporter, off-camera*]: [*Whispered*] "Uh huh. I think toaster-worship just became the state religion…."

Details of casualties in the operation remain unclear also, but witnesses report hearing gunfire in several parts of the city, as well as seeing numerous ambulances. No one yet knows the fate of "Thomas Marik," though the Minister's pronouncement implies that he is not in custody. Court rumor suggests the former leader has fled but that several members of his family were killed during the night.

Corinne Marik, the fifty-first Captain-General of the Free Worlds League (though that title is contested by Prince Kirc Cameron-Jones of Regulus) was not available for comment.

"DOES PEACE HAVE A CHANCE?"

[*Alethea Colby (Foreign Ministry Attaché, ret.,* Foreign Market Report*)*]: "The fact that worlds have split away from the League because of the impostor Thomas makes any kind of unified response to this crisis impossible until he steps down. The loss of the Irian industrial base alone is crippling our economy. Like it or not, any response we make will be fueled not by patriotic fervor, but by our ability to financially mount and maintain a military force. And to rebuild."

[*Colonel Caleb Montieth (FWLM, ret.,* Armed Forces News*)*]: "Fake or not, the Thomas Marik we've got has worked for the best interests of the Free Worlds League for years. True, he admits he was originally placed by ComStar—but they've dropped all support of him. In fact, they're working against him on several fronts because he chose the League over Blake. Right now he's more stabilizing than divisive. Jeremy Brett recognizes this and is working to rally the united military behind him."

[*Keith D'Candide (syndicated columnist,* Free Worlds Features*)*]: "Behind Jeremy Brett, you mean! He's feigning loyalty to Tommy the Fake because once the dust settles, the impostor will be the easiest leader to topple. After all, he has no legitimate claim to the Captain-Generalship."

[*Montieth*]: "Surely you're not suggesting Jeremy Brett intends to assume the C-G?"

[*D'Candide*]: "No. But he is a father. Once the crisis is over—assuming he's successful and Tommy the Fake remains in office—he'll be in an excellent position to broker a new dynasty."

[*Colby*]: "Again, the key issue is economics, not politics. Without the fiscal infrastructure to maintain a government—particularly a government rebuilding after a tragedy of this magnitude—a faction based on deceit and military prowess will not succeed. Though much of his support is regional, Kirc Cameron-Jones represents—"

[*D'Candide*]: "A power-hungry opportunist willing to tear the League apart rather than have it survive without him as Captain-General."

[*Colby*]: "The incident on your home world was unfortunate—"

[*D'Candide*]: "Unfortunate?!"

[*Monteith*]: "What do you recommend, Candy? What sort of leadership to get us out of this mess?"

[*D'Candide*]: "The Free Worlds League's greatest strength has always been our people. The Captain-Generalship was conceived to meet an emergency; it grew to become a hereditary title, the

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time for which has passed. In the present crisis, the people must decide our course. An openly elected leader—regardless of what title we give her or him—is the only way the Free Words League will attain its full potential."

[*Colby*]: "God, you're a dreamer."

—Partial transcript from *Commentators' Weekly Roundtable*, first aired 13 September 3069

FYLGIA RETURNS FROM THE DEAD!

(29 September 3069)

Skye [FREE SKYE PRESS]—Still bearing battle scars from Alarion, the LAS *Fylgia* appeared at Skye two weeks ago—after avoiding Blakist pursuit for several months and shunning all contact for as long as possible, despite the rumored sightings at Noisiel and Gallery. Admiral Helena Danvers is said to be eager to replenish the *Fylgia*'s stores of ammunition and supplies so that she can quickly pay the Blakists back "with interest." Already many locals are jumping at the chance to become part of her crew. Numerous requests to do so—both formal and unofficial—have reportedly already been filed with the admiral.

With the *Fylgia* back in the fight, we can expect to see some reversals in the near future.

[*Free Skye Press—Be advised of the following:*

The above article cannot be transmitted, per Ducal Decree 3069/71, which specifically prohibits the transmission of any facts related to or mention of the Mjolnir-*class cruiser* Fylgia *through any channels.*

If you repeat this offense, this crime is punishable by ten (10) years in prison and 100,000 kroner per responsible person, per offense.

—Office of Duke Ryan Kelswa-Steiner]

UNEXPECTED SURPRISE

[*Static*]

[*Able*]: "…confirmed, the jump signature is the *Fylgia*! Say again, we face the *Fylgia*! Command, we must abort, we do not have the resources to engage that *Mjolnir*!"

[*Baker*]: "I'm with Louis, Command. Lets get the [deleted] out of here! Her fighters will be all over us in ten more minutes!"

[*Command*]: "Form up to engage those fighters. Make a hole."

[*Baker*]: "Which fighters, Command? The wing that came from the station, the wing that the *Mjolnir* is launching, or the wing those Lyran droppers shat out?"

[*Able*]: "[*Deleted*]! We're [*deleted*] dead!"

[*Charlie*]: "Cut the chatter! Break through the *Fylgia* fighters. Fifth and Sixth squadrons are about to launch. *We'll* deliver Blake's wrath on that Heretic cruiser. So quit crying and get the job done."

[*Baker*]: "Now you're cooking with fusion! All right, form on me, cupcakes. This'll get a bit rough and chunky, but we outmass those Lyran butt-drips, so put your backs into it and make the hole for—"

[*Charlie*]: "Disengage from this frequency! That station is monitoring!"

[*Static*]

—Intercepted comm transmissions attributed to Blakist forces near north polar monitoring station *Rochelle*, Skye, 4 October 3069

BLOODY SKYE

(7 October 3069)

Terra [VOICE OF BLAKE]—Today we salute the defenders of Skye who lost much in their haphazard defense of Duke Robert's home. Though we do not understand why so many military men sell their souls for a deceiving, power-mad noble who claims questionable lineage to the corrupted Steiner bloodline, we admire their perseverance against our smaller fleet.

VOICE OF THE FORGOTTEN

Hi Mom, I'm well. The invasion started out easy but now it's gotten tougher. All that time in the academy and now I finally get to show off my stuff. Combat is exciting until it's over and I have to get out of the 'Mech, to see what it does to people. The Eagles are finally recovering from the initial hit and they aren't falling as quick. I took down three on Cascade and one here on [*censored*]. When we hit [*censored*] I'll be sure to be an ace. We sure could use some snacks, TP and toothpaste. Luckily we took a deodorant factory, so I'll send you guys a crate later. I hope things are going well back home and I miss you and Jamie. I really regret missing her graduation.

Love, Jeremy

Hey folks, I'm still hanging in there. Just like I told you, I made ace when I took down a *Hermes II* here on [*censored*]. Then the Eagles hit back, hard, with a heavy lance. I pulled their lead *Orion* off to the side and managed to take it down. My *Clint* took out an *Orion*! But when I got back, a *Quickdraw* had killed Billy Thompson and tore up Jinny Taylor's *Uziel* before my reappearance sent their two 'Mechs back to their lines. We're going to try to get Billy's *Blitzkrieg* fixed up so Jinny can pilot it, but it's weird having her pilot his 'Mech. And we're low on ammo, so I don't know how useful it's going to be. Well, there went another warning. I'll write again soon.

Love, Jeremy

—Private letters found among the effects of Leutnant Jeremy Minderhoff (MIA on McAffee 27 November 3069), dated mid-October 3069

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Our naval force did not expect such stiff resistance. The presence of the cowardly *Fylgia*—which obviously took advantage of the chaos in Alarion to slip away from her Tharkan masters—merely confirms that Duke Kelswa has his own interests at heart. Our attempt to put down such a traitorous crew failed only somewhat, however, as we managed to wipe out most of the support vessels and shattered the planetary aerospace defenses. Rest assured that we will return to finish the job, once the *Fylgia* and her crew have had time to repent their cowardly and traitorous ways and return to the Alliance. There, we can give them the honorable death they deserve, so that the men and women of the *Fylgia* might go down in history as misguided heroes rather than as traitors to their country.

So prepare what meager resources you have left, Duke Kelswa. Blake's judgment is calling and finds you wanting. Remember, you are the one who declared war on our allies in the League. We will punish you for your naked ambition and unwarranted aggression.

The Hand is coming. And you will succumb.

IF NOT FOR KING, THEN FOR COUNTRY

(3 November 3069)

[*Cue images of the nuclear holocaust at Tharkad City, mushroom cloud rising high into the air.*]

"Tharkad. Our capital. Our leadership. Our citizens. In one fell swoop the Blakists tried to decapitate our nation, launching their attacks from the lost pride of the Lyran Navy, the hero of Hesperus II, the LCS *Invincible*! Not content with that, their Marik puppets also launched an unprovoked attack on Skye. Since then, the Blakists have launched assault upon assault against our worlds, doing their best to cripple our military and industrial might. It is only because of men like Marshal Adam Steiner that the Archon is still alive and the LAAF is fighting back.

"Already the Mariks have sued for peace, unable to continue their offensive against us. But still we have enemies out there, foul cowards who take advantage of our plight to stab us in the back. The Clans will pay in the end, but only after the Blakists are dealt with.

"Citizens of the Alliance! These are the times that try our souls, these are the times in which you can do your duty to your nation! The valiant Lyran Alliance Armed Forces needs YOU! Planetary militia academies are quickly being upgraded to turn out not just infantry and armored units, but also MechWarriors and aerospace pilots to replace those who already have given the ultimate sacrifice for the Alliance.

"Will you sit and cower until the Clans or the Blakists come? Adam Steiner, the Alliance and the future of the Inner Sphere depends on YOU!"

"Paid for by Brotherhood Press and Concerned Citizens for a Secure Commonwealth."

FOX'S TEETH STILL SHARP

(11 November 3069)

Mira [FSNS]—The Word of Blake's grip on the Federated Suns world of Demeter remains far from firm, as was demonstrated graphically last month when McKinnon's Company raided the planet.

Also known as McKinnon's Raiders and as the Fox's Teeth, this crack company of the elite Seventh Crucis Lancers has been striking Blakist-held worlds for months. Under the command of Captain Ross McKinnon, they have caused confusion and inflicted damage on our enemy far out of proportion to their small size. While the objectives of the Raiders' campaign remain classified, the AFFS has released details from the first field tests of a new battle armor design attached to the company.

On Demeter, the Blakists' Call to the Faithful III-delta dispatched troops to pursue McKinnon's elusive 'Mech force, only to fall into a carefully coordinated ambush. Thinking they had finally cornered the Raiders' BattleMechs, the Blakist advance was thrown into chaos when a company of the new Hauberk assault battlesuits emerged from concealment behind them. Caught in a hail of missile fire from the battle armor, the Word's lighter equipment was swiftly destroyed. Before the surviving Blakists could turn on the infantry, McKinnon's 'Mechs launched their own attack. Few of the enemy survived to flee the field, and our troops departed Demeter.

The AFFS reportedly is "very happy" with the performance of the new equipment, and believes it will be an invaluable asset in "driving the Blakists from our worlds."

"PAYBACK ON BETELGEUSE"

(12 November 3069)

Betelgeuse [FWLN]—The sky is clear over the Firmir Commercial plant on the banks of the Whiskey River. It's spring here, dawn, and the sky to the east is turning copper, red and gold as the rays of the rising sun pass through the smoke above Ymyr—the city in flames.

It was noon local time when the First Free Worlds Legionnaires descended on Betelgeuse, having jumped in-system via a near-orbit pirate point from Conquista.

The First Aerospace Wing under Commodore Wilerby Rosslyn was the first to engage the enemy when Warrior House Kamata's aerospace rose to meet the attack. Composed almost entirely of *Transgressor*s, the Kamata wing attempted to keep the fight above the atmosphere, but the First's *Stingray*s and *Rievers*—led by the command lance of Commodore Rosslyn and Commander Barbara Williamson in their new Lopez-produced *Shiva*s—slashed their defensive shield to ribbons.

With clear aerospace superiority, General Tracy Fenton placed her forces on the surface unencumbered. While the First and Second battalions struck various key military and logistical targets, the Third attacked the House Kamata stronghold. Though lighter overall, the Third's mix of *Eagle*s, *Wraith*s and *Hammer/Anvil* lances was more than a match for the Kamata *Jinggau*s, *Lao Hu*s and *Sha Yu*s.

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With the planet's defenses effectively neutralized, General Fenton set about reducing the Betelgeuse threat with the same efficiency she employed in neutralizing the Magistracy Dragonslayers and Marshigama's Legionnaires during their unprovoked sneak attack on Andurien in 3066.

As our Karnovs flew without need of escort from the landing zone to the Firmir plant—one of several industrial sites being stripped of technology that might be used against the Duchy of Andurien—this reporter finds hope that unmolested flight, like this golden dawn, may prove a precursor of a new day for the duchy and the Free Worlds League.

With the First Free Worlds Legionnaires on Betelgeuse, I'm Liz Althea.

BRETT OFFERS CEASE-FIRE TO ALLIANCE

***** Breaking News*****

(2 December 3069)

Bolan [BBC]—Only minutes ago, Duke Alder Umayr of Bolan completed an impromptu press briefing on the steps of Government Hall in Bolan City, in which he announced Bolan's receipt of an armistice proposal—apparently more than a month old—from Marshal Jeremy Brett of the Free Worlds League. This move appears to follow Brett's previously unexplained unilateral moves to halt the fighting by scaling down and even pulling back his troops along the border.

Umayr, while refusing to be drawn on the particulars of the proposal, was quietly optimistic. "[Brett's proposal] provides a real opportunity to end this conflict and restore the Bolan worlds to a sense of normalcy. Too many sons and daughters of our province have given their lives to this Blake-bred conflict. We must do all in our power to end the senseless bloodshed."

The Duke's aides likewise sounded upbeat, calling the development a positive move that benefited both sides, though many obstacles remain to be overcome.

It is not yet clear if similar proposals have been made to Duke Robert Kelswa-Steiner and Duchess Hermione Aten of Skye. Though recent evidence suggests that Brett wishes to restore peace along the whole League-Alliance border, no news has emerged from the beleaguered Isle. However, given that the province is reeling under Free Worlds operations and has also become a prime focus for Blakist invasions, the slow response is unsurprising. Only the coming days will show whether the hopes of Duke Umayr and the people of Bolan can be realized.

NEWS DOWNLOADER v3.7

Date & Title	*Service*	*Status*
(20 April 3069) "Moore, Sabik Fall to Blakist Invaders"	[DBC]	COMPLETED
(25 April 3069) "Capellan/Blakist Onslaught Drives Wedge Near Kittery"	[KNN]	DOWNLOADING
(20 May 3069) "Raven Warpath Claims Four Worlds"	[ISAP]	ACCESSING

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CHAOS UNLEASHED: BRUTE FORCE

BRUTE FORCE

The Caselton asteroid belt was formed more than three million years ago, when two mid-sized planetoids intersected in their orbits. The resulting collision occurred in slow motion over time, creating gigantic chunks of rock that gradually separated along a wobbly path around the system primary. Influenced by gravitational effects from the two nearby gas giants, the Cassini Belt—as the local scientific community named it—has spread out into a snake-like string that plods along its orbital path. The string contains more than two million identified asteroids, with more than 900 of them at least 50 km or larger across.

Because of the high mineral content of both intersecting planetoids, the Cassini Belt is known in the Federated Suns as among the best sources of germanium, nickel, zinc and silver.

—From the *Federated Atlas* (3065 edition)

SITUATION

Site 2B, Cassini Belt
Caselton, Federated Suns
10 September 3069

Every once in a while, you get a contract offer that you have to take—not because it's a peach or on some exotic ocean world, but because it's the proverbial "tough nut." Caselton, at first glance, is one of them.

A challenge, to be sure, but the payoff is worth it. Seems Mr. Askai's employers are all hot to trot in cracking this particular nut. Several clauses of the contract contain so much legalese, they practically scream "corporate," but other parts seem ill defined. After brief but intense negotiations, your unit landed the contract to break open Site 2B, part of the Caselton Mining Corporation's string of germanium mines.

Why take it when it looks so tough? Ego. Break this sucker and bragging rights are yours—as well as a justified increase in rates. And right now, with mercs under the microscope everywhere, nailing a place like this can only enhance your reputation, guaranteeing more solid work ahead.

Time to break out those nutcrackers. So where is the rest of the crew?

CHAOS UNLEASHED: BRUTE FORCE

GAME SET-UP

CBT: Use Mountain Terrain maps. The gamemaster should place the HQ (Level 2; CF 80) within five hexes of one map edge. Place the power station (Level 1; CF 50) within ten hexes of the HQ building. This track uses the Low Gravity and vacuum rules (see pp. 84-85, *BMR*).

AT2: Use Space maps. The gamemaster should place the HQ space station (Armor 50; SI 30) within five hexes of one map edge. Place the power station (Armor 40; SI 10) on an asteroid within five hexes of the HQ station.

RPG: Gamemasters may set up for a space or ground battle using the above rules as a guideline. Gamemasters will need to prepare blueprints of each section in case the player group decides to go the infiltration route. Security should be difficult but not impossible, with most TNs around 10.

Attacker

The Attacker consists of up to 100 percent of the players' total force. The Attacker deploys on the map edge farthest from the HQ building. Starting Velocity (if applicable) must be 3 or lower.

Defender

The Defender consists of elements of the Second Davion Guards RCT. The Defender's force equals 100 percent of the Attacker's total deployed force and has Elite experience. Add five RAC 2 turrets (CF 60; 20 rounds per turret) and place the turrets before the Attacker deploys. Turrets must be no farther than twelve hexes from the power station. Space turrets (Armor: 50, SI: 10, armed as ground turrets) are placed on stationary asteroids.

The Defender enters on the map edge closest to the HQ building. Starting Velocity (if applicable) must be 5 or lower.

WARCHEST

Track Cost: 700 WP

Optional Bonuses (all bonuses cumulative):

+250 Transport Glitch: Part of the Attacker's transportation gets separated from the main group or develops mechanical problems; reduce the Attacker's force build to 75 percent of the players' total force.

+400 Sandstorm: Use rules for Blowing Sand (ee p. 153, *CBTComp* or p. 11, *MT*). For *AT2* games, consider the track as taking

CHAOS UNLEASHED : BRUTE FORCE

place in a heavy dust cloud trailing the asteroid field and use the same effects.

Victory Bonuses (not cumulative):

+600 Partial Victory: Complete one objective.

+1,000 Complete Victory: Complete all objectives.

–300 Total Defeat: Complete no objectives.

OBJECTIVES

1. Take down that network! Destroy the power hub and all turrets.

2. Sever system coordination: Destroy the headquarters building.

3. Soften 'em up! Destroy or cripple at least 75 percent of the Defender's force.

SPECIAL RULES

The following rules are in effect for this track.

Forced Withdrawal

The Second Davion Guards follow the *Forced Withdrawal* rule.

Initiative Bonus

The gamemaster should designate one of the Defender's units as the operational leader. As long as that leader remains on the battlefield, the Defender gains a +2 Initiative bonus. This bonus is lost once the leader is removed from battle.

Turrets

In addition to following the rules for Gun Emplacements (see p. 53, *BMR*), each turret is independently powered and rotated, and so the destruction of the power station does not affect them. All turrets have Gunnery Skill 3 for this track. To reflect their quirky fire control systems, each turret suffers a +1 penalty to all to-hit rolls if the hex containing the turret is covered by enemy ECM.

AFTERMATH

You gave it your best. Shattered the turrets and blew the power station just like you were told. Too bad that whole setup didn't even affect Site 2B. Seems Askai's contacts had really crappy intel. Not sure you want to hook up with this fool again, unless you negotiate your own intel operation next time.

As you burn out-system, your transport captain points out a cluster of dots on his threat board. "Unidentified, as far as they're transmitting, but all of those are transports loaded to the gills. One of the boys on the *Gulag Savior* owes me a favor, sent me a scan of that little gaggle. No transmissions, no CAP, nuthin'. Dunno if that's an invasion force waiting to go in on the signal or a recharging effort. Either way, someone nearby's gonna get hammered soon…."

ADDITIONAL HOOKS

What other defenses lurk in the Caselton mines? And just how tough a nut is this place to crack? Someone out there would love to have that intel, no doubt.

Expansion Ideas

Gamemasters can link several scenarios in this track, possibly splitting up the objective buildings among several maps. Alternatively, the players' force can help assist another small merc command hitting an asteroid mine nearby. Regardless of what the players decide, it becomes obvious that a full-scale assault on the Cassini Belt is underway. Someone wants those resources, bad.

NEXT TRACK

Living Dead Men; Panic and Pain; Binge, Purge, Flush

CHAOS UNLEASHED : LIVING DEAD MEN

LIVING DEAD MEN

[*HPG Command*]: *"Unidentified DropShip, you are infringing on restricted airspace. Change your vector now or we will assume you have hostile intent."*

[*Badger One*]: *"Command, DropShip is not responding. Vector has not changed."*

[*HPG Command*]: *"Unidentified DropShip, this is your final warning. Abort your current trajectory and divert to Kalidasa Port. We do not wish to burn you from the sky."*

[*Badger Two*]: *"One, I'm reading active fire control. We're being targeted."*

[*Badger One*]: *"Back off to two thousand meters. Any sign of attack, go evasive."*

[*HPG Command*]: *"Course unchanged. Badger flight, the Precentor has authorized weapons free. Repeat, you are weapons free. Divert that DropShip."*

[*Badger One*]: *"Roger, Command. Weapons free. Be advised, the DropShip is opening bay doors. Prepare ground troops for landside attack. Badger Two, punch it. Let's go hunting."*

SITUATION

HPG Compound AA-2, Tagus Metropolis
Talitha, Free Worlds League
8 December 3069

During a passing stint through the Free Worlds, your Galatean liaison notified you of a quick month-long contract to beef up a garrison on Talitha. The Precentor there is missing his standing force, and during the ensuing flurry of merc contracts, he neglected to cover a gap in December. A garrison contract usually blows, but it's only a month, giving you just enough time to stand down for repair and refit without getting too bored. Another merc command is due at the turn of the year, so what's the harm?

Turns out some other mercs—apparently part of the decimated AMC—heard about the gap in coverage and decided to launch a raid. Too bad their intel wasn't good. Now you not only get to rest up, but some easy salvage is dropping in, ripe for the picking.

CHAOS UNLEASHED: LIVING DEAD MEN

GAME SET-UP

CBT: Use any Urban Terrain maps. Gamemasters should place and designate a building as the HPG station (minimum Heavy Level 3 building).

AT2: Use at least two Space maps and the *Atmospheric Operations* rules (see p. 18, *AT2*). Gamemasters should place a satellite uplink station (Armor 60; SI 25) within three hexes of the Planet Interface row.

RPG: Gamemasters should use a similar setup as described above for a ground or space battle. All station personnel should use the standard Soldier NPC template (see p. 207, *CBT: RPG*).

Attacker

The Attacker is elements of the Third Dismal Disinherited and Burton's Brigade mercenary commands. The AMC units should be 150% of the Defender's total deployed force and are of Veteran skill level. The Disinherited units roll on Column B of any Mercenary Random Assignment Table (see 122, *Field Manual: Mercenaries, Revised*). The Brigade's units (of which there should be no more than nine 'Mechs) roll on Column C of any Mercenary Random Assignment Table (see 122, *Field Manual: Mercenaries, Revised*).

The Attacker may choose two map edges from which to enter, but must declare one edge as his "home" edge for any forced withdrawals. Starting Velocity (if applicable) should be less than 6.

Defender

The Defender is the player group; they may use up to 100 percent of their total force. The Defender sets up anywhere within ten hexes of the HPG/uplink satellite. Starting Velocity (if applicable) should be less than 3.

WARCHEST

***Track Cost*:** 750 WP

Optional Bonuses (all bonuses cumulative):

+300 Combat Drop! (CBT Only): The Attacker may deploy up to all of his available force through a combat drop maneuver (see *Dropping Troops*, p. 78, *BMR*).

+300 High Speed Insertion! (AT2 only): The Attacker enters the battlefield at a minimum velocity of 7 and receives a +2 bonus to Initiative rolls for the first two turns.

CHAOS UNLEASHED: LIVING DEAD MEN

+300 High Winds: See High Wind rules, p. 153, *CBTComp* or 12, *MT*. For a space battle, a combination of massive sunspot activity, strong local magnetic fields and gravity creates the same effect.

–500 Early Reinforcements: The Defender may bring in additional reinforcements. These troops are Regular and may equal 50 percent of the Defender's total deployed force. To determine units, roll on Column A of the ComStar, Word of Blake and/or Mercenary RATs. The reinforcements enter from the map edge closest to the HPG/satellite station.

Victory Bonuses (not cumulative):

+900 Partial Victory: Completing two objectives.

+1,200 Total Victory: Completing all objectives.

–400 (cumulative): If Objective One is not completed.

OBJECTIVES

1. Defend with your lives! The HPG/orbital satellite uplink must survive the track.

2. We need information: Capture an enemy soldier by crippling or capturing an attacking unit.

3. Remain in control until reinforcements can arrive: At least 50 percent of the Defender's deployed force should survive for at least ten turns.

SPECIAL RULES

The following rules are in effect for this track.

Third Dismal Disinherited

When rolling to randomly determine lance composition, twice per lance (or wing) the player controlling any of the Disinherited units may roll on Column C of either the Random Assignment Table: Federated Suns (see p. 139, *Field Manual: Federated Suns* or p. 225, *Field Manual: Updates*) or Random Assignment Table: Lyran Alliance (see p. 127, *Field Manual: Lyran Alliance* or p. 227, *Field Manual: Updates*).

Gift

If the player group achieves a Total Victory, their employer gives them an additional 200 Warchest Points with which to purchase new units. These points may not be used for any other purpose.

AFTERMATH

After Action Report 4992-T

Okay, maybe not so easy. Those AMC jocks fought with their lives to get at the HPG station—but ultimately to no avail. Good salvage though. These mercs've been living on the hog lately. They must've mauled a Blakist force or raided a supply base—some of their machines were Word designs.

We got some argument from the WoB Precentor at the HPG regarding that. He claims it's all Blakist property and offered us a small sum of money in exchange, but good ol' Harrison looked it up on the Interweb and noted that the equipment we scored is worth a hell of a lot more than what he offered. We reached an agreement eventually—we handed over the C^3i equipment but got to keep the 'Mechs and vehicles. The Blakie gizmos are pretty sweet, but those machines we brought down will last a lot longer. Plus, we finagled some time in the garrison's empty repair bays, so the Blakies will bring us up to fighting trim a lot quicker.

While we don't trust the Word all that much, considering that they caused some of the problems out there, I've got a better feel for this crew. Being abandoned by the Blakie high command also stands in their favor—seems the First Circuit (or whatever they call them now) doesn't much like these "Expatriates". My guess is, the big boys are just looking for a way to whack these folks without doing it themselves. Of course, I wouldn't put it past the Blakies to have hired out the Dismal D to do just that.

ADDITIONAL HOOKS

The AMC forces may decide to hit the garrison through more covert means, or may bring in additional help. They may even subvert some of the citizenry to their cause and gain other, less orthodox help in taking down the HPG compound. Regardless, there's no love lost between the Word of Blake and the AMC.

Expansion Ideas

If the AMC forces come in covertly, the gamemaster may need to run recon scenarios in order to pinpoint their location. The Defender can use Stand Up and Fight proactively to avert an attack, or the mini-campaign may dovetail into a brutal Base Defense scenario.

More covert operations can occur using the *CBT: RPG* rules, with players rooting out nascent rebel cells or even using a double agent to spring a trap. Alternatively, clever player groups may launch a pre-emptive strike on the Stalking Horse before they are ready to begin operations.

NEXT TRACK

Click, Click, Boom; Binge, Purge, Flush

CHAOS UNLEASHED: STIRRING THE ANTHILL

STIRRING THE ANTHILL

[*Sword One*]: *"Repeat, our position is grid YY by five. Requesting immediate recovery. Respond."*
[*Torch Two*]: *"Roger, Sword. This is Torch Two. ETA five minutes. Extraction zone is fubarred, fallback position Tango is now live."*
[*Sword One*]: *"Copy that, Torch Two. Better hurry, we've got some nice prizes for the R&D boys."*
[*Torch Two*]: *"Good to hear. Don't worry, we'll get you out. No problem."*
[*Sword One*]: *"May want to can the optimism, Torch. We've got company coming.* Ocelot *at range two kilometers."*
[*Torch Two*]: *"*Ocelot*? What the frag is that?"*
[*Sword One*]: *"Get your ass down here and find out. Going silent. Sword out."*

SITUATION

Mighty Spine Mountains, Badlands
Avon, Draconis Combine
25 December 3069

The Combine seems to be hiring mercs for everything nowadays. Considering your success back in 3068 during the Dieron campaign, the Dracs wanted to know if you'd be interested in another hush-hush mission. The amount of money they're offering made it a pretty easy decision.

The Dracs have been doing some small-unit training on Nova Cat worlds, helping the Clan bring its counter-intrusion operations up to snuff. The Watch, after all, isn't known for covert intelligence. So they've hired your command to sneak in and see if you can extract a small DEST squad from under the noses of the resident kittens.

CHAOS UNLEASHED: STIRRING THE ANTHILL

GAME SET-UP

CBT: Use Hills/Flatlands Terrain maps in a Chase format. The gamemaster should designate one edge as the entry edge for the DEST squad.

RPG: Set up the track following the *CBT* rules as a guide. The gamemaster should have a map of the area for reference.

Attacker

The Attacker is the player group; they may use up to 25 percent of their total force. The DEST force is a single squad of Kage battle armor.

The Attacker enters via the opposite edge of the battlefield from the Kage unit. The DEST unit is placed within six hexes of the gamemaster-designated edge.

Defender

The Defender is elements of the First Nova Cat Guards, all Elite troops, and equals 150 percent of the Attacker's total deployed force. The Defender's force should include one to three *Ocelot*s (see p. 138).

Up to half of the Defender's force enters on Turn Two from the gamemaster's designated edge. The other half enters the track after the Kage unit has made contact (within one hex of a mercenary unit) and enters from the Attacker's home edge.

WARCHEST

***Track Cost*:** 900 WP

Optional Bonuses (all bonuses cumulative):

+600 Polar Mission: The track occurs on the polar caps. Consider all Clear hexes as covered in ice (see p. 83-84, *BMR*), and use the optional Ice rules on p. 152, *CBTComp*. In addition, replace all Forest terrain hexes with Deep Snow (see p. 152, *CBTComp*).

+500 Visionaries: Deploy up to 25 percent of the Defender's force per the Hidden Units rule (see p. 83, *BMR*).

+400 Extra Boom: Add one SM1 Tank Destroyer (see p. 135) to the Defender's force for every two units the Attacker deploys.

Victory Bonuses (not cumulative):

+ 850 Partial Victory: Complete two objectives.

+1,400 Total Victory: Complete all objectives.

OBJECTIVES

1. New 'Mech, new toys: Capture an *Ocelot* by crippling it.

2. Smackdown! Destroy or cripple all defending forces.

3. Safe haven: At least one trooper in the Kage unit must survive the track.

4. ISF intel wanted: Capture at least three Nova Cat MechWarriors (destroy or cripple Defender units without killing the pilot).

CHAOS UNLEASHED: STIRRING THE ANTHILL

SPECIAL RULES

The following rules are in effect for this track.

Clan Honor

The Nova Cats do not honor *zellbrigen* with mercenaries, but do suffer a +2 penalty to all physical attack rolls.

Salvage

No salvage is possible during this track.

AFTERMATH

So the Nova Cats haven't been cowering in their caves like most everyone in the Inner Sphere thinks. They've been barreling down the research and development path, building a new BattleMech that frankly scares the heck out of your recon boys.

And the ISF helping the Cats with counter-intrusion? If you didn't know better, you'd swear the ISF was more about spying on the Cats than helping them. Especially considering the merry chase those aerojocks gave you on the outbound flight. They sure didn't seem to be playing around on a training mission!

So what in the world is the real relationship between the Cats and the Dragon?

ADDITIONAL HOOKS

Once a secret is known, can it be taken back? How far will the Nova Cats go to suppress the knowledge of their new design—and who would benefit from this information? Or better yet, the design specs? And what, exactly, did the ISF find out at that facility that the Cats were willing to fry some DEST troopers over?

What other secrets do the Cats harbor in that facility on Avon?

Expansion Ideas

Considering the zeal the Nova Cats may have in eliminating a mercenary threat to a research facility, the Clansmen could spend awhile pursuing the merc command, leading to many scenarios through various terrains. Weather and environment may also become factors, especially if the players take the polar route to completion.

NEXT TRACK

Click, Click, Boom; Panic and Pain; Binge, Purge, Flush

EARLY 3070: BLAKE ASCENDANT

EARLY 3070: BLAKE ASCENDANT

This third year of the new "succession war" (though we doubt the Blakists would call it that) continued to bring only dark news. Coordinator Theodore Kurita's passing at the dawning of the year only perpetuated the bleakness that began to encompass even the unaffected citizen. Continued war on Dieron and other worlds close to Terra brought to light rumors of civilian atrocities, prison camps that saw their occupants slaughtered like cattle or brainwashed into mindless zombies of the Blakist will.

Former allies in the Free Worlds League saw whole provinces "surrender" to the Word of Blake as the League continued to fracture, offering no protection to more independent worlds like Zion, Dubhe and Zosma. Rumors of entire League regiments switching sides to the Blakists ran rampant, causing many citizens of that once-grand alliance to begin questioning their own protectors.

The Clans took advantage of this chaos, with the Falcons and Wolves going from strong raids and feints into all-out invasion. The Falcons seized several Alliance planets weakened by the continued lack of united leadership, while the Wolves moved in parallel, seizing worlds of their own from the Falcons and the Alliance.

The Federated Suns fared no better, with continued war on New Avalon and the March lords carrying out their own agendas in neighboring realms. Duke Hasek's assassination at the hands of the Word of Blake brought fighting in the Confederation to a screeching halt, however, allowing troops on both sides a chance to breathe for the first time in two years.

The dawning of 3070 also saw the spread of the terror war. With the horror of bio-engineered plagues capable of killing entire worlds now confirmed on Galax and Alarion, other victims of such attacks—like Galedon—soon faced even greater tragedy as governments began to undertake extreme measures to contain the spread.

Peace does not appear to be on the horizon—only darker clouds that promise more war and death. In this "new age" of quick wars and instant results, the continued lingering conflict that seemingly engulfs the entire Inner Sphere has begun to drag down even the most stalwart proponents of peace. Meanwhile, the Blakists wage their war on all those who do not share their vision, intent on becoming the only dominant power left in the universe. We have seen the birth of a new Succession War unlike those that came before—a war not of leadership, but of tyranny and fear.

—Michael Bosworth, INN Special Correspondent

THE REAL ENEMY REVEALED

"Citizens of the Confederation, it is my sad duty as your Chancellor to inform you that an injustice on a monolithic scale was perpetrated against our beloved Sian. This outrage you may already know, but while we originally believed that the Federated Suns committed this act against us, earlier today I received undeniable proof that WarShips belonging to the Word of Blake actually launched this barbaric attack. Using modified IFF beacons to simulate Davion identification beacons, these traitors to humanity laid waste to the Forbidden City and most of the capital.

"Thanks to diligent efforts by the Maskirovka, our operatives uncovered the truth. Furthermore, we know who is ultimately responsible for the attacks in and around the Liao Commonality—the Word of Blake. In addition, though Hasek launched an illegal invasion against the peaceful citizens of the Confederation, he did not authorize any attack using WarShips against Sian. I recognize my government's responsibility in accusing the Federated Suns and hereby recant that claim.

"We have a common enemy. Instead of battling each other, the CCAF and AFFS should turn their focus toward the Word of Blake. They pose a clear and present danger to the security and stability of the Capellan Confederation and the Federated Suns. For us to continue our current actions will only sap our strength and weaken our ability to defend against those who seek to destroy our way of life. Therefore, I am offering to Duke George Hasek a cessation of all hostilities and an immediate cease-fire. Together our respective militaries must focus on eliminating the military threat posed by the Word of Blake. Thank you and good night."

—Confederation-wide broadcast by Chancellor Sun-Tzu Liao, Sian, 7 January 3070

STANDING ALONE

TO THE END OF ALL THINGS

8 Dec 3069—Wei

The Blakists have been here for only three days, but it seems as though three years have passed. More than half my platoon is dead; I no longer recognize the brave young faces of my soldiers, and can only guess which of the still, mangled bodies may have once been troopers under my command. Only *San-ben-bing* Ji-gin and I remain from the original complement; the rest are battlefield orphans we took in from other squads.

Somehow—on whose authority I know not—I have been promoted to the rank of *Sao-wei*, bypassing the senior enlisted ranks completely, and I now command a "platoon" of a dozen scared but resolute *Shia-ben-bing*. The oldest of them is nineteen. All are acutely aware of the duty before them and the gravity of their families' expectations, and will do the Confederation honor…as will their replacements.

The invaders claim noble purpose, but we on the front recognize their pretentious calls of "unity" for what they are. To the last man, we will resist the invasion of our glorious realm, and never will we forget the sacrifice of those who have come before us.

Xin Sheng!

—Excerpt from the diary of *Sang-wei* Tan Won, candidate for the Cluster of Conspicuous Heroism (KIA on Wei, 11 January 3070)

EARLY 3070: BLAKE ASCENDANT

CAPELLAN BARBARITY CONDEMNED ACROSS THE SPHERE

As we look back, only now are we finally beginning to comprehend the confusion blanketing the Inner Sphere. Nevertheless, closer to home we have a clearer picture of Hasek's failure in Operation Sovereign Justice, and the effects of the Capellans' brutal advance with the collapse of the Davion front. Moving rapidly, Confederation forces now control close to a third of the Capellan March's rimward territory.

Meanwhile, leaders throughout the Inner Sphere have voiced their shock, dismay or bemused surprise at the pace and methods of the Capellan advance.

From the Lyran Alliance, our affiliate station on Arc-Royal recorded this clip from General Adam Steiner's news briefing:

"What is the Lyran position on the Confederation's actions? We decry these actions taken against the Capellan March, the systematic destruction of infrastructure that helped maintain lives. Furthermore, we challenge the Chancellor to withdraw his troops to their original borders. The CCAF has proven its point; there's enough death now without them adding to it."

From embattled New Avalon (where FedSuns forces continue to clash with Word of Blake invaders), a press release attributed the following comments to Marshal Jackson Davion:

"On Talon, the Blackwind Lancers deployed nuclear weapons to kill millions! Though we condemned Hasek for his illegal actions against the Confederation and sent notice to Sian, nothing can justify this heinous attack! I call on the CCAF to condemn the Lancers as a rogue unit and bring them to justice. The Confederation should be condemned in the strongest of terms for such acts of wanton and merciless violence."

From our affiliate Ashio, representatives of the Combine's Coordinator had this to say:

"While the Dragon appreciates the Confederation's desire to preserve its integrity and to throw off the yoke of Davion oppression, we categorically condemn the unwarranted aggression in their drive to harshly punish the Davionist invaders with uncontrolled warfare that can only bring dishonor on House Liao. The Dragon politely cautions the Celestial Wisdom to temper his anger and respond only with the force needed to reclaim what was lost."

—Wilma Helms, Senior Editor, *INN Tonight*, Demeter, 2 January 3070

CAPELLANS FLEE NEW SYRTIS!

(12 February 3070)

New Syrtis [FSNS]—The Liao dogs have fled! With their tails between their legs, their entire force beat a hasty retreat from the surface and headed for the nadir jump point in disarray.

The fate of the *CCS Zhejiang* vividly illustrated the folly of their attack on New Syrtis. The *Impavido*-class destroyer was in the vanguard of the Liao fleet that jumped in-system in September last year and its approach to New Syrtis was bitterly contested. Despite heroic efforts by AFFC and mercenary forces, Capellan troops succeeded in reaching the ground—but not before the *Zhejiang* received a pounding from the *Bellerophon*, flagship of the Medusans' Basilisk Squadron. Though the mercenary assault DropShips were forced to quit the system, the invaders' troubles were just beginning. Whether because of the inferior technical skills of her Liao crew or as the result of battle damage sustained while trying to reach New Syrtis, the *Zhejiang* suffered a catastrophic drive failure when she attempted to jump out with the other fleeing Capellan units.

With House Liao now in full retreat, the question facing Duke Hasek is whether or not to allow the valiant defenders of the Capellan March to administer the chastisement the Capellans deserve. Or should he listen to Chancellor Liao's mewling cries for mercy and turn to deal with the marauding Word of Blake troops that even now strike into the Capellan March?

BLOOD FEUD

4 February

Un-fucking-believable! These goddamned Davions really don't see that they're done. We've been kicking their asses from the moment we landed. Yesterday, my company led the assault on the enemy infantry's skirmish line. My platoon cut through their APCs and light armored vehicles like a vibrodagger through plastic.

But these FedRats didn't flinch. They stood right there and fought for every inch of ground we took from them. I counted thirteen vehicle kills and one light 'Mech by my modified Patton. Damn, my hat's off to them, but hell! They kept fighting as if they were Capellans of old! Hah! It was a bloodbath, nearly 200 KIAs and only 20 POWs. We took heavy losses, too. I lost a third of my platoon, and we had it light. The company suffered 50 percent casualties.

HQ sent the company to the rear to rest and refit. Rumor mill is going strong. I learned from *Si-ben-bing* Carter in Echo Company that we're being recalled. I asked him where he heard this; he said he overheard it while a couple of O-gangers were talking shop in the can. I hope he's right. I'm ready to go home. We all are. I think we've kicked enough Davion ass to last us a lifetime.

[*Editor's Note:* Si-ben-bing *Sanders died in the line of duty during the recall to St. Ives*.]

—Excerpt from the diary of *Si-ben-bing* Abraham Sanders, Second Battalion of the First St. Ives Lancers' Thirty-third Armored

BLAKE ASCENDANT

OUR OWN INTERESTS

"…Thankfully, Protector Shraplen has once again remained steadfast in putting the interests of the Concordant over that of his allies. Today his stated refusal to send more troops to the aid of the Capellan Confederation, a fellow Trinity Alliance member, sends the signal that we *will* act in our own best interests when necessary.

"Citing lack of available resources since the outbreak of the Second Civil War, Shraplen has dodged the unfair obligations of the Trinity Alliance accords while maintaining the ability to claim he is assisting the Confederation by distracting Hasek with the continuing campaign for the Pleiades Cluster.

"It is time to debate whether or not we should stay in this tilted Alliance. Getting no assistance from either of our allies, who are both larger than the Concordat and not as thinly stretched, is not right. We, the public, need to realize that we should not be our allies' piggy bank, a resource from which to continually make withdrawals without giving something back…"

—Excerpt from an editorial aired by the Taurian Public Broadcast Network, 20 February 3070

ALONE IN THE DARK

With the Word of Blake attacking nearly every substantial power in (and possibly outside) the Inner Sphere, the lack of willing cooperation against a common foe (unlike the Clans invasion, when the FedCom eagerly joined with the Kuritas), is disheartening. Yet the Celestial Wisdom, Chancellor Liao, has extended the olive branch to every neighbor and potential ally.

The response?

None from the Free Worlds League, likely in the conspiracy with the Blakists.

The Davions? Hit just as hard (if not harder) by the Word of Blake, they continued their violation of our space.

And our allies, the Taurian Concordat? They have refused to send troops to help defend us from the Blakists—but against our common enemy, the Federated Suns, that's another story. They pursue their own agenda, loosely covered with poor excuses of "providing a distraction" for our benefit.

Were it not for our closest friends in the Magistracy of Canopus (such as they are), we would be all alone in the dark, and in many ways we still are.

Indeed, the Magistracy has not given an official response, what with Canopus still apparently dark. However, several regiments of Canopian soldiers led by Naomi Centrella—betrothed of the Celestial Wisdom—have remained in Confederation space to assist us. But against the warriors of Blake, with the Davions at our door and the Mariks poised behind, is this small token enough, or are we truly on our own against the universe?

—Excerpt from an editorial published by Victoria News Service, 2 March 3070

HASEK MURDERED!

*****Breaking News*****

(19 March 3070)

New Syrtis [NSNN]—House Hasek and AFFS officials on New Syrtis confirmed today that Duke George Hasek, leader of the Capellan March and architect of Operation Sovereign Justice, was assassinated this morning in his palace on New Syrtis. Officials would not

THE DEVIL IS DEAD!

Taur-ren-ren-ren: Wasn't that supposed to have happened by now?

Illus: They never really gave a date, just "3070," IIRC.

Moammer: Well, can you blame them? Last thing anyone wants to see on statewide media is a bunch of Wobbie wedding crashers…

Taur-ren-ren-ren: True that.

****SianeseSunshine has entered the chat****

SianeseSunshine: The Devil's dead!

Illus: Which one?

SianeseSunshine: Hasek! Hasek's dead, dead, dead!

Illus: Terrific!

Lumous: Awesome!

Taur-ren-ren-ren: About **[CENSORED by MODBOT]** time!

Illus: Great! Now the cursed Davion war effort is bound to collapse in on itself!

Moammer: Are you stupid? Now that we're diverting our focus to the damned Blakists, we're fighting almost as hard to disengage as we did to invade.

Illus: All right there, buzzkill. Don't you think that with Hasek gone, the Davions will stop obsessing over our rightful counterattack and start looking at the Blakists as well, like they should have all along?

Moammer: OK, so you *are* stupid. Thanks for taking the time to confirm that. No, all this murder will do is cause the equally dumb Davions to blame us, again. You'd think that after all the public exposure of Hasek's various crimes, they'd have a clue, but if they had half a brain, they'd be Taurian, not Davion.

Taur-ren-ren-ren: Hey! How about we meet face to face and you repeat that statement!

Moammer: Whatever. Mark my words, cattle. The Davions will just get nastier, and this might be exactly what the Blakists need to divert them back to us. This may be the first high-ranking murder pinned on the Word that they actually perpetrated. It certainly doesn't do us any good.

@Gertrude: Oooooookay. How about you check the rules, and don't flame people in here. Goodbye.

****Moammer is banned by @Gertrude****

****Moammer is kicked from #Inspiration by @Gertrude****

—Excerpt from Sian network chat room (moderated), 28 March 3070

EARLY 3070: BLAKE ASCENDANT

release details of the slaying, except to indicate that evidence left at the scene pointed strongly at Word of Blake operatives.

This news comes as another blow to our nation, as New Syrtis has certainly lost one of its most stalwart sons. The Blakists may hope to crush our spirit, now that the Capellans are withdrawing and we can focus more fully on the Blakist threat. But just as the burned towns and fields they leave in their wake only strengthen our resolve, so to will this additional loss to our nation. We will see George Hasek's legacy fulfilled!

As Duke Hasek's principal aide over the past several years, Field Marshall Ally Swanson has taken temporary command of the March war effort and the ongoing push against the invading Capellan and Blakist forces. Swanson is expected to retain command of the ongoing push to expel all remaining Capellan and Blakist units in the Capellan March, until such time as Angela Hasek, the late duke's eldest living sibling, can be installed as duchess-regent of the Capellan March. After that, sources on New Syrtis say, military command of the March may fall to Field Marshall Nathaniel Hasek, current commander of the Edgeward Combat Theater.

THE SUNDERED LEAGUE

FRACTURED ALLIANCES

ARM: Too little, too late. It appears "family unity" isn't all it's cracked up to be.

TBM: Don't take your frustrations out on us, Alys. We've done as much as we can to stabilize the situation inside the League and with our neighbors. It was Paul who pulled the rug from under our feet.

ARM: I trusted Corr and yet she's in the thick of things, from what I hear. And her protesting that she had no desire for power. Lying cow. Look where she is now: self-declared Captain-bleedin'-General!

JB: I suspect she was played as much as Tommy and we were. Who would've suspected the quietest and most studious of us was working hand-in-hand with the Enemy and would go so far as to kill children?

ARM: Paul is a creep, but I don't believe Corrine's "Oh woe is me, let me declare myself Captain-General" act for a moment.

TBM: Given Cameron-Jones' stunt, I don't think there was much choice. Irrespective of Paul's actions, Tom's position was untenable and someone in the family had to step up to the plate. Would you have done so? I considered it, and to be honest have yet to rule it out.

ARM: God, what is this? Every man for himself? You'd really claim the post?

TBM: I am Janos' oldest surviving child. Under the Succession Act, my claim has the greatest strength, greater even than that of the real Thomas, should he ever emerge from the shadows.

ARM: Apart from the fact that granddad disowned you.

TBM: He didn't speak to me. He never removed my legal right, and back then I had no interest in the post.

ARM: I don't think you're still considering it. I think you've already decided.

TBM: Yes.

ARM: There was an old saying, "Hang together or hang separately." I guess I'll see you at the gallows, Captain-General.

—Communications log attributed to Marik family officials, dated January 3070, leaked to ISAP by unknown sources

HELL IN A HANDBASKET

Thoughtful Reader, your humble servant is weary and finds it difficult to bring you any words at all, much less words of good cheer.

We live in strange times indeed.

The shockwaves emanating from the discovery a few months ago that our Captain-General is not who he should be have yet to subside—if indeed they ever should. Already fracture lines are forming between our member states.

One hears Jeremy Brett is now pulling back from the Lyran war to meet threats within our borders. And there are tales of palace alliances forming as rivals—who might in years past have been characterized as "loyal opposition"—come together to forestall the coming crisis.

Or, more properly, contain the crisis already upon us.

This consolidation of resources, this formation of new alliances, on the face of it appears to be a good thing. The binding of wounds, the braiding together of strands to form a stronger rope. But that this rope must be woven—that the dynamics which made our government a vital, living thing must be set aside—indicates how grave the situation has become.

All around us states less resilient, less free, than the Free Worlds League are falling apart because they relied too heavily on central governments unaccountable to their people. When these governments fail, as they inevitably must, the people are left without leaders and are ill prepared to raise leaders from among themselves.

As the Terran poet Yeats warned twelve hundred years ago, when the center no longer holds, mere anarchy is loosed upon the world.

Which is why, Thoughtful Reader, your humble servant is so gravely concerned. For we are dangerously close to meeting this crisis by making the same mistake our neighbors have long made: the formation of a monolithic central government upon which we will become dependent.

We must take great care, as we teeter on the edge of this abyss, that we do not give up the rule of the people. For what is the point of surviving in name, if all we stand for goes to hell in a handbasket?

—Keith D'Candide, *The Candid View*, Free Worlds Features, 29 June 3070

EARLY 3070: BLAKE ASCENDANT

HIGHER PURPOSE

Fr: Office of the Sixth FWL Legionnaires, Oliver
To: General Calderon Benge, FWL Legionnaire High Command, Andurien
Date: 4 March 3070

General Benge:

This is to inform you officially that the entire the Sixth Legionnaires has severed all command and control with the LCCC. We are transferring overall command to Precentor-Martial Cameron St. Jamais and will continue to garrison Oliver—for the Word of Blake and their new Protectorate. We are now part of the new Twelfth Division garrisoning these worlds.

Any threat of force from LCCC units will receive swift and decisive action to protect our men, materiel and civilian charges. Of the fourteen men and women who resisted this change, thirteen are being sent to you on the tramp freighter *Lucinda*. Force Commander Alld Sood is being held for criminal charges, and depending on the tribunal's decision, may be repatriated at a future date.

Cal, you have to see the writing on the wall. Marik's lost total control of the situation—hell, he's played us all for fools. I'm not going to let my people get slaughtered for a nation that no longer seems to care, or even knows what the hell is going on. We've not seen parts, men or even pay for more than six months now. I'm sorry, Cal, but this has gone beyond unacceptable. The Word of Blake offers us pay, supplies, food, and most important, a cause.

Goodbye, Cal. I hope we don't meet across the battlefield from each other; I'd hate myself forever if I had to kill you.

Demi-Precentor Sola Pepper
Dreams of Sunrise III-alpha
Twelfth Division, Word of Blake

—FWLM official correspondence (veracity later confirmed) obtained by undisclosed ISAP sources.

FIGHTING ON!

To our suborned League brothers, listen! You are not forgotten, you are not alone, and your voices are being heard!

Alys Rousset-Marik hears your painful cries for freedom and assistance. The League as you knew it no longer exists—a dinosaur of an era that has finally breathed its last, as the shocks of these past years have proven. But justice and freedom are *still* ours to hold if we continue to resist the efforts of our onetime allies to convert us to their evil desires!

Your leaders have deserted you, deceived you! Your enemy is not the Confederation or the Alliance, but the Blakists themselves. You have not heard of the tragedies on Coventry, on St. Ives, on Kittery, on Dieron, because our own government followed the Blakists' puppet strings. Innocents just like you have died for no reason other than that they work in factories, on shipyards or at military posts that pose a "threat" to the Word's superiority. Do not fall for the propaganda that only *they* can save you! If they could, why did they kill tens—if not hundreds—of thousands of League men, women and children on Irian, Procyon and Sirius? Why did they "cleanse" the League world of Berenson of legitimate opposing voices?

Rally to the cause! Throw off the yoke of Blakist oppression! Bring down your duped and deceived leaders! Let us re-create the League of the Free Worlds!

—"A Rallying Call" pamphlet circulating on Oliver and Hall, circa May 3070

WARRIORS OF THE LEAGUE EMBRACE BLAKE'S WORD

(20 May 3070)

Zion [VOICE OF BLAKE]—In our Grand Crusade to bring peace and enlightenment to all humankind, we who follow Blake's true words thought our valiant struggle would be a lonely one.

But such has not been the case!

From the rapidly disintegrating Free Worlds League has come heartening news. With the impostor who had sought to twist the League to his own dark ends revealed at last, many have flocked to our banner. The valiant Silver Hawk Irregulars—loyal to their homeworlds to the last—have rejected the vile pretender and stand with us.

Last week, in an impassioned speech, Colonel Ricardo Catere-Jones and the warriors of the Third Free Worlds Guard declared their allegiance and Zion has been welcomed into the Word of Blake Protectorate. The people of Stewart have also sought our protection, and their Home Guard is just as committed to protecting their world as we who speak Blake's Word.

After years of neglect by the League while they languished under the heavy hand of the Federated Commonwealth, the warriors of the Border Protectorates were happy to receive our aid. Now the Steel and Hematite Guards have chosen to join us—though they mourn the misguided loyalty maintained by their brothers in the Iron Guard for the sham that the Free Worlds League has become.

Warriors of the League, we entreat you to look around! The great nation you have defended so valiantly from external threats has fallen to greed and incompetence from within. No longer is it worthy of the sacrifices you have been asked to make. Look around you! If the League cannot help you defend your homes, why do you march to do its bidding?

Follow the example of your brave comrades. Join us, and together we will bring peace to the Inner Sphere once more.

EARLY 3070: BLAKE ASCENDANT

TRINITY WORLDS AT WAR

(7 June 3070)

Galisteo [LWN]—The violence on the Trinity Worlds began spiraling out of control when what started as a dispute over new taxes exploded into a full-scale rebellion after the infamous "Bad Rock Massacre."

With FWL military units committed to other fronts, and Swann's Cavaliers thinly spread between Cerillos, Galisteo and Sierra, the situation had become a stalemate. Rebels and the government's remaining loyal militia units (with mercenary support) exchanged small-scale raids and reprisals, but neither side achieved much except adding to a growing list of casualties.

All that changed in April, when Camacho's Caballeros (formally known as the Seventeenth Recon Regiment) arrived on Galisteo, under the command of Colonel Carlos Camacho, *patrón* of the Vado Ancho hacienda and Knight of Galisteo. Like their commander, many members of the Caballeros hail from the Trinity Worlds. When Don Carlos received word of the events unfolding on his homeworld, he requested and received release from his unit's contract with Tanadi Computers (a subsidiary of Hachiman Taro Electronics in the Draconis Combine). Unprepared for intervention by a well-equipped mercenary regiment, half the Cavaliers' aerospace assets got caught on the ground, and their Charlie Battalion was overwhelmed.

Since the Caballeros' victory, Camacho has accepted the post of President of Galisteo's new provisional government, and has retired from the mercenary trade.

The disposition of the surviving members of Swann's Cavaliers remains a mystery. Rumors abound that their forces on Sierra and Cerillos have abandoned their posts and departed aboard unmarked DropShips, even though pockets of violence persist on both worlds.

TRAITORS!

They dragged us into an unwanted war with the Lyran Alliance, and now the Sirian Concordance shows its true colors by seceding from the Free Worlds and joining the Blakist hegemony. Until now, a shadow of doubt remained over Sirius' complicity in the invasion of Skye. No more. It now appears that the Concordance government has worked hand-in-glove with the Blakists since the outset. They probably carried out the attack themselves, to foment strife between the League and the Alliance—two realms that had previously enjoyed functional, if not cordial, relations. It even seems likely that pro-Blakist Sirians engineered the assassination of moderate Helen Thrall as part of a junta that may extend as far back as the mad reign of Alisendar Gyrn. Even money says that someone planned this all along, during the years between the formation of the Chaos March and the liberation of the "Sirian Holds."

The Border Protectorate and Silver Hawks betrayals are a little harder to fathom. While the League lost many of their worlds to the Steiner-Davions during the FedCom's brief existence, the Protectorate has never seen the factionalism or anarchy that plagued their spinward neighbors or those in the Silver Hawks Coalition. But they *have* frequently suffered Lyran assaults, and their defection to the Blakist hegemony might represent a vain attempt to place themselves outside the conflict currently wracking the Inner Sphere.

However, if they think the League is doomed and will sit idly by, they are sadly mistaken. Marshal van Creveld of the Dieudonné Military District is believed to be carrying out operations to limit Blakist encroachment into League territories, even though her command center appears in grave danger of isolation as many independent worlds fall to the Jihad.

—Richard Hanniseck, *Hanniseck's World* syndicated column, Commonwealth Times, 28 June 3070

NEWS DOWNLOADER v3.7

IRIAN

Date & Title	Service	Status
(22 May 3069) "Davions Retreat from Galedon"	[VotD]	COMPLETED
(24 May 3069) "Blakists Stopped at Kessel"	[VotD]	DOWNLOADING
(9 June 3069) "Deia, Mkuranga Under Attack"	[ARNN]	ACCESSING

A SERVICE OF IRIAN NEWS INTERSTELLAR

EARLY 3070: BLAKE ASCENDANT

ALLIANCE IN FLAMES

SOLARIS HOME DEFENSE LEAGUE HOLDS NOWHERE

"What you are about to hear is real. No factoids have been fabricated, no truths massaged, no statistics distorted. This is Adam Kristoff from the Solaris underground. Despite what the Word of Blake mouthpieces spout, the resistance is alive and well. Last night I was on the scene as Erik Gray's Solaris Home Defense League hit a Word of Blake forward position near the city of Nowhere.

"The full company of SHDL 'Mechs, with battle armor support, hit the six Blakist defenders hard and fast, with Gray's *Emperor* blowing apart a *Phoenix Hawk* in the first few seconds. The other 'Mechs fell as well, though local hero Karl Edwards was killed when an enemy *Scorpion* struck his *Valkyrie* in the cockpit. Cavalier troopers quickly secured the enemy barracks and marched the Blakists out. One by one the enemy pilots, soldiers, techs and even cooks were interrogated, and most gave the SHDL what they wanted. The few who did not suffered for their resistance.

"Meanwhile, SHDL 'Mechs scavenged the remnants of the seven downed Blakist 'Mechs, though some continued to attack the fallen invaders. What debris the SHDL did not haul back was left piled on the ruins of the Blakist outpost and the bodies of the defiant fanatics, a disturbing reminder of the carnage of war and a brutal sign of the totality of this conflict, where no quarter is asked or given.

"This is the truth on Solaris. With the Solaris underground press, I'm Adam Kristoff."

—Audio report dated 9 January 3070, smuggled to off-world ISAP sources by local resistance

FALCONS ASSAULT KANDERSTEG, BOUNTIFUL HARVEST

(2 February 3070)

Bountiful Harvest [ARNN]—Just a few days ago, several Jade Falcon Clusters made landfall on the Grandeur continent of Bountiful Harvest, apparently as part of a two-world assault that represents the latest wave in what officials are calling a new Falcon Incursion. On Bountiful Harvest, the Falcons almost immediately engaged the Second Wolf Strike Grenadiers outside KevGlen City. Observers have told INN that the fighting was brutal, with neither side apparently conforming to the ritualized warfare common to the Clans. Reliable sources indicate that the Falcons refused the *batchall* issued by Star Colonel Terret Radick, apparently condemning the exiled Wolf Clan as bandits unworthy of the challenge.

Despite the Falcons' numerical superiority, the Grenadiers have held their own. One Wolf MechWarrior told ARNN that the Falcon ranks are "littered with children and substandard warrior-rejects, who would have flushed out of their sibkos in any real Clan." She further suggested that the Grenadiers faced only a Cluster or so of "noteworthy" troops, spread across the three Clusters that landed on the world.

On nearby Kandersteg, a similar number of Falcon troops engaged elements of ComStar's 208th Division. The Com Guard forces, spread thin among nearby worlds from their base on Hamilton, have not fared as well as the Wolf forces, and are expected by some experts to quit Kandersteg within the week. However, other sources indicate that the 208th's remaining troops are attempting to secure several strategic drop zones planetwide in anticipation of possible reinforcements from Hamilton. ARNN cannot confirm either report at this time.

MOPPING UP

Honored Master Kernoff,

Resistance has ended. I am pleased to report that Hesperus II is now part of the holdings of the Blessed Blake. After two weeks of hard fighting, we have successfully cleared all resistance to our Order, with minimal damage to the factory complexes. The last rebel died at 1421 hours on 19 Feb, 3070. Maria's Elegy had to be cleansed of infestation by a local pest, but the loss of the city is a minimal setback.

WE SHALL NOT FAIL

Attention, all employees of Defiance Hesperus!

As you are aware, we are under attack by Word of Blake forces. All outside access has been restricted at this time. Please remain in your operational area. Anyone found outside his or her work zone will be detained, and security cannot guarantee your safety.

We apologize to those employees who rely on the Myoo MR line for transportation. That line is experiencing technical difficulties and will be operating within seventy-two days. Until then, see your supervisor for alternate avenues of transport.

All current leaves and off-shifts are hereby cancelled. Off-duty employees report to Sector HH-19 for the time being.

We apologize for the inconvenience to our extended employee family. Defiance Hesperus has never fallen to an enemy force, and we take these precautions so that we may maintain that proud tradition.

Anyone seeing any unusual activity inside or outside the factory complex should report such incidents to Plant Security immediately. We rely on the cooperation of our valued employees to help our company repel audacious and foolish attacks against our corporate sovereignty, and we will not succumb to a group of techno-religious fanatics. We have stood against the might of the Combine, the Federated Suns, the Free Worlders and even rebels in our own Alliance. We will not fall.

Management thanks you for your cooperation and patience as we deal with this interruption to our stellar service. We will inform you when these restrictions are lifted.

Attention, all employees….

—Complex-wide PA address during the second day of the Word of Blake siege of Hesperus II, 6 February 3070

EARLY 3070: BLAKE ASCENDANT

The Creeping Death III-zeta performed extremely well under the new programming. Personnel losses amounted to only three Tau soldiers and a handful of conventionals from the actions of a suicidal Fifteenth Guards *Nightstar*. I believe Ciamba herself foolishly tried to sabotage her own 'Mech to deny us the south entrance. She failed to execute her foolhardy plan before one of my men crushed the life from her in a personal meeting.

I am also pleased to report that we managed to salvage three *Excalibur*-class DropShips fully loaded for shipment. The materiel gained should help offset the Fortieth Shadow's losses against our other prize, despite our inability to capture the LAS *Melissa Steiner* intact. In a final tally, we have secured more than a division's worth of equipment in various stages of development and retained more than three-quarters of the facility's production lines, which can be made operational as soon as we can relocate our new converts here.

We do not require much in the way of refit or repair. I await your next orders; I understand Tamar is nice this time of year.

Toyama's word be spread, Blake's name be praised.

(signed) GH

—Blakist military communiqué intercepted by Hesperan resistance (veracity unconfirmed), Hesperus II, circa 20 February 3070

CULLING THE FLOCK

Protocol: 700223-INT146T (Authorization Code Eta)
Source: 013T-T146 Classified (Eyes Only)
Interview Subject: Tau-146 (adult female subject)

Upon entry to interrogation chamber, subject gave no response to my presence. Subject was unclothed and bedraggled; closer examination revealed signs of physical trauma to arms, legs, abdomen, left breast, neck, head and face in the form of abrasions and obvious swelling, with extensive evidence of approved interrogation techniques to face, head, underarms, palms of hands, soles of feet and genitals. Moderate burn trauma evident on subject's left side and forearm, source unknown; partial signs of healing suggests that subject may have sustained injuries in combat before the complex fell.

Subject was initially unresponsive to communication attempts; ammonium ampoule usage was required to restore consciousness, after which subject offered no resistance to verbal or physical interrogation techniques. Report follows:

CONFIRM POSITIVE RESPONSE: Evidence of undocumented egress within walls of DefHes facility or underground within or nearby; several access points inside and outside facility suspected.

CONFIRM POSITIVE RESPONSE: No knowledge of placement of these points.

CONFIRM POSITIVE RESPONSE: Projection 50-65 trained guerrilla personnel with access to egress and further 100-120 incidentals (*both figures conjectural*).

CONFIRM POSITIVE RESPONSE: Lack of knowledge specific to these assertions; subject yielded only rumor and supposition, with no change in position during or after application of further approved techniques.

CONFIRM NEGATIVE RESPONSE: Rumor of active 'Mech force within DefHes facility.

CONFIRM NEGATIVE RESPONSE: Rumor of professional resistance cell, other than noted above.

CONFIRM NEGATIVE RESPONSE: Connection to any relation, either personal or professional, among active resistance.

FINAL EVALUATION: Tau-146 is of no further use, even as labor; recommend termination and disposal.

COMMENTS: Psych-op tech analysis projects 98.3 percent likelihood that information is authentic, 99.8 percent confirmation that subject's will to resist was broken. My compliments to initial interrogator technique and procedure.

—Word of Blake interrogation report (intercepted by Hesperan resistance and relayed to ISAP sources)

THE FINAL CALL

"Ladies and gentlemen, this is probably the last broadcast DBC Donegal will make for some time. As we speak, Word of Blake forces are coming down the city streets toward our headquarters and transmitter tower in an effort to create an information blackout. In response, we will share with you all the information we have accumulated before they shut us down…"

[*Explosions rumble in the distance.*]

"The Blakists have complete air and space superiority, using their WarShips and escorts to prevent any traffic in and out, though we believe the *Ian McQuiston* may have made a successful jump out-system. This has given them the ability to call massive fire support anywhere on the planet, almost at will. Every time the garrison has appeared on the battlefield, orbital fire has decimated them. Only a few companies of armored units remain scattered across the area, staying underground for fear of instant annihilation…"

[*More explosions. Static for a few seconds.*]

"The only remaining active defenders are the several regiments of hastily organized infantry militia protecting Media City with man-pack and support weapons. Casualties, military and civilian, have been horrendous. The Blakists' liberal use of orbital fire has claimed well over six hundred thousand lives since troops landed in mid-February—not counting those killed in the Blakist raid almost two years ago. We've seen this same tactic used on Hesperus II, which fell more than three weeks ago…"

[*Explosions rumble louder. Cries of alarm are heard, mixed with angry shouts and unintelligible commands.*]

"The resistance has captured several Blakist infantry, and they have learned that the Word's fleet is operating from a hidden base over…"

[*Explosions rumble louder than ever. Short yelp. Transmission ends.*]

—Final audio broadcast from DBC Headquarters, Donegal, 27 February 3070

EARLY 3070: BLAKE ASCENDANT

THE AWFUL TRUTH

[*Karen Silverford*]: "Colonel Hogarth. What's your reaction to the news from Hesperus?"

[*Thomas Hogarth*]: "Well, Karen—you don't mind if I call you Karen?"

[*Silverford*]: "Not at all, Colonel."

[*Hogarth*]: "Frankly, I was shocked. Absolutely shocked. Leutenant-General Peter Zambos was an acquaintance. I know all his close friends will be devastated at losing him."

[*Silverford*]: "And what about losing Defiance Industries?"

[*Hogarth*]: "Well, we'll find it inconvenient, I suppose. I remember back in '61, Peter threw an absolutely delightful dinner. Always the life and soul of the party. We'll all miss him terribly."

[*Silverford*]: "Er…yes, Colonel. But with Twycross, Sudeten and Pandora lost to the Falcons, and no production coming from Tharkad and Coventry, surely the LAAF is facing a supply crisis?"

[*Hogarth*]: "Oh, the boys and girls in Supply are frightfully resourceful. I'm sure they'll manage—they always have. I remember a time—back in '27 it was—Peter, Gina Ciampa and I served on Colonel Petroff's staff in the Twenty-second Skye Rangers. Now there was a man with style, I can tell you! Well, anyway, we were supposed to be moving our headquarters, and there was an absolutely dreadful foul-up with transport allocation. We just didn't have the transport we needed to get the colonel's wardrobe aboard the DropShips in time for our scheduled departure. What a mix-up! Anyway, a terribly resourceful sergeant managed to find a company of VTOLs to help out—"

[*Silverford*]: "Umm...thank you for your insight, Colonel."

[*Hogarth*]: "Not at all, Karen. It's been an absolute pleasure."

—From a DBC interview with Colonel Thomas Hogarth, (former) commanding officer of the Furillo BPM, Furillo, 1 March 3070

LOSING GROUND, LOSING HOPE

I just heard that the authorities consider **Coventry** under Blakist control as well. Together with **Tharkad**, **Hesperus** and **Donegal**, that puts maybe eighteen worlds in their hands…or **worse**. The importance of those worlds is obvious to anyone. They represent the bulk of our nation's military industry, an enormous chunk of our economy and governmental structure. I'd hoped we'd start recovering from the initial strikes on Donegal, Coventry and Hesperus **two years ago**, but apparently those were just a prelude to the outright invasions they've suffered.

Our capital is occupied. Our **Archon** remains out of contact. Meanwhile, our borders are under attack by the **League** and the Falcons. I've heard rumors that even the **Ward Wolf Clan** (not the Kell one) is attacking our planets.

Faced with all this, how can we go on? All our enemies seem to be conspiring to take us down. The only thing missing so far is a new Drac invasion.

I don't know where to turn anymore. So much adversity. So much suffering. What's left? Where can we turn? Will I still be a Lyran next year?

—Excerpt from a private blog by PaxSus07 on the Chukchi InterWeb, 15 June 3070

NEWS DOWNLOADER v3.7

Date & Title	*Service*	*Status*
(20 June 3069) "Liberated Allard-Liao Decries 'FedSuns Criminals'"	[XSFP]	COMPLETED
(17 July 3069) "Deneb Kaitos, Ruchbah Fall" ("Deneb Light Cavalry…	[NSNS]	DOWNLOADING
(13 August 3069) "Coup on Atreus?"	[ISAP]	ACCESSING

A SERVICE OF IRIAN NEWS INTERSTELLAR

HAIL THE PASSING STAR

*****For immediate release to all VOTD affiliates. Lead with this story. All broadcasts must end with a moment of reflection. Honor the twilight.*****

(5 January 3070)

New Samarkand [VOTD]—Citizens, the Honorable Coordinator Theodore Kurita has passed from this mortal coil. The Dragon's Soul has moved beyond the gates to the Golden Realm.

On 5 January 3070, the Dragon lost its brightest star. Theodore Kurita was revered by all, respected by many and feared by others. He embodied the True Soul of the Dragon. And his star will be missed in the heavens.

Born on 1 July 2997 to Takashi Kurita and Jasmine Isu, Theodore led a life that would shape him for the troubled days of the Dragon that lay ahead. Rising to the mantle of Coordinator in 3053, he has single-handedly reshaped the might and majesty of the Dragon into the most powerful nation in the Human Sphere.

The Coordinator refused to be bound by traditions that he recognized as strangling the Dragon. Even during his time as *Gunji-no-Kanrei*, he at times took actions initially regarded poorly, but that ultimately brought strength and honor to the Combine. In 3034, he granted the Rasalhague people the seperate nation they desired, and created a buffer state with the Lyran Commonwealth. His strategic brilliance overshadowed even that of the Davion Fox in protecting the Dragon from the Suns' predation during the War of 3039. His vision for the Combine's future put him at odds with his own father—but Theodore knew he owed his duty to the Dragon, not to blood and kin.

Because he embodied the ideals of *ninjo* and *giri*, he formed a non-aggression pact with the hated FedCom alliance so that the greater—and far more deadly—threat of the Clan Invasion could be dealt with. His leadership in the former Star League led to the downfall of Clan Smoke Jaguar and liberation for many of the Dragon's people. His compassion also shone through, with his acceptance of Nova Cat refugees among several worlds in the Irece Prefecture, simultaneously bonding the Clan to the Dragon with the sacrifice of his own blood kin to that Clan.

During the opening days of the Blakist Jihad, our beloved Coordinator was at the front once more, planning and leading the Combine's forces to free our imprisoned citizens on Luthien and Dieron. Even when the Blakists captured and tortured the Dragon's Heir, the Coordinator stood strong. Our Coordinator knew where true honor and duty lay.

So today, as you go about your lives, send your thoughts to the stars and honor Theodore Kurita, Duke of Luthien, Warlord of the Dragon, Coordinator of the Draconis Combine. He will be missed, but his duty and honor remain in us all.

By the Dragon's Throne
Lilies weep and winds draw still
Dragon's Soul departs

AKE ASCENDANT

THE DRAGON'S TEETH

THE HONORABLE CHOICE

Honorable Warlord,

I wish to commend you on your excellent choice of director for the new Internal Security Force. While many will undoubtedly question your elevation of a *Chu-sa* to such a lofty height, I know you have chosen him because he is a loyal Son, much like his half-brother, who was tragically killed in the failed Davion strike on Benjamin two years ago. Do not let the critics bother you. They do not see the big picture, and we sorely need that vision right now.

Chu-sa Shakir Jerrar has a solid career, with many successful DEST operations under his belt. He also received the Bushido Blade in 3063, during the Ghost Bear War. He is one of my best commanders, and I am sorry to see him go, but content in the knowledge that our security lies in his very capable hands.

My only concern is that his brother's loss may have taken an emotional toll on him. He and Toma were very close after their father died during the initial Clan invasion. This is a small concern, however, as I have heard he recently wed Toma's widow, the striking Kikiyra. I am sure Shakir will have more than enough to occupy him with the Blakist war still engulfing the Dieron District and sating his thirst for revenge.

I am impressed with your decisions, *Kanrei*. You have been a calming and stable influence for our troops and I know we can beat back these technopaths with your guiding hand. With Jerrar's influence on our psychologically weakened heir to the Dragon, we will finally see the dawning of a new era for the Combine.

Your servant,

Tai-sho Paul Omishita

—Intercepted DCMS memo (veracity unconfirmed), posted by the Irurzun Drake InterWeb site, 23 January 3070

THE SPREADING CURSE

(20 April 3070)

Kirei Na Niwa [THE DRAKE]—So what's really going on over on An Ting? Government tells us they're just conducting a massive influenza vaccination protocol, due to some "outbreak" that just happens to regularly pop up. Yet that system's never had a recorded outbreak on such a scale before, much less an epidemic. An Ting's got a perfect bill of health, according to several decades of travelogues we've scrounged off the netlinks. Yet here comes the mighty Combine state, telling us that all of a sudden they have to quarantine an entire continent to contain an influenza epidemic? *Riiiight*.

Listen up, readers. The Drake's done some digging. Those symptoms they're touting as "normal for a non-lethal pandemic episode" closely match those reported by DCMS troops that fought the Davions on Galedon V. They called it the "Curse of Galedon," and it apparently made the rounds during the final days of fight-

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ing between Suns and Combine forces (and has been blamed on everyone from the Snow Ravens to the Word of Blake). From what we've managed to gather, other systems in other nations have had similar "outbreaks"—Alarion, Kathil, Atreus, Liao, even Orestes and Dieron. It's pretty obvious some Blakist bio-weapon is at work here. Whole planets are now going dark—anyone heard anything from Galedon lately?

So "influenza vaccination protocol," our ruby-scaled behinds! It's a sure bet An Ting got tagged with whatever hit Galedon and those other worlds, only here the good state is trying to contain it. Or exterminate it.

Take that as you will, good reader.

HACHIMAN TARO DESTROYED

(3 May 3070)

Hachiman [VOTD]—The city of Masamori is no stranger to the destruction inflicted by the self-styled followers of the "Word of Blake." In 3056 the Blakists launched three separate attacks in and around the city. The first two—aimed at Hachiman Taro Electronics—were defeated by the heroic efforts of the Ninth Ghost Regiment. The third claimed the life of Percival Fillington, Earl of Hachiman and Planetary Chairman.

Yesterday the Blakists struck once more.

This time their target appears to have been no less a personage than Chandrasekhar Kurita, CEO of Hachiman Taro Electronics. The honorable Kurita has been as successful in the realm of the Pillar of Jade as his illustrious forebears who distinguished themselves on the battlefield under the Pillar of Steel. Building HTE up from nothing, the esteemed Chandrasekhar acquired a controlling interest in Tanadi Computers following the death of Marquis Edmond Hosoya in an air crash.

The Blakist attack force entered the Hachiman system masquerading as a tramp merchant JumpShip transporting a DropShip with cargo destined for the HTE compound. Not until they entered atmosphere did a routine security enquiry uncover the deception, by which time it was almost too late. Despite the best efforts of valiant HTE Security, approximately two companies of Blakist 'Mechs and infantry stormed the compound and razed the facility before making good their escape.

Thankfully, the CEO's personal bodyguards received sufficient warning to whisk their charge to safety.

COUNCIL OF GEMS, II

[*Sapphire*]: "It seems I owe you an apology, Ruby."

[*Ruby*]: "Oh?"

[*Sapphire*]: "Director Jerrar is indeed a wise choice for his position. I commend you and Jade on your judgment."

[*Opal*]: "Indeed. Dealing with the Dragoons' Delta regiment in such a fashion was a master stroke."

[*Ruby*]: "Ah. Understand that the idea came from our protégé. He and Jerrar had already dealt with the situation before I was even aware."

[*Diamond*]: "While I applaud their ingenuity and independence, we must make sure they do not decide to slip our leash."

[*Jade*]: "No fears, Diamond. Ultimately, they acted for the good of the Combine."

[*Obsidian*]: "*So ka*? Explain."

[*Ruby*]: "As you know, ever since Buckminster suffered heavy raiding last year, it has been left nearly defenseless. According to intelligence Director Jerrar has acquired regarding other Blakist attacks, it seems that the Blakists hammer key worlds with massive orbital strikes, then follow up with ground operations within a set time."

[*Opal*]: "I have heard similar stories from my corporate contacts in the Alliance. Donegal and Hesperus were both struck this way. And both fell."

[*Ruby*]: "Precisely. Now, consider that in the wake of such a brutal attack, Lady Miyako herself organized an O5P relief operation to help assist recovery and rescue efforts there, since she was in the Prefecture at that time. The ISF got wind of a Word of Blake force nea—" [*heavy, persistent coughing*]

[*Jade*]: "Save your strength, *sensei*."

[*Diamond*]: "So the ISF heard of a new attack on Buckminster?"

[*Jade*]: "Not quite. Jerrar knew there was a battle group in the area, a sizeable one. Considering that our forces on Dieron were—at the time—in position to finally overwhelm and expel the Blakist invasion, we needed a plan to keep the Word from reinforcing and taking the system."

[*Ruby*]: "The Warlord ordered the Dragoons to Buckminster to safeguard the Keeper of the House Honor. He informed them that a Blakist attack might be forthcoming and that a small force was nearby. At the same time, the Director leaked information about the Dragoons' presence on Buckminster to one of the few agents we suspect of ties to ROM. He also got Lady Miyako to leave the system, but did not tell the Dragoons."

[*Obsidian*]: "So the Blakists found out that the Dragoons were on Buckminster and redirected their reinforcements there instead of to Dieron?"

[*Jade*]: "*Hai*. As a result, Buckminster weathered another Blakist assault, where the Dragoons fought honorably to safeguard the Keeper but were brutally beaten down. The Word of Blake lost at least two-thirds of their attacking force—no matter what they trumpet—and Buckminster remains ours. And, by design, we now also know the identity of at least one ROM double agent in the ISF."

[*Ruby*]: "And the Dragoons have been crushed on Dragon soil. We have taught them the lesson they should have learned years ago."

[*Diamond*]: "As long as your convoluted revenge will also save the Combine, Ruby, I don't think we much care about the reason behind it."

[*Opal*]: "Indeed. Now, on to newer business. I have discussed the plans Obsidian and I have made for Luthien Armor Works with Nathaniel. He is in agreement and has already instituted the initial

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purchase of the engineering designs. We can save LAW for the Dragon—and further tie them to our cause, once the old board is removed. Director Rivarez has given us his assurances…."

—Partial recording made by ISF agent 3-86, undetermined location, circa May 3070, posted by the Kuzuu Drake InterWeb site (veracity unconfirmed)

GALEDON IN FLAMES!

(17 May 3070)

New Ivaarsen [DMNS]—Sources within DMI have informed the DMNS that Galedon V is being—or has already been—subjected to a systematic strategic thermonuclear bombardment, the goal of which is the extermination of all life on the planet. A nuclear bombardment on this scale has not been executed since the First Succession War, even by the Blakists. Indeed, according to our reliable sources, the DCMS is undertaking the operation in response to an epidemic that has raged unchecked across the planet. This outbreak apparently started shortly after the Snow Raven bombardment last year, but it remains unclear whether the Clan deliberately unleashed this plague. If so, it would be the first recorded instance of a Clan deploying a biological weapon, and a panel of Clan experts suggests that the timing of the epidemic is either coincidental (and thus wholly unrelated to the bombardment) or only an indirect effect of the Raven strike.

The nuclear bombardment began back in February, and was well on its way toward accomplishing its horrible task as of the last time our sources made contact with the Galedon system. Indeed, some sources in the DMI have suggested that the task may already be complete, leaving roughly 1.5 billion Galedonians dead.

[*"If the Dracs can exterminate themselves so thoroughly in response to a disease, what do you think they will do to their hated and ancient enemy?"*]

At this time, we have no word regarding the undisclosed Davion units that raided Galedon V prior to the epidemic and the subsequent massacre, though DMI and the AFFS both strongly believe that all Davion assets made it offworld before the Ravens' attack.

AND IN OTHER NEWS…

RUMORS OR ORDERS?

>>>Transmit Code AA-4221-RedRedGamma<<<

Precentor:

Verifying the attached now—it came in on a side-packet with standard comm traffic to Kathil. Used black-black Suns cryptography. May want to alert the PM, considering it concerns his home turf. If this is true, then the Capellan March is more screwed up than we thought. Possible targets are Duke Allard-Liao, Duke Hasek, Marshall Stromp, Marshall Zibler or Marshall Swanson. Could be higher, if Duke Sandoval or the Regent is visiting the area.

—BY

GENERAL DIRECTIVE 72

Receiver: Precentor XIII Charles Reanner, 323rd Division, Robinson
From: Precentor XII Alexander Durbin, Third Army V-lambda

Chuck:

I wanted to make this a personal message, considering what I'm about to order you to do. I know your command's been hit badly since Mermentau. Hell, you're one of my last cohesive commands, since we've not heard from Grandi after Fletcher got hit and Tang's unit is more body parts than machines.

I need you to integrate with the AFFS on Robinson. In the event the Blakists hit the system—and ROM believes an attack is imminent—you are to defend the town of Purki from any assault.

Here's the thing. That town, while it doesn't look like much—bland, drab and smells like a rotten Orlab egg farm, thanks to the sulfur pits nearby—it houses one of our hidden Brian Caches. The entrance is through the library complex, to give you an idea of where it sits. If—no, *when*—the fanatics hit, if they make a move for that town, I need you to defend it with your lives. Them moving on Purki means they know what's there, because otherwise it's strategically and tactically useless.

The Precentor Martial has already alerted Marshall Johnson about your cooperation, so expect the Robinson DMM to contact you shortly.

Chuck, it's extremely important that the Brian Cache not fall into Blakist hands. What's in there isn't your concern, just know that if they get to it….well, this Jihad of theirs will get worse.

If the situation looks lost, you are ordered to execute General Directive 72, *regardless of civilian and allied forces present*. Deploy the Santa Ana with extreme prejudice. Don't worry about the consequences; I'll make sure that I take the blame if Purki becomes a nuclear wasteland. It's a better alternative to what would come to the surface otherwise.

Good luck, Charles. Hopefully I'll see you on the other end of this thing.

Alex

—Alleged internal Com Guard document, posted on the Kervil Drake InterWeb site, 4 April 3070

>>>YY-32-XX-UltraBlack///FX 99-99-99-1<<<

YOU ARE AUTHORIZED TO PROCEED WITH ORDER THIRTY-NINE. AVOID COLLATERAL DAMAGE AT ALL COSTS. PRIMARY MISSION IS TO END CURRENT UNAUTHORIZED ACTIVITY, USE ANY MEANS NECESSARY TO FULFILL. TARGET LAST KNOWN LOCATION ON NEW SYRTIS OR KATHIL. EXIT CODES TREY-TREY-RED AND BLUE-NINE-EXETER ARE AT YOUR DISPOSAL. REPORT THROUGH **FX 81-88-42-2** UNDER ULTRA-BLACK PROTOCOL. GOOD LUCK.

—Inter-office communiqué attributed to ComStar ROM (veracity unconfirmed), posted on the Bethel InterWeb site *Think About It* by "Agents of Starling," mid-January 3070

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MAKING THEM PAY

(18 February 3070)

Midale [MIDALE PLANET]—Today's destruction of the last raiding company on-planet heralded the end of the three-day campaign by the mercenary Hansen's Roughriders to systematically destroy the estimated two battalions of the Second Taurian Lancers, which attacked Midale days ago.

The Second Lancers, known for their recent killing of approximately seven thousand of the Roughriders' dependents, were en route to the Pleiades Cluster to assist in the guerrilla campaign to hold onto that group of worlds when they landed on Midale for a "recon in force" operation to net as many FedSuns supplies as possible. Upon learning the raiding party was the Second Lancers, the entire Roughriders regiment mobilized. The Third Battalion immediately combat-dropped around the attackers' landing zone, capturing the enemy's DropShips.

The Second Lancers turned around to attempt an immediate extraction, only to find themselves trapped between the Third Battalion at the landing zone and the other two Roughriders battalions. Falling on the Lancers' rear guard, the second day saw the raiding party mostly destroyed, along with the confirmed death of the Second Lancers' CO, Colonel William Mouat, who fell under a massed artillery barrage.

The fighting occurred inside the Great Midale Rockies mountain range, where outside observers report that no Taurian prisoners were taken, as none survived the operation.

PROTECTORATE INVASION!

(21 March 3070)

Carvajal [TPB]—Components of the First Taurian Pride landed on Carvajal and Mirfak more than a week ago. While they still struggle with local defenders, these forces from Baron Kithrong's breakaway Calderon Protectorate have claimed both worlds "in the name of the Taurian people," stating their intent to "liberate all Taurians from Shraplen's destructive obsessions." These statements, continuously broadcast from orbit over both worlds, assert that Protector Grover Shraplen is unfit to rule the Concordat and is leading the Taurian nation to doom and destitution by obsessing over the Davions and the liberation of the Pleiades Cluster, while the Word of Blake "wages war on all humanity."

Protector Shraplen has denounced these attacks as "common piracy, revealing the true nature of Kithrong's rebels and his imperialistic objectives." Indicating that the invasion would be turned back, Shraplen promised the loyal Taurian defenders that the "upstart traitor" would be brought to justice, and encouraged all loyal Taurians to "stand fast; help is on the way."

Unconfirmed reports from both worlds indicate that the invaders are inexplicably receiving a great deal of popular support, and that riots are breaking out in many cities and population centers between pro- and anti-Shraplen gangs. Official sources denounce these reports as "Protectorate propaganda."

FAR LOOKERS MARCH ON TAURUS

(1 April 3070)

Taurus [FREEDOM PRESS]—Traffic came to a standstill in the capital today as thousands marched through the streets protesting Protector Shraplen's policies toward the worlds of the self-declared Calderon Protectorate.

Led by Sonja Couvert and Jane DuKirk (both prominent members of the social movement collectively known as the Far Lookers), the marchers called for an end to hostilities and renewed efforts to seek a negotiated settlement with Cham Kithrong's rebel state. Public opinion is strongly against continued hostilities with the so-called "Calderon Protectorate," especially given the continuing conflict with Federated Suns forces in the Pleiades Cluster. Elements of the Taurian Guard were deployed to block the protesters' route to the Protector's Palace, and Protector Shraplen has once more declined to meet with representatives from the protesters to discuss the current situation.

Political commentators note that the Protector's two-front war threatens to leave him politically isolated. If the Concordat is to avoid a constitutional crisis, Protector Shraplen desperately needs to bring one of these conflicts to a conclusion. Some speculate that the Protector may call upon other Trinity Alliance member states for military assistance.

Date & Title	Service	Status
(19 August 3069) "Addicks, Tybalt Join Blake Protectorate"	[VoB]	COMPLETED
(26 September 3069) "Military, Clan Forces Besiege Dante" ("Thousands Killed…	[OANS]	DOWNLOADING
(15 October 3069) "'Pocket WarShips': A Look at the Word's Latest Weapon"	[MRBC]	ACCESSING

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LURKING DANGERS

>>>TRNDH/MERCH-CHAT/DS-PRIV#331<<4members>>

BergusHawk: Labov is to be commended. Reworking our navy into this new structure has increased our operational efficiency while reducing our time-in-system. We can attend to more systems in a lesser amount of time, meaning more profit.

DropMasterClyde: Always a good thing. How goes the *Spectral Skate*'s configuration?

ShatterShark: Excellent. The *Poseidon* is on schedule and should be finished in two weeks. Her hold has been modified, at the expense of some other systems, but with the new additions this will not be a problem. We can execute the Khan's plan with minimal discovery now, with the new Horses "arrangement."

BergusHawk: Superb. I shall let the Khan's office know.

Shark42: Do we have a destination for the Horses yet? We have maximized the load from Tokasha and delivered it to staging point Gamma. Though we did have an encounter.

DropMasterClyde: Oh? What kind?

Shark42: Not much. At the time it seemed odd, but after the latest news from Hector, I am not so sure.

ShatterShark: Hector? So it is true, then? The Hellions have only a token force there?

Shark42: Seems that way. Four sources confirm it, two of which were bargained for during the *Black Diamond*'s last transfer.

BergusHawk: So what was the encounter?

Shark42: When we arrived at Gamma, we found a Hellion ship on-station.

BergusHawk: Oh?

Shark42: Yes. The *Scarlet Eye*.

ShatterShark: The Hellions' lone *Bug Eye*, three jumps from the Isles? But that ship is normally at Hector. They have not moved that ship for at least fifteen generations!

BergusHawk: Interesting. I will need to add this to our Watch's list.

DropMasterClyde: Heard something else interesting when the *Trail of Tears* came through Tamar. Seems the Wolves have stumbled on part of the Adders' force. Though the numbers were odd.

BergusHawk: How so?

DropMasterClyde: They estimate Upsilon at only four Clusters. Seems they missed at least half the fleet.

ShatterShark: Not surprising. The Adders seem to have split them up for precisely that reason. Either they do not want the others to know their full strength, or they are expanding their coverage. Neither bodes well. Are we the only ones who know the truth?

BergusHawk: I have reliable sources who tell me that the Ravens and the Bears also know, or suspect as much. We, however, have a lock on the actual numbers, thanks to the Adders' willingness to use our supply ships along the Road.

Shark42: The Deep seems to have gotten a lot more crowded lately….

—Excerpted from a Diamond Shark Chatterweb log (merchant caste), mid-March 3070

NEWS DOWNLOADER v3.7

IRIAN

Date & Title	*Service*	*Status*
(20 October 3069) "Blakist Marauders Hit Buckminster" ("Millions Dead in…	[VotD]	COMPLETED
(31 October 3069) "Menkent Bombed!"	[FSP]	DOWNLOADING
(11 November 3069) "Cyclops, Inc Debuts New APC: the Saxon"	[Warrior Magazine]	ACCESSING

A SERVICE OF IRIAN NEWS INTERSTELLAR

CHAOS UNLEASHED: CLICK, CLICK, BOOM

CLICK, CLICK, BOOM

Intercepted transmission:

"…are located near the Nag's Head Plains. Transponder codes are a 100 percent match. HK Team Omega-4 is en route with orders to exterminate the target."

"Be advised hostiles are inbound toward target area. Eliminate with extreme prejudice."

"Understood. ETA four minutes. Inform the Precentor that Code Blue is in effect."

"Code Blue underway, copy. Good hunting, Shadow One."

SITUATION

Agro Farm BB-8, Nag's Head Plains
Donegal, Lyran Alliance
19 April 3070

Even though Donegal has been silent for several months, many in the Alliance held out hope that the system's HPG had only been knocked offline and that the planet was not "sterilized"—as apparently happened on Alarion. When the LIC got word from an unknown source that a contingent of Very Important People were trying to get off the planet, they jumped at the chance to get some intel. Oh, and those prominent Lyran citizens, too. With the LAAF tied up elsewhere on other important missions, the LIC turned to the mercenary trade. Your command is garnering a rep and came highly recommended.

Go in, get the VIPs and get out. Now.

Oh, by the way—they're in the badlands with a busted vehicle.

CHAOS UNLEASHED: CLICK, CLICK, BOOM

GAME SETUP

CBT: Use Badlands/Mountain Terrain maps. The gamemaster designates one map edge as the objective edge.

AT2: Use Space maps. The gamemaster designates one map edge as the objective edge.

RPG: Ideally, this track occurs in a non-civilized location—either in space or in the blasted remains of one of the larger agrofarms near Conquessa.

Attacker

The Attacker consists of Veteran elements of a Word of Blake Hunter force. The Attacker's force equals 100 percent of the Defender's total deployed force. In addition, for every six units fielded by the Attacker, one unit is Elite (or comprised of Tau soldiers, if the gamemaster has *Interstellar Players* handy; see pp. 131-134, *IP,* for rules). The Attacker's force should include at least one Elite unit. Determine the Word of Blake force composition on the A column of any faction Random Assignment Table; the Blakist units enter from the gamemaster-designated objective edge.

Defender

The Defender consists of up to 50 percent of the players' total force and enters from the edge farthest from the gamemaster-designated objective edge. In addition, place an appropriate unit (the objective) near the center of the playing area. This unit has Regular experience and a starting Velocity of 0 (if applicable).

CBT: The unit is a Goblin Infantry Support Vehicle (–2 Cruising MP due to motive system damage)

AT2: The unit is a *Leopard CV* DropShip (–2 Safe Thrust due to engine damage)

RPG: The gamemaster chooses the unit, depending on how the player group decides to approach the track. The VIP characters have a maximum +3 bonus to any combat skills they possess.

WARCHEST

***Track Cost*:** 1,000 WP

Optional Bonuses (all bonuses cumulative):

+500 Brutality: Increase the ratio of Elite warriors on the Attacker's side to one for every four Veterans.

+500 On the Lam: Rather than in the middle of the playing area, the objective unit begins within three hexes of the objective edge.

Victory Bonuses (not cumulative):

–600 Total Defeat: No objectives completed.

+1,300 Partial Victory: Two objectives completed.

+1,800 Total Victory: All objectives completed.

OBJECTIVES

1. Save the suits! The objective vehicle must survive the track and/or exit off the Defender's starting edge.

2. Break the Blakist spine: Destroy every Elite warrior in the Attacker's force.

3. Burn the body: Destroy every attacking unit.

CHAOS UNLEASHED: CLICK, CLICK, BOOM

SPECIAL RULES

The following rules are in effect for this track.

Word of Blake

The Blakists become more aggressive as they take damage. For every two hits suffered by the pilot, each pilot gains -1 to all weapon to-hit rolls. Conversely, for every two Elite warriors eliminated from battle, the Word of Blake forces suffer a –1 penalty to Initiative rolls.

The Word of Blake forces will not surrender or retreat.

AFTERMATH

After a brutal ten hours of hide and seek among the rocks and cliffs of the badlands, you finally manage to exfiltrate—but at a price. And you don't find it very comforting to know that the Important People the LIC was so hot about saving were just press junkies. Sure, one of them happens to be Ruth Kirkland, CEO of ComPress. But really—rescuing a glorified tri-vid news exec and her overpaid executive staff? So much for the vaunted intel assets of the LIC.

ADDITIONAL HOOKS

Is there more to Kirkland's story or is it really as simple it seems—a botched intel mission that rescues some scandal-vid reporters? And why in hell were those Blakist fanatics so hot to kill you and your charges? There's something more going on here—but what?

Maybe WoB-ROM's tentacles go deeper than everyone thought….

Expansion Ideas

A prolonged battle can turn into a series of raids and recon moves, trying to pin the opposing force down. The Word of Blake will not give up until the players are destroyed or captured, so this track could take a long time if the players keep running.

NEXT TRACK

Binge, Purge, Flush; Celestial Calamity; Grim Death

CHAOS UNLEASHED: PANIC AND PAIN

PANIC AND PAIN

[*Announcer*]: *"…massive panic in Algonquin Province. Seven more cases of the epidemic have been confirmed in the area, fueling speculation that refugees from Galedon have indeed brought a viral bug to An Ting. Freeway 75 has been clogged with traffic for more than ten hours as thousands of families flee the area. Residents in Algonquin are advised to stay indoors and not add to the congestion that has practically shut down the Takashi Memorial Bridgeway.*

"In other news, An Ting officials have confirmed that outside help has been brought in to ascertain the nature of the recent outbreak and to provide assistance in relief efforts. Civilians are advised to heed emergency personnel instructions and report any unusual symptoms to the nearest medical facility."

SITUATION

The Burrens, Algonquin Island
An Ting, Draconis Combine
23 April 3070

At the tail end of 3069, four DropShips carrying refugees from the devastating Federated Suns attacks on Galedon landed on Algonquin Island. While planetary officials worked with the refugees—who were short on food and shelter, and had left everything behind on the burned-out husk of a Combine prefecture capital—life began to regain some measure of sanity for the displaced citizenry... until signs of the flu outbreak appeared.

Not much was known of the epidemic beyond the Combine officials involved in dealing with Galedon, but rumors and false accounts criss-crossed the Prefecture Intraweb and underground press regarding the "Curse of Galedon." Within days, the refugees—once pitied by the An Ting citizenry—were being shunned and corralled in their small tent city outside Algo Port. Armed guards—supposedly placed to protect the refugees from violence—were posted outside the camp. Rumors flew about some sort of "containment plan" being concocted by the planetary government, prompting a mass exodus of refugees and residents outside the camp that overwhelmed the local militia.

The An Ting government panicked and hired the first merc group passing through the system to help contain the mad rush, hoping also to contain the disease before it wiped out yet another world.

CHAOS UNLEASHED: PANIC AND PAIN

GAME SETUP

CBT: Use at least two maps, any Terrain, set up in a Chase format. The gamemaster designates the Attacker's and Defender's home edges.

AT2: Use at least two maps set up in a Chase format. The gamemaster designates the Attacker's and Defender's home edges. Gamemasters may make this track space-based or use the *Aerospace on BattleTech Maps* rules (see p. 18, *AT2*), or a combination thereof.

RPG: Gamemasters should have a map for reference but may use any type of terrain for this track.

Attacker

The player group is the Attacker for this track and may use up to 25 percent of their total force. The Attacker sets up within eight hexes of its designated home edge. Units begin with a starting Velocity of 5 or less (if applicable).

Defender

The Defender's force consists of elements of the poorly armed planetary militia and several civilian vehicles. The armed portion of this force equals 50 percent of the Attacker's total deployed force. There are twenty civilian vehicles, determined either by gamemaster selection or at random. Any weapons on these vehicles are considered inoperable. All Defender units are Green.

Up to three civilian vehicles enter on every odd turn. The militia force enters the area on Turn Five.

WARCHEST

***Track Cost*:** 1,100 WP

Optional Bonuses (all bonuses cumulative):

+500 Human flood: A veritable tidal wave of refugees surges through the area. Add another twenty civilian vehicles to the Defender's force. These units enter on every even turn after Turn Four (up to four vehicles may enter per turn).

+500 The Dragon is watching: Add +2 modifier to all Attacker to-hit rolls, to reflect extra care being taken as several Combine officials watch for casualties.

+300 Kittens with claws: Any weapons on the civilian vehicles are functional; weapon operators are considered Green. These vehicles only fire when fired upon.

Victory Bonuses (not cumulative):

+700 Partial Victory: Complete Objective Two.

+100 Cumulative Bonus: For every civilian vehicle successfully prevented from leaving the area.

–200 Cumulative Penalty: For every civilian vehicle destroyed by an attacker.

OBJECTIVES

1. Contain the outbreak! Stop as many vehicles as possible from exiting the area.

2. Stand down, dammit! Cripple (but do not destroy) all militia forces.

CHAOS UNLEASHED: PANIC AND PAIN

SPECIAL RULES

The following rules are in effect for this track.

Civilian Vehicles

In order to get a vehicle to stop, an attacking unit must move within one hex (or 50 meters) of a civilian unit and call for that unit's surrender. During the End Phase, roll 1D6 for that civilian vehicle. On a result of 1 to 4, the unit ignores the command. On a 5 or 6, the unit surrenders. The Attacker may modify the roll by hitting the vehicle with a non-lethal attack (any attack that causes damage of 3 points or less), which adds a +1 bonus. For each successive attempt, add +1 to the roll.

Civilian vehicles may be any unit that has a motive system of Airship, VTOL, Hover, Wheeled, Tracked, or Fixed Wing. If in space, then vehicles can be any DropShip, Small Craft, or Aerospace fighter.

Attacking units may only demand the surrender of one civilian unit per turn. Civilian vehicles that exit the battlefield are considered escaped.

Salvage

There is no salvage for this track.

AFTERMATH

Any time the military is brought in to contain civilian panic, tragedy ensues. An Ting is no exception. While the mercenaries hired by the government succeeded in stemming the tide from one side of the island with minimal force, more violent measures erupted near the main port facilities. A massive explosion, caused by a riot of people carrying torches and burning an effigy of the planetary governor, tracked back underground and blew the main lines that ran underneath the Takashi Memorial Bridgeway, collapsing the entire four-kilometer span and drowning thousands of civilians. 'Mech forces were brought in from the local militia to help with disaster control, but by then the PR damage was done. The underground newsnets broadcast vids of the bridge collapse, interspersed with images of mercenaries firing on civilian vehicles, which got picked up and broadcast by the Word of Blake.

And during this time, the Curse of Galedon began to spread….

ADDITIONAL HOOKS

How deadly is the Curse? Is it transmittable by touch, air or water? Player characters who come into contact with infected civilians may find out the hard way.

Public relations battles can be just as hard to fight as 'Mech combat. Journalist-oriented groups may find additional challenges in assisting the underground press or the government agencies in fighting such a battle that rages out of control on An Ting and surrounding worlds.

Expansion Ideas

Gamemasters can expand this track into a series of rolling Chase scenarios through a variety of terrain. Civilian vehicles can be any type, including support vehicles and watercraft. Determined players can conduct "chase" missions, running down any vehicles that gave them the slip the first time or even attempting to reunite families split up in the recent chaos.

NEXT TRACK

Grim Death

LATE 3070: THE TIME OF TRIALS

LATE 3070: THE TIME OF TRIALS

As 3070 settled into the same pace as the prior years—constant reports of new wars, new conquests, and darker terrors—it seems humanity is devolving to our baser impulses. No one has made any genuine attempt to unify the warring nations against a common enemy—indeed, while the Blakists fight seemingly everyone by any means necessary, old and long-standing animosities continue to hold sway and bring neighbors into clashes that defy reason. While old hatreds play out with savage intensity, the Blakists' continued expansion of their Protectorate seems puny in comparison.

The Confederation finally declares victory along the Suns border worlds, leaving a mauled AFFS to pull back and face the continuing war on New Avalon. Yet even as the Federated Suns' actions become apparent, the Taurians—in their infinite paranoia—believe they are the next target and begin preparations and probing attacks into Suns territory to stem off the "inevitable" invasion.

Fracture lines in the Free Worlds League become canyons as political rivals and enemies turn to military force to ram home their ideologies. Rampant Word of Blake defections and propaganda continue to rise, turning small fires into raging infernos of hate, greed and domination. Through it all, the political wars for control of the League continue to escalate—a harbinger of darker days ahead for a realm that remains a nation in name only.

Just as the Confederation trumpets its victory over the Suns, erasing years of perceived shame after the Fourth Succession War, the Word of Blake unleashes an attack on Sian, finally hitting the last House capital world (the alleged bombardment of Sian notwithstanding). Reports trickle in about the Word's betrayal of their last remaining ally as St. Ives and other Confederation worlds—so recently removed from Davion aggression—begin to suffer Blakist assaults.

Just as it seems things can't get any worse, the Clans resume their invasion, with evidence of yet another Clan from their far-off homeworlds arriving to finish what the Falcons, Wolves and Bears could not.

So the darkness continues. The only flames that light the nights now are not of hope or peace. They are funeral pyres, rising on hundreds of worlds as the savage human beast is unleashed.

—Michael Bosworth, INN Special Correspondent

GHOST BEARS COME TO ORESTES

Prince Ragnar speaks to the Riksdag

"Rasalhagians, my citizens! It has been a long time since I last stood before any of you. It has likewise been a time of changes and—especially of late—a time of chaos. Where once we knew mostly peace and tranquility, we now see war and death. Where once my duties to my new adopted nation kept me busy, now I can no long ignore the cries of my fellow citizens—cries for help, and for vengeance!

"You elected me your leader, even though I am sworn to the Ghost Bear Dominion. I cannot ignore your call, especially now that the need is so grave. Your brothers and sisters in the Dominion have pleaded to their Clan for help on your behalf, to free the besieged people on Tukayyid. And now the Ghost Bears have answered. Together, led by our newest Rasalhagian forces—the First Rasalhague Bears, the Gunzberg Eagles and the WarShip *Rasalhague*—we went to Tukayyid side by side with the Ghost Bears, and removed once and for all the brutal murderers who still held that world in thrall. They threw all they had at us: fighters, missiles, even nuclear weapons. But they could not stop the combined wrath of the Bears and Rasalhague.

"Now I stand here before you, as your Elected Prince—no longer in exile, yet still bound to my Clan—to ask our Riksdag that we work together toward creating one nation where two now exist. As before, in ancient times, our ancestors joined their three nations into one to create the Kalmar Union. But this time, it will be a union of equals. It will take time and effort to bridge the gap between our cultures, to find the proper way forward. But for the sake of all our people, this gap must be bridged."

—Excerpt from Elected Prince Ragnar Magnusson's speech to the Riksdag, Orestes, 21 August 3070

EMBRACING UNITY

KHAN'S ORDERS

[*saKhan Broderick Sukhanov*]: "Loremaster, you need to step up the pace of these 'negotiations.' With the damage we sustained at Lum, we will require all of the Alliance's resources."

[*Loremaster Klaus Harper*]: "Understood, my Khan. However, the President remains reluctant to allow us more forces in the Alliance because of his predisposition to nonviolence. And our…zeal…in the Dante solution has given the more pacifistic voices in his government impetus to block our new enclaves on Risin, Cerberus and Rushaven."

[*kaKhan Lynn McKenna*]: "That is unfortunate. We did them a favor by removing such a vile infestation from their midst. To deny us what we require? This is maddening."

[*Harper*]: "It is also reality, and we must adapt to it. I have more respect for Khan Jorgensson now, after seeing how the Bears have adapted to their surroundings. Perhaps the Invaders have the right of it—only the Clans with the capacity to adapt to these changing times can truly survive contact with the rest of humanity."

[*Sukhanov*]: "Then we must endeavor to learn. And quickly."

[*McKenna*]: "Regardless of vision or fortitude, our immediate need is to secure appropriate facilities to handle the rest of our fleet as it arrives. If the Adders continue to pursue us, we will be in scant position to defend even our new enclaves."

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[*Sukhanov*]: "Perhaps we should include our merchants in your negotiations, then. While our assistance in upgrading their aerospace hardware has done much to forge our current relationship, perhaps other avenues—non-military ones—will entice them further."

[*Harper*]: "Very possible, saKhan. I shall contact Merchant Louis at once. He is currently still finalizing our mercantile enclave on Port Krin, and the forces assigned there have done well in ridding that world of the pirate stink. Indeed, the latest Watch reports suggest he is close to finding the prize there of which our Founders spoke."

[*McKenna*]: "Excellent. Then carry on, Loremaster. And remember, time is short. If we do not secure a reliable, amicable accord with the Alliance soon, we will have no true place to call home. And the Jàrnfòlk lifestyle will not suit our proud heritage. We are Ravens, not Sharks. We must roost."

[*Sukhanov*]: "I daresay if we do not secure a home soon, the Alliance may well pay for it in blood, however costly it may be. Let us hope it does not come to that."

[*Harper*]: "*Aff*, saKhan. I have grown fond of these people. I do not wish to see another Dante, either. I will do what I can and more. Harper out."

—Real-time HPG transmission log reportedly intercepted by Ghost Bear Watch ship *Arcturus' Halo*, 1 July 3070 (released to ISAP by the Shadows of Radstadt resistance group)

TUKAYYID FREE AT LAST!

(20 July 3070)

Tukayyid [INN]—The bleak situation here on Tukayyid has been completely reversed over the past two weeks, as officials confirmed today that the Blakist forces that have blockaded and bedeviled this world since early 3068 have finally been vanquished by none other than the military forces of the Ghost Bear Dominion.

The first word received by Tukayyid's remaining planetary defenders about the impending liberation came on 11 July, when a terse message flooded the entire intra-system communication network:

"I am Prince Ragnar Magnusson of the Free Rasalhague Republic, Star Colonel of the First Rasalhague Bears of the Ghost Bear Dominion. In the name of the Republic and the Dominion, all Word of Blake forces in the Tukayyid system will surrender and lay down their arms, or be destroyed. This is your only warning."

The ensuing space battle appeared on several news channels thanks to a direct feed provided by the Ghost Bear vessels. The Bear fleet, led by a *Leviathan*-class WarShip named *Rasalhague* and a *Nightlord*-class battleship, met the Blakist vessels—the *McKenna*-class *Blake's Sword* and *Essex*-class *Deliverance*—as planetside viewers watched. The Dominion vessels swiftly disabled the *Blake's Sword*. In their desperate last struggle, the fanatics allegedly launched nuclear weapons against the Ghost Bears, apparently hitting the *Rasalhague* with at least one warhead that the mammoth vessel amazingly shrugged off. Minutes later, the *Deliverance* fell, torn apart by a hellish broadside from the *Rasalhague*'s guns.

ALLIANCE AT A CROSSROADS

My fellows, we are at a crossroads in Alliance history. We face tremendous opportunity and potential. The Clan Snow Raven proposal would indeed grant us the security and military defense that we have sorely lacked for centuries. Only with their aid can we stop worrying about an *en passant* invasion and absorption by the Draconis Combine or Federated Suns. Only with their help can we hope to be rid of such dangerous terrorists and fanatics as Dante's Inferno and the Word of Blake. Only with their assistance can we expect our economy, technology and education to advance significantly. With limited resources, they have achieved great power and inner strength, achievements we would do well to emulate only half as successfully as the Ravens have.

Such a tempting offer is hard to refuse. Very hard. But our fellows from Baligorra and Raldamax have no trouble refusing it. Their calls to shed the brutal Snow Ravens are interpreted by many as an anti-Alliance stance, or as ungrateful considering all the Ravens have done for us. But we do ourselves and our brethren a disservice by simply dismissing their concerns as self-serving propaganda to further the gains of the famed Raldamaxan Frederique Muller, the most prominent Raven opponent. Our tolerance toward their almost alien culture, and its apparent incompatibility with all others in the Alliance, is a hallmark of our enlightened perspective on life. This tolerance has allowed us all to coexist peacefully for centuries. But it also forces us to close our eyes to the excesses of strangers. We've become afraid to condemn guests for their infractions lest we be considered intolerant of their ways.

Dante. Galedon. Are they worth it? Is this the new style of justice and peace the Alliance will dispense toward ourselves and our neighbors?

—Nathaniel Rodriguez, syndicated columnist, Outworlds Alliance Media Services, 30 July 3070

With the *Deliverance* destroyed and the *Blake's Sword* adrift beyond Tukayyid's gravitational pull, the few Blakist forces planetside scattered in an effort to hide from the inevitable Bear assault. The bulk of these forces were discovered and destroyed by the First Rasalhague Bears and the Gunzberg Eagles, two of the newest formations in the Dominion's armed forces.

Since their heroic victory, these brave children of Rasalhague—once thought lost forever to the land of their birth—have announced their next step in the liberation of the Republic with Prince Ragnar's journey to the Riksdag on Orestes. Meanwhile, two Ghost Bear Clusters and their *Nightlord* battleship have remained behind, pledged to ensure that the Blakists do not return to challenge Tukayyid's liberty again.

RESPECT AND PRIDE

For two days since the massive Dominion fleet made its presence known in the Orestes system, the population has held its breath with dread and anticipation. No one knew if the massive Ghost Bear fleet had come to conquer or worse. Rumors abounded of other Clan attacks on the scale of the Jaguars' scouring of Edo. The entire planet let loose a collective sigh of relief after First Prince Ragnar Magnusson's incredible address only hours ago.

The Bears had not come to conquer, but to save.

"The past three years have clearly shown that ComStar can no longer protect the Republic. The Com Guards lie shattered on Terra, on Tukayyid and on a dozen other worlds. Their fleet is all but destroyed.

"In the name of the Khans of the Ghost Bear Dominion, I pledge from now on that the military forces of the Ghost Bear Dominion will be deployed to protect not only the Dominion, but if Parliament wishes, the entire Free Rasalhague Republic as well. The time has come to stand together against the *stravags* of the Blakists as we decide our common destiny."

Magnusson's epic speech was punctuated by the dispatching of several Dominion DropShips to various locations across Orestes, loaded with food, supplies and other resources. Even now at press time, still more ships are inbound, showing the Dominion's determination to carry out the Prince's promise.

And not a moment too soon.

It's about time someone came to our aid. ComStar lies in shambles around us, their shattered bases amid the ruins of our own decimated cities a mute testimony to the savage Blakist attacks against this world over the past two years. The Blakists killed indiscriminately, wiping out entire metroplexes in order to decimate the Com Guard forces stationed there.

For all the good it did us. The Com Guard held back the Blakists as effectively as tissue paper holds back a polar typhoon. And the innocents of Orestes paid the price. Our time of harboring ComStar has run its course.

We hope this is merely a beginning of the reunification of the Rasalhagian people across the former ComStar-held worlds and the Dominion. We urge our brethren on other worlds of the Republic to give serious thought to the offer of our First Prince—after all, we elected him as our ruler even though he was a ward of our former enemy.

The past is the past. The Rasalhagian people have suffered much and yet we continue to survive because we are a hardy people. We have fallen down seven times. But we got up eight times. Here, now, is our chance to once again know unity and strength with a people who—for all their differences—may not be so unlike us after all.

We welcome our Prince home. Long live the Republic! Long live the Dominion!

—Op/Ed by Gustav Ashigo, Senior Editor, Republican News Services (RNS), Orestes, 21 August 3070

TIME OF TRIALS

THE DEVIL'S OFFER

Given his ultimate rejection by the rest of his fellow countrymen, is it any real surprise to find the deposed Prince Magnusson journeying back to the world of his birth, with his new pets in tow?

Oh, I'm sorry; I meant *as* a pet of his new "brethren." See how magnanimously they treat with him? After all, he is their leader….

Are we such curs ourselves as to accept this scrap of fodder from our conquerors under the guise of "protection?" Has the pride of Rasalhague fallen so far and fast as to forget the shame of the defeat imposed on us by the very troops the Great Boor himself now purports to lead into what shattered remains of our realm he can claim as a hereditary landhold, merely for the pathetic gesture of returning to them?

No! I say, *NO!*

This has gone far enough, beyond even the maniacal imposition by ComStar when they so callously chose Tukayyid for their "Final Showdown" with the Clans in 3052! To allow occupation by the very people behind the war machine that brought forth our decline—and the wholesale decline of civilization itself!—and to allow such without opposition is too far *all over again!* We must dissent! We must defend ourselves!

We must fight!

Politics be damned, and the Bears, too! For each and every one of us killed thus far, we must shed the avenging blood of the fanatic! We have felt the searing bite of pain…now it is time for those hardships to give way to honor restored!

—Anonymous editorial published in *The Free Republican*, Grumium Publishing, 30 August 3070

COMSTAR OUT!

(12 September 3070)

Orestes [RFP]—Many citizens of the Free Rasalhague Republic have viewed ComStar's presence in a negative light. With so many centuries lost under Combine tyranny, the Republic's citizens, passionate about their independence from Combine and Commonwealth, have at best considered the Order's presence a necessary evil in the face of the Clan invasion.

But while the Com Guards undoubtedly prevented the Republic from being swallowed whole, they have also turned our worlds into targets for their "evil twins" in the marauding Word of Blake. Recent heavy fighting on Tukayyid and Orestes resulted in devastating collateral damage to both of the Republic's remaining industrial worlds. Additional raids by Blakist troops and their mercenaries have been visited on the rest of the nation.

How much longer must citizens of the Republic be involved in a war not their own? In the wake of Elected Prince Ragnar's visit to Orestes, the question on everyone's lips is whether the Republic would fare better under the benevolent protection of the Ghost

SHADOWS OF DANTE

(29 November 3070)

Anjin, the Voice just gave us access to the following intercept made by some ISF watchers in the Outworlds. It's cleared for broadcast as-is, if you can believe it; looks like a transcript from some unfortunate Raven's flight recorder data recovered from wreckage over Dante. Refreshing to see that the Ravens are not all-powerful, no? —Lindon

>>>Recording Begins<<<

[*Point Mu-Alpha*]: "Command, crossing zenith of object zero-six-six…now."

[*Raven Command*]: "*Aff*, Mu-Alpha. Proceed to waypoint Epsilon; bypass all others. Picking up faint IR signatures in that area. Will transmit all data as you complete approach to Epsilon."

[*Mu-Alpha*]: "*Aff*, Command. Waypoint Epsilon…"

[*Silence for a minute*]

[*Mu-Alpha*]: "Command, I see nothing here, I—*Contact*! I have contact! Sensors confirm small craft drive plume! Advancing for positive ID."

[*Command*]: "Acknowledged, Mu-Alpha. Be advised: there is no registered friendly traffic in your area."

[*Mu-Alpha*]: "Understood, Command. No chance of friendly fire."

[*Command*]: "Or support. The Star Colonel will be extremely displeased if you manage to get yourself killed out there, Point Commander."

[*Mu-Alpha*]: [*Chuckles*] "*Aff*, Star Captain. I do not have permission to die..."

[*Command*]: "Mu-Beta, be advised. Mu-Alpha has contact in sector zero-niner-seven. Alter vector as appropriate for support, full burn."

[*Mu-Alpha*]: "Warbook has positive ID on contact. Contact is a single *Ahab*. Say again, contact is a single *Ahab* fighter of indeterminate configuration. Engaging target..."

[*Command*]: "*Neg*, Point Commander! Pursue target only. That is possibly the same *Ahab* that has been sniping away at our Binary for the past week. Command says he has proven that bidding a single fighter is well below cutdown. Find his base; we will arrange a proper Trial—"

[*Mu-Alpha*]: "*Neg*, Star Captain! Target has come about, matching vectors! It is already too late to disengage."

[*Command*]: "Mu-Beta?"

[*Mu-Beta*]: "ETA to contact waypoint one-two minutes, Command."

[*Command*]: "*Savashri!* You had better defeat your opponent, Uter. A Circle awaits your return…"

[*Mu-Alpha*]: "*Chalcas*! Freebirth son of a surat! Command, hostile *Ahab* is heavily modified! Being engaged by several particle cannons! He already destroyed one of my weapons!"

[*Command*]: "Break off, Point Commander! Try to lead him to—"

[*Mu-Alpha*]: "*Neg*! Direct hit! He has disabled my drive! I am coasting on a hea—!"

>>>Recording Ends<<<

E TIME OF TRIALS

Bear Dominion. When the Clans attacked the Inner Sphere, they were an unknown quantity—seemingly alien invaders bringing death and destruction. However, over time we have become more familiar with the invaders—thanks in no small part to the efforts of Prince Ragnar.

It has become increasingly clear that the people of the Republic have more in common with Clan Ghost Bear than with ComStar. While the Republic Parliament debates the matter, the people have not been slow in giving voice to their dissatisfaction. "ComStar Out!" is a phrase now heard across the Republic.

FALLING BACK

DAVIONS CRUSHED IN THE CONFEDERATION

(7 July 3070)

St. Ives [CBS]—CBS News received confirmed reports this morning of the surrender and withdrawal of the last of Hasek's invading forces still operating in Confederation territory. Many of these forces made their final stands in the St. Ives Commonality, erroneously believing that the people of these worlds would be more sympathetic to their failed effort to annex a portion of the Celestial Realm. Here on St. Ives, our forces crushed the remnants of three separate commands, including the First Federated Suns Lancers RCT.

On Ares, where the Fourth McCarron's and the Home Guard secured the world with surprise support from the Blackwind Lancers, normality has already begun to return in the wake of the Davion assault. Across the surrounding duchies, other Davion units faced total or near-total destruction, with their remaining commands on Necromo, Warlock and Hustaing barely able to retreat back to the Capellan March with more than a handful of their original troops intact.

Chancellor Liao released this statement in honor of those who paid the ultimate sacrifice:

"*The valiant defenders of the Confederation willingly gave their lives in the face of certain death to repel the barbarian force George Hasek sent to destroy our nation and our way of life. We, the citizens of the Confederation, owe our very existence to those who selflessly gave their lives in our defense. To those thousand of patriots who answered the call to arms and rose up to aid our forces in the struggle against tyranny and oppression, we honor you.*"

Here on St. Ives, and elsewhere throughout the Confederation, we echo our beloved Chancellor and bow our heads in memory of those who gave themselves for our freedom.

CONFEDERATION TROOPS RETURN TRIUMPHANT

[*Lunsford*]: "This is Pamela Lunsford reporting for CNS from Warlock. Today the First St. Ives Lancers returned home victorious from their recent campaign on New Syrtis. As this heroic command marches down Celestial Boulevard in what has become a

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CAPELLANS IN RETREAT

(21 July 3070)

New Syrtis [NANS]—Capellan March officials announced today that Capellan forces are continuing their retreat from FedSuns space, following the defeat of their invasion at New Syrtis five months ago. The announcement, released by Duchess-Regent Angela Hasek's office, stated the following:

"*CCAF forces continue to retreat after facing insurmountable odds and certain destruction at the hands of the elite troops of the Federated Suns. Every attempt made by Capellan units to take control of New Syrtis resulted in devastating losses. Our valiant defenders defeated Chancellor Liao's troops at every turn. Though their forces reached deep into our realm, at no time was the safety and security of the Capellan March threatened by House Liao's ill-advised and ill-conceived attack on the citizens of the Federated Suns. At this moment in time, the remnants of the Capellan military are a shattered, ill-equipped force with no conceivable way to defend themselves for some time to come. Davion forces once again have proven their prowess and strength. Long live the Capellan March*!"

Casualties among the retreating Capellan forces are estimated at or above 75 percent in most cases, while our own losses—though great—were substantially less. The barbaric invasion of New Syrtis caused significant collateral damage, but officials have stated that reconstruction should take less than a year. Unfortunately, civilian casualties ran extremely high, a result of retreating CCAF units randomly firing in heavily populated residential centers as they ran for their DropShips, while cover fire from orbiting WarShips caused grievous damage to outlying areas.

Even the revelation of this information cannot put a damper on the victory our military achieved here on New Syrtis and continues to achieve elsewhere in the Capellan March.

spectacular impromptu victory parade in the planetary capital, we go to Tom Stulner for live coverage. Tom?"

[*The CNS newsroom is replaced by a male reporter standing before a scene of vehicles and infantry in CCAF colors, moving own a broad street past screaming and cheering masses, amid clouds of colorful streamers and confetti.*]

[*Stulner*]: "Thank you, Pamela! I'm here at the corner of Vine Street and Celestial Boulevard, where elements of the St Ives' premier line regiment can be seen marching with military precision down the center of the capital city. Thousands of well-wishers and patriots pack both sides of the street as far as the eye can see, all waving flags with the Liao and St. Ives insignia as they frantically cheer on their victorious troops…[*Enormous uproar and shouts of jubilation.*] Pam, the crowd is going absolutely crazy here, as a single BattleMech turns the corner. Bob, pan the camera, and zoom in…" [*Camera zooms in on a lone* Centurion *BattleMech.*]

"*Yen-lo-Wang*! It's Duke Kai Allard-Liao! Returning home in triumph! The crowd's outpouring of love is as overpowering as it is awesome, and the Duke's 'Mech moves with such fluid grace…" *[Camera scans the crowd as they begin singing.*]

"The crowd seems to have broken into a spontaneous song…It sounds like...yes, the Capellan national anthem, ringing with pride as others shout '*Xin Sheng*' in the background. It's a massive party here and throughout the capital! With pride and hope in abundance! Back to you, Pamela."

[*Lunsford*]: "Thank you, Tom. We have received reports of similar celebrations on Sian, Capella and Victoria. Truly, this has been a great day for the Capellan Confederation."

—Canopian News Service broadcast, Warlock, 14 September 3070

FINAL NOTICE

Field Marshal Hasek,

Again, I command you to do your sworn duty to your state and sovereign, as current head of the Capellan March forces. You are to rescind George's "no mercy" directive to your troops at once, or face dire consequences. I am losing patience with your stubbornness and your inability to see beyond petty personal vendettas during a national emergency. This is dereliction of duty and gross insubordination. Enough Federated Suns blood has been spilled against your private foes, while the true enemies of the state run rampant over us. Follow your legal orders immediately.

I am through warning you, Nathaniel.

—Intercepted AFFS message attributed to Princess-Regent Yvonne Steiner-Davion (veracity unconfirmed), posted to the Kathil InterWeb by "Ikonoklast," 8 November 3070

TAURUS NEXT?

The recent fizzle of our vaunted allies' offensive into Davion space once again leaves us high and dry. These events conspire not only to remove the initiative of our Pleiades offensive, but are liable to kill it off completely. Without the Capellans as a greater threat, the Davions are left with no restrictions to utilize their full force against us.

No sensible person can doubt the attack will come. Our inability to completely consolidate the Cluster is practically begging the Capellan March to dislodge us wholesale this time. Certainly, the public claims are that both nations intend to focus fully on the Blakist problem. But that is a cop-out. Our "allies" were always all too eager to dump us, and Hasek's people have been practically foaming at the mouth to dig their teeth into the Concordat without Capellan distraction. One wonders how profitable the weapons trade from the Confederation is to the Concordat? Enough to start a war for us, then not be around to see it through?

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That question is mostly irrelevant because the Davions have vowed to build a palace on Taurus from the rubble of the capital. All of it. Yes, I know numerous "official sources" indicate that reports about those claims are all unsubstantiated, but who did they ask?

Speaking of high-level official sources, the real ones are telling me that the FedRats have been building up supplies to engage us as soon as they can rotate troops back to and over our borders. Even various Davion news outlets are making reports to that effect.

So what are we going to do? Keep our focus on rebels, bandits, pirates and Blakists who have done us no harm? Or put it where the *real* threat lurks: the Federated Suns, a disaster waiting to happen? They have no other priorities left beyond the extermination of Taurus, to finally put an end to the Concordat as the major Periphery power. And we'd better be ready to show them the error of their ways.

—Sean Stemens, syndicated columnist for Taurian Public Broadcasting, Taurus, 15 November 3070

A SEPARATE PEACE

LONG LIVE THE KNIGHTS!

(6 August 3070)

Atreus [ISAP]—For almost a year now, the world of Atreus, capital of the embattled Free Worlds League, has been a stronghold dominated by allies of the Word of Blake, reportedly under the aegis of Corinne Marik and her father, Intelligence Minister Paul Marik. But for all those Atrean citizens oppressed by the Word, there is still hope. Over the past several months now, survivors of the Second Knights of the Inner Sphere—thought destroyed in late October of 3068—have emerged to engage the Blakists in a pitched guerrilla warfare campaign. Constantly eluding pursuit, these resisters remain at large and operational, carrying out exploits that have destroyed more than a battalion of Blakist troops.

[*"It is true that a small band of terrorists operates on Atreus. But their likeness to the Second Knights of the Inner Sphere is only as deep as the paint that covers their 'Mechs.*

"In truth, this band is no better than a collection of pirates. They have inflicted damage mostly on civilian assets, and caused a substantial amount of civilian casualties with their wanton acts of terror. The deluded and subversive are lifting these criminals up as a symbol for their struggle against the order and peace of Blake that we have provided for months. This type of opportunistic propaganda only serves to strengthen the resolve of those who resist the truth and justice we have dispensed ever since the false Marik fled. All law-abiding citizens should report any subversive activities to the authorities, to help us provide a safe environment for all."]

FIGHTING RAGES IN WORD-OCCUPIED LEAGUE

(30 August 3070)

Irian [ISAP]—Despite the best efforts of the Word of Blake to eradicate resistance to their occupation of the Free Worlds, hope survives. Efforts to kill or capture prominent figures such as Alys Rousset-Marik and Jeremy Brett have come to nothing, and even the false Thomas Marik remains at large.

The Duchess of Augustine has captured the popular imagination with the daring exploits of her resistance movement, centered on the remains of the Krushers, her father's mercenary command. Likened to a modern-day Robin Hood, her actions behind enemy lines are often little more than pinpricks but have driven the Blakists to distraction, pinning down a large contingent of their troops and collaborators.

Brett's defense of Tamarind and of his wife, Captain-General Therese Marik, is less romantic than his niece's actions but no less dramatic and significant for the League. His pragmatic abandonment of outlying worlds to concentrate his forces brought cries of outrage but has allowed him to beat off no less than three Blakist assaults on his territory, solidifying his reputation as one of the pre-eminent commanders of the modern era. However, it seems unlikely that even his genius can hold out forever against the Blake juggernaut, particularly now that Atreus and much of the Marik Commonwealth lies in Blakist hands. In one bright spot, rumors of friction between Paul Marik and his daughter, the Captain-General, imply that the Word of Blake's control is far from absolute.

The continued survival of Captain-General Thomas Marik—who still uses that name despite his own admission that it is not truly his, and that title despite his ouster from Atreus—must stick in the Blakist craw. The scars of orbital bombardment and troop landings mar Oriente, but it has held out against enemy assaults, with troops loyal to Duke Christopher Halas rallying to the defense of their lord and his son-in-law. Rumors of assassination attempts are rife, but to date none has come close to succeeding (as far as we know). How long can Oriente survive, an island surrounded by a sea of enemies?

FLEET ADVISORY: SHILOH

Attention, all shipping:

This is an all-points fleet advisory issued from Atreus Command, 1200 GST on 4 September 3070. Be advised that renegade vessels may be operating in the vicinity of the holy world of Shiloh. At 2315 GST on 22 August 3070, disaster beacons were picked up from the WoBS *Xanthos*, a *Black Lion*-class battlecruiser, and the WoBS *Impetuous* (formerly the FWLS *Nueva Badajoz)*, an *Aegis-*

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class vessel, both of which were on routine patrols in the system. Additional vessels dispatched to render aid recovered some 165 crewmen from the two distressed ships, both of which had been destroyed.

The crews revealed that a group of merchant vessels pretending to be disabled had lured them into an ambush. A renegade flotilla then struck without warning or mercy, employing an *Agamemnon*-class heavy cruiser and two *Eagle*-class frigates. The identity of these vessels has not been established beyond doubt, but transponder signals broadcast during the battle indicate they were the *Menelaus*, the *Lancelot* and the *Galahad*, all vessels that subverted the systems installed during their construction and thus were not brought under our blessed command.

The post-battle status of these Heretic WarShips is unknown, but shipping should assume that all are extremely dangerous and will attack without provocation. Do not approach or engage them; leave that task to Blake Militia capital ships with due authority.

—Advisory report issued by LCCC headquarters on Atreus to all allied posts within ninety light-years of Shiloh, 5 September 3070

FADING LIGHTS

On 27 July 3070, we were forced to alter our intended itinerary and use Alarion as a recharge point. We knew the planet was no longer communicating and had heard the advisories to avoid the system, but did not realize a full quarantine was in effect until we jumped in-system.

We did not at any time attempt to contact the planet. We observed apparently derelict DropShips near the jump point but did not attempt to communicate or to investigate.

We didn't get the whole message at once. There was heavy interference, probably from the quarantine satellites' jamming. It was obviously a recording, playing and replaying, so we heard bits and snatches from a few dozen repetitions before we could put together what it said. This is what we got:

"Anyone, any JumpShip, any WarShip, anyone out there: We know you've been warned to keep clear. But listen. You can help. You can save our children. We have children here. Asymptomatic—no sign of any disease. You could use DropShips with sealed holds. Wear hazmat suits. Or environmental suits. Load them in the holds, scrub the air—pump in fresh, whatever. Get them off this world. Keep them isolated as long as you think you need to. You'll see. They're healthy. It's too late for us, but they still have a chance. If you help. Please!"

We did not reply. And we did not stay in the system any longer than we needed to recharge. We left ASAP and completed our run.

Not that we've gotten a hell of a lot of sleep since then.

—Report filed on 4 August 3070 with the Lyran Free Traders Association by Captain Richard Marshburn of the *Harbinger*, a *Tramp*-class JumpShip (registered to Akfata-Zaprudy Transport)

DEAD ENDS

Lord Thomas,

Our mutual friend has confirmed the details of the world you were interested in and that we discussed in our prior conversation. The information uncovered matches your recollections and supports the proposition that it was a major center of enemy operations until recently, perhaps even a staging post for the present hostilities. However, once we jumped in system and neared the planet, we discovered that the largest, northern continent (according to your recollections and accounts to be host to the planet's population and activities) was undergoing volcanic activity the likes of which I have never seen, much less imagined. Most of the continent was completely obscured by a cloud of ash, mixed with astonishing amounts of sulfer dioxide, carbon dioxide (and a host of others I didn't care to note). We braved atmospheric entry, only to find something my eyes could not understand. In place of a mammoth volcano (or even super volcano, which I'm aware of), there was no single cone or ejection point we could discover; not even a crater, as I first surmised the Enemy might have used the first known instance of a strategic nuclear weapon in this war, to eradicate their presence, but accidentally set off the eruption. But this?! As far as we could determine from our cursory pass before the extreme sheer of venting heat and noxious gas threatened our safety, forcing us to burn back to orbit, over hundred-thousand square kilometers of land were already inundated under a flow of magma possibly tens of meters (if not hundreds) thick. And it was growing and growing and growing, literally as we watched. My comms-officer (who knew he was a closet volcanist aficionado), practically wet himself when he realized what we were seeing. A traps volcano. Apparently it starts with a plume from the very core of the planet that sends up an overabundance of basalt magma, which pools directly underneath the crust, after which it begins working its way through various fissures, until it finally finds outlets (how long something like that might take was beyond his knowledge) and then begins flowing from such egress points in unimaginable volumes (well for me; Rodney began spouting off numbers in volumes, cube roots and I shut him down, especially when he began talking about how such a basalt flood could last tens of thousands, if not millions of years!). What I did verify, however, is he confirmed that they are exceptional rare (he's never heard of one so late in a planet's life cycle and knew any one of a hundred scientific organizations that would sell their mothers to observe this; he will be discrete, I have been assured) and when asked whether such a traps volcano might be caused by human hands, he laughed so hard I believe he did wet himself at that point; started spewing off about how all the nuclear weapons ever used by man was a small flame compared with what we witnessed, and that none of that could possible effect the core in such a way to cause a plume…sorry, I'm babbling, but this is just astonishing…the forces involved.

Everything is gone, as though it never existed. As far as I could surmise from our quick observations, it is though no human hand has ever touched this place. Did the Enemy simply run afoul of cosmic karma attempting to balance out the murderous, soulless actions of the Master? Somehow, despite all the horrifyingly real evidence before me, I can't help but doubt…

Regardless…we are back to square one. And yet I refuse to believe—as I know you do also—that this was the only such world hidden away, and will continue to work through channels to discover the location and disposition of other nests.

Your humble servant,

E

—Verigraphed message (veracity unconfirmed) addressed to "TH" on Oriente (intercepted by the Scourge of Atreus resistance group and posted anonymously on the Keystone InterWeb, 13 October 3070)

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SACRIFICES

Mark!

Got this from a friend. Apparently the Blakists are using the Solaris police to help them process prisoners, and in typical cop fashion they logged this into the evidence room despite the fact that there were no trials going on for political prisoners. He swapped a bootleg of *Stranded*, Season 3 for it.

—Giselle

[*Camera briefly catches a glimpse of a wild-eyed woman who barely two years ago graced Solaris holovids with an award-winning smile. The scene pans to catch sight of smoke and flames and a marching BattleMech of indeterminate type, weathering a swarm of small arms fire. In the lower-right corner, the date: "08/11/70" appears.*]

[*Cooper*]: "This is Kiva Cooper, reporting for freedom-loving people everywhere. A few blocks down Jade Street, you can see the Solaris Home Defense League assaulting the Central Utilities Building. A lance each of 'Mechs and vehicles are holding off an enemy unit while infantry troopers plant explosives on one of the major lines.

"This is not an attempt to 'throw the city in chaos' so that the cavalry can come rushing in to save us. There is no cavalry. This will shut down the spaceport for a few days. While many say that the SHDL is just hurting the people of Solaris by resisting, what it's really doing is making the Blakists' job harder. Their job entails murder, enslavement and horrors one can only imagine unless they've been to your homeworld.

[*A rumble shakes the ground and the camera as 'Mechs stomp forward amid the loud rattle of heavy autocannon fire. Cooper begins to cover the action blow-by-blow as the combatants stumble into view.*]

[*Cooper*]: "Off Burl Street, you can see a *Buccaneer* and…oh shit!...a *Legacy*…getting past the League line. Jeanette Mason has pursued them with her custom *Stalker* and is taking them both on. Lasers, cannons and missiles are flying. The *Buccaneer* goes in to use its axe…"

[*Male Voice*]: "*Stop*!"

[*Camera swings wildly around to zero in on a man in police riot fatigues approaching Kiva Cooper. At least four others flank him.*]

[*Cooper*]: "We're filming for SBC!"

[*Cop*]: "No, you escaped there last week."

[*Cooper*]: [*suddenly drawing a pistol*] "Run, Chris! Get the footage out, I've got this one!"

[*Cooper fires a shot, and the cop doubles over from a hit to the groin. Camera spins wildly, catching a blurry glimpse of more infantry, the pavement, a gloved hand and the overcast sky before suddenly going black.*]

VOICE OF THE FORGOTTEN II

Hi Mom,

I know the men in suits have probably scared you and told you I was dead, missing or captured. It's the latter, but they're treating me well. Your boy went down swinging here on [*censored*]. I took down three 'Mechs helping cover the retreat. I hope some of the guys made it off-planet. Don't worry, I can handle the Eagles and I'll come back to you when this little war is over. Some of the guys say some units are a few jumps from Atreus, so I'm sure a peace treaty is coming soon. I'll write again when they give us a chance.

Love, Jeremy

Mom,

I want to go home. It's getting worse. The war keeps going and going. Supplies are getting harder to come by and they're cutting back our rations. They moved us a few jumps away. I think we're on [*censored*] or maybe [*censored*]. The Eagles are okay, but it's the other guys that make it horrid. Those Wobbies come by occasionally, and when they do, we get interrogated It's so brutal, it's near torture. And we can't give them anything. I don't know what forces are on Zebebelgenubi! I just drive a 'Mech! What do they want? How much longer will this last? I can't take much more. Some guys are disappearing, especially officers and nobles. I don't want to be next. The Eagles hate the Wobbies almost as much as we do. Write the Duke for me, Momma.

Love, Jeremy

—Private letters attributed to Leutnant Jeremy Minderhoff (POW, captured on McAffee on 27 November 3069), dated early November 3070

SKYE STILL A THREAT

In the general excitement over the cease-fire with the Lyran Alliance and high tensions on the home front, many people have overlooked the reality that Skye—specifically, Skye's duke, Robert Kelswa-Steiner—has remained silent.

Duke Kelswa-Steiner unilaterally declared war on the Free Worlds League in February of 3068, long before any other Lyran Alliance province looked toward us with hostile intent. He has never rescinded that declaration, nor apologized for the false charges upon which it was predicated.

Now as our Free Worlds League Military concentrates within our borders, Skye is left unwatched. Skye, which has at its disposal at least one powerful *Mjolnir*-class WarShip, the duke's private army of cavaliers—cleverly withheld from combat and kept safe from harm until such a time as this—and who knows how many other military assets. Skye, which has already invaded, sacked and

occupied sovereign Free Worlds planets in a transparent grab for power and territory during this time of crisis.

Can there be any doubt that the duke has his eye on the verdant worlds that lie across his rimward border? Worlds now undefended or minimally defended as we turn our attention toward healing our nation? Worlds that will soon—unless the League Central Coordination and Command recognizes the danger and reallocates defenses—be crushed under the Lyran jackboots of "free" Skye?

The time to act is now, before our reliance on the integrity and good will of forces that have never given us cause to trust them leads to disaster. Before our shortsighted lack of preparation costs our brothers and sisters on worlds closer to the coiled serpent of Skye their homes, their freedoms and their lives.

—Jesse Winley, *The Miaplacidus Perspective*, Commonwealth Press, 4 October 3070

UNLEASHING HELL

WORD OF BLAKE RETURNS TO SIAN!

*** Breaking News! ***

"This is Kim Soo Li reporting live from an underground location. Six days ago, a massive invasion force comprised of three Blakist Militia divisions and supported by two WarShips launched a surprise assault against Sian at the peak of celebrations marking the return of our valiant troops from the war against Duke Hasek. Indeed, their arrival was so sudden that, had it not been for the efforts of our own naval forces, the situation here in the capital would surely have spun out of control within hours of the first volleys.

"Instead, the newly modified *Feng Huang*-class heavy cruisers, *Ilsa Hyung* and *Aleisha Kris*, together with two *Impavido*-class destroyers, engaged both Blakist WarShips while a massive fighter screen deployed by the *Feng Huang*s dealt with the enemy's inbound DropShips. As of this report, at least one Blakist heavy cruiser was reportedly destroyed, with the other either crippled or driven off. No word on the damage done to our own vessels has yet been released.

"Elements from two Blakist divisions—tentatively designated as the Seventeenth and Twenty-fourth—survived to land on Sian. Both initiated a massive attack on the Forbidden City and its outlying areas, but the gallant efforts of the Red Lancers and Warrior House Imarra kept Sian from falling.

"According to field reports, one of the Blakist divisions surrounded the capital in an attempt to crush the Lancers, while the other cut a swath of destruction through every city and town within a hundred kilometers of the capital, and the battle became a bloody stalemate for a time.

"Twenty-four hours ago, the surprise arrival of the Blackwind Lancers turned the tide against the Blakists. Apparently returning to their Capellan roots, the renegade Lancers executed a combat drop directly atop the Blakists' southern front and drove for the heart of the capital, where Blackwind commander Warner Doles reportedly led his command directly to the main government building to personally rescue the Chancellor.

SETTLING THE SCORE

[*Star Colonel Teresa Sender*]: "So the Horses have reared their ugly heads once more in Invader space."

[*Star Colonel Meagan Johnston*]: "Tremble in fear, Wolf cur. I am Star Colonel Meagan Johnston of the 412th Mechanized Strike Cluster assigned to Kappa Galaxy. I am here to take Paulus Prime from your limp and rotten jaws. What forces do you bid to defend yourselves, if you even dare?"

[*Sender*]: "I am Star Colonel Teresa Sender of the Thirteenth Wolf Regulars. Try to take this planet, my pretty pink ponies. We will defend it with all resources available to us."

[*Johnston*]: "Wolves resorting to Spheroid tricks? We wish to fight this battle honorably, but I should have known better, considering that you Wolves have lost your way in honorable combat."

[*Sender*]: "So you say. I think the Horses have no taste for reality."

[*Johnston*]: "Apparently news of Tiber has yet to reach your ears. This unit is a proud inheritor of many veterans of our victorious campaign."

[*Sender*]: "Tiber? You mean the world where your tankmen tried to claim honor and only reduced themselves further by not bowing to our inherent superiority? We are the Founder's Clan. You are a pale horse."

[*Johnston*]: "Then perhaps we can decide this more simply. I bid a point of tanks to take this world. Specifically, Star Commanders Andrew and Robert, who as commanders of a Mars crew in our Eighty-fifth BattleMech Cluster rightfully claimed seventeen kills on Tiber, seven on the plains of Tokasha and nine more of your feeble kin on Oberon IV. Or are you Wolves so lost that you cannot even bring yourselves to face down two 'useless' vehicles and their crews?"

[*Sender*]: "You speak impudence, Meagan. All right, Ponyrider, I accept your bid. I shall defend with myself in my *Nova* on the rim of the Arlington Chasm. And I will show you the error of your ways."

[*Johnston*]: "Say it, Teresa. Or are you trying yet more Spheroid word play?"

[*Sender*]: "Fine, Gelding. This battle shall decide who may claim Paulus Prime, as it shall be until we all fall. Or is that too complicated for your lowborn bloodline to understand?"

[*Johnston*]: "Bargained well and done, cur. *Seyla!* Say your goodbyes now while you have a chance—I doubt your fellow Wolves will want you back after you lose in shame."

—Transcript of the Hell's Horses' *batchall* for Paulus Prime, 12 December 3070

THE HASEK CONSPIRACY

Somebody actually put a bullet through his brain. George Hasek's invasion came to a halt not because he was outmaneuvered, or out-fought, but by one person with a pair of brass ones between his legs. Of course, being a sniper means you're issued a pair anyway. But whoever he is, he managed to penetrate the Davions' most stringent security measures, set up his rifle, wait for Old George to put his head in the crosshairs and squeeze that trigger just enough to end things.

Here's the thing about that. Who actually pulled that trigger? Hasek's sharp; his security must have been intense, especially while he's in a shooting war against the Capellans—a nation-state known for its use of irregular tactics—and lets not forget the first assassination attempt. Yes, the Death Commandos are more than capable of having done this, but I don't think they did. To hit George means you have to get close enough to see him. Considering he only uses hand-picked people with the proper political leanings in his security forces, and brings in more if he doesn't feel secure enough, the Death Commandos are a tough sell. Extracting Kai, maybe; croaking the duke himself? Nah.

Which means if the Death Commandos, or any other Capellan group, did it, they got very lucky. That kind of luck does not grow on trees, not even for the Capellans. Locals? Not even a remote possibility. That leaves somebody from Hasek's own security forces. The next question is, were they subverted? As I said, they're loyal. To a fault. So I don't think the Capellans got to the shooter. Rather, I think another Davion is behind this. Considering the target, only one person could have ordered the hit.

That would be the seated Regent.

Now, why would *she* do that? Well, that's obvious. The Word of Blake blockaded her home, her military is needed to defend the realm, and what does Hasek do? He goes against the Capellans in a foolish war that can gain nothing and lose everything. What should Hasek have done? Turned his forces inward to help break the Word's blockade.

What did his sovereign ask him to do? Break off hostilities against the Capellans and assist his realm.

What did he do? Continue his attacks against the Capellans.

What did it cost him? His life.

Think about it!

—Renegade Exeter InterWeb posting by "Starling," 30 July 3070

"With the arrival of the Free Capellan forces, the Red Lancers and House Imarra appear to have finally shattered the Blakists' siege. Two hours ago, I'm told, the last of the surviving Blakist units lifted, leaving a devastated but free Sian in their wake.

"For CBS news, I'm Kim Soo Li."

—CBS News special report, Sian, 21 September 3070

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FREE CAPELLA DISSOLVES

[*Shen*]: "Good evening, viewers, this is Peter Shen. The local Free Capellan ambassador, Tamara Quinn, has called a special news conference. We take you live to City Hall where Ken Franks is standing by. Ken?"

[*Ken*]: "Thank you, Peter, I'm standing here in Shin Low Hall in Xin Singapore, awaiting the start of this unprecedented news conference, called by representatives of the renegade Free Capella movement. Rumor has it a major shake-up in the movement's ranks is imminent, concerning the state of its remaining combat commands and—. Ah, wait…Here comes Tamara Quinn now, the movement's local representative."

[*Background sounds of camera and the murmurs of the gathered reporters.*]

[*Quinn*]: [*Long pause*] "Good evening, ladies and gentlemen of the press. I'm Tamara Quinn, and I have come here on behalf of Mandrinn Treyhang Liao…[*Pause*] "Two days ago, Blakist Manei Domini assassins brutally attacked Mandrinn Liao while he was visiting on St. Ives—"

[*Audible gasps and murmurs from the crowd; a few unintelligible questions are shouted out over the din.*]

[*Quinn*]: "He survived the attack, but succumbed to his injuries a few hours later. Before he died, he gave these final instructions. [*Pause, sound of paper being unfolded.*]

[*Quinn*]: [*Reading*] "*With the Jie Fang Legion's destruction at the hands of the Death Commandos, and the Blackwind Lancers' heroic return to the Capellan fold after relieving Sian and rescuing the Celestial Wisdom, I hereby dissolve the Free Capella Movement. The time has come for all Capellans to stand and defend the Confederation against those who seek its destruction, as one Capellan people, united in body and spirit.*"

[*Quinn*]: [*Clears throat*] "These instructions were to be carried out immediately. Thank you, fellow citizens. That is all."

[*More murmurs and inaudible questions.*]

—Excerpt from a special report issued by CBS News' affiliate (KIDS Channel 7) on Indicass, 1 November 3070

NO NOBLER SACRIFICE

(18 September 3070)

XSFP [St. Ives]—*Tian-tin* is burning [*"with the purification of the guilty"*]. Even at the time of this editorial, our beloved capital still burns [*"with cleansing fire"*] from the savage fighting that has occurred there over the past seventy-two hours. It began in orbit, with the crews of the *Elias Jung* and her escorts selling themselves dearly [*"foolishly"*] to keep the Word of Blake's Eighth Division from invading in force. In their noble defense of our sacred planet, the *Elias* took an unnamed Blakist *Dante* [*"The* Jung *exploded from within, barely scratching the* Perdition*"*] with it in a heroic [*"foolish"*] final stand.

Though the Blakist DropShips filled our skies and landed their troops with murderous [*"blessed"*] intent, our Capellan forces stood true [*"Impeding progress, leading to judgment."*]. Every one

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of our heroes who fell took two Blakists with them. Our unity has stiffened our spines and shattered theirs.

They then resorted to burning our homes, our property, our lands [*"Only after the citizens began looting."*]. They torched our offices, cut off our power, poisoned our water and brought death to thousands of innocents at a time [*"Only to shift blame from yourselves, who would rather poison your world than let us refine it."*]. Yet our will did not break. We opposed them with whatever we had on hand—rakes, knives, our bare hands. I remember seeing a mob of thousands swarm over a Blakist infantry stronghold, tearing the invaders limb from limb [*"Exaggerations: a common Confederation trait!"*]. All to protect our homes and our loved ones [*"And the honor of your tyrannical dictator."*].

We will continue to stand fast, citizens [*"Only because you do not see the truth of your folly."*]. Because we are the only ones who can help ourselves [*"And therefore, your downfall is secured."*]. We have stood against the Davion aggression and now the Word of Blake. And we will survive, because we are Capellan. And they are nothing [*"Nothing but the embodiment of Truth and Wisdom, unlike your own ruler—who shall pay for his own crimes very soon."*].

So honor our fallen heroes as you sleep tonight. Light a candle for them. Light up the night [*"with purifying flame"*] and show our "honored guests" that we will not tolerate their presence [*"Nor we yours!"*]. Because there is no nobler sacrifice than to die for the world you love [*"Unless you die for a Cause greater than yourself. Blake be praised!"*]. *Xin Sheng! Xin Sheng! Xin Sheng!*

LOOMING THREATS

Loremaster:

We have received information from the remnants of WolfNet and our Lyran friends that confirms some type of imminent Blakist operation may be aimed at the Arc-Royal theater, perhaps even against the world of Arc-Royal. I realize we are operating on a few incomplete reports, and that we have seen only a small percentage of the likely operational logistics network, but presuming that we are indeed seeing a buildup to support a strike-in-force on another major system in this area, I feel we must accept that Arc-Royal remains the only significant target in this part of the Commonwealth that fits the bill for what amounts to a typical Word of Blake headhunter strike. I postulate that they hope to use the current preoccupation with the Jade Falcons to facilitate this strike.

They may have mustered sufficient force to engage our standing Arc-Royal garrison, but I feel we know enough of their unholy war so far to establish that they try never to use more than they strictly need. We therefore have a chance to repel this Blakist strike. I realize that an attempt to prepare for this may hamper our efforts against the Falcons, but given Outreach, Alarion and Galax, I would consider our hand forced. Perhaps impairing our efforts is sufficient gain for the Blakists, but relocating assets would be the lesser of two evils.

—Star Colonel Rael, Arc-Royal, report dated 13 November 3070 (declassified on 29 December 3070)

ADMISSION OF HONOR

"The Hell's Horses are…possessed of a powerful will to fight to victory. They do not purport to fight until the end, only to victory; any sacrifice along the road to victory is acceptable to a Hell's Horseman. Such a perspective is not unique to them, however, and any Clan warrior could swear by that, or by a similar credo.

"All things considered, we Wolves remain the most capable of all the Clans in combat. Honor, valor and fortitude are our bywords, flexibility and speed our doctrine, all concepts ingrained in us. I tell you now: once the Wolf seizes hold, any opponent would be wise to make his peace quickly, and then fight as if his very legacy is endangered.

"The Hell's Horses also honor and embody these concepts in every conceivable fashion. To engage them is daunting for even a seasoned warrior, and to be engaged by them is a deadly matter…"

—Amendment to an after-action report filed by Star Colonel Juanita, Second Wolf Guards Grenadiers Cluster, after the battle for Nyserta, 3 December 3070

NEW CLAN INVASION?

(20 December 3070)

Alexandria [INN]—Following the loss of contact with Eridani Light Horse troops on Huntress, disturbing news has begun to filter out of the Clan Occupation Zones, prompting the LAAF to place forces deployed along the Periphery on high alert.

Word is that Clan Hell's Horses has returned to the Inner Sphere.

While this Clan has reportedly focused its attentions on Clan Wolf territory to date, many experts believe it is only a matter of time before Horses troops drive further into the Inner Sphere. Worse, the reappearance of this one Clan may herald the arrival of others. Already we have seen the Diamond Sharks infiltrate the Inner Sphere in a slow but steady economic invasion, while the Snow Ravens' arrival in the Outworlds Alliance has been a distressing development for the Draconis Combine and the Federated Suns.

With troops spread so thin, the arrival of additional Clans along the Periphery must be ranked as one of the LAAF's worst nightmares. Should the Clans renew their invasion in defiance of the so-called Great Refusal, any Clan attacking from Poulsbo and Kolovraty could have almost a clear run right through to Skye, putting them well ahead of any competitors in the drive to Terra.

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ASSAULT ON ARC-ROYAL FAILS

(30 December 3070)

Arc-Royal [ARNN—If there were any who doubted the wisdom of Duke Kell's offer of sanctuary to the members of Clan Wolf exiled from the Wolf Clan Occupation Zone, events over the past week have laid them to rest once and for all. Following the devastating attacks on Outreach, it was inevitable that the Word of Blake would eventually strike Arc-Royal, even before the duke offered sanctuary to Dragoons survivors. The Blakists' war with the AMC had claimed the lives of many mercenaries, among them Lindon's Battalion and the Dismal Disinherited. So far, the Kell Hounds had been spared, but it was only a question of when—not if—the Word would come for them.

Just two days ago, that question was answered.

Rather than bog themselves down with a prolonged ground engagement, the Blakists instead chose once more to employ nuclear weapons. But rather than launch a massed attack with WarShips, assault DropShips and aerospace fighters, this time the enemy attempted to strike by stealth. A lone DropShip infiltrated the Arc-Royal system via a pirate point with one goal in mind—to wipe out all troops on the planet in a suicidal nuclear strike. But they had not counted on the presence of the *Ulric Kerensky*. In-system preparing to escort supplies and fresh troops to the Jade Falcon front, the Clan battlecruiser detected the intruders the moment they arrived and quickly intercepted the bomb-laden DropShip when it refused to surrender. Amid the wreckage they found a combined payload of more than thirty megatons of nuclear ordnance, all of which was promptly disposed of by the Wolf Clan defenders.

TAMAR ATTACKED!

(31 December 3070)

Arc-Royal [DBC]—This morning, a press release issued by the office of the General of the Armies stated that the Wolf Clan capital and former Lyran provincial center, Tamar, has been attacked by unknown vessels that dispensed a massive nuclear assault across the planet's surface. The full extent of damage and casualty figures remains unknown at this time.

The press release contained no additional information about the attack, beyond the fact that it occurred only three days prior.

The Wolf Clan is currently engaged in operations against the Lyran state and the Jade Falcons, and we do not know whom they hold responsible for this attack, though the methods used certainly suggest a hallmark strategy of the Word of Blake. However, we have no information as to what the Wolf Clan believes or knows about the Blakists and their Jihad.

That DBC has received information about the attack so rapidly after its occurrence could suggest that the Wolves are aware of its possible Blakist origins. If so, the attackers—if they are the Word—have made a critical mistake, as the Wolves are highly likely to redirect their focus against Blakist objectives. While that seems encouraging on the face of things, the path between Clan Wolf and Terra contains several Lyran worlds, and after the atrocity on Tamar, we can no longer be certain to what degree the Wolves will contain themselves.

Khan Kell and Margrave Kell were both unavailable for contributions to this article.

ROYAL WEDDING

(12 October 3070)

Sian [CSN]—Despite war, despite hardship, despite the devastation of two fierce invasions in as many years, the streets of the Forbidden City today are truly alive today! The amount of activity here is awe-inspiring, on the eve of the long-awaited marriage between Chancellor Sun-Tzu Liao and Naomi Centrella, heiress-apparent to the Magistracy of Canopus.

Equally inspiring is the energy and fervor people display while contributing to the ongoing rebuilding efforts. Much of the damage inflicted by the latest attack still scars the city. Months after rebuilding efforts from the first Blakist attack were considered largely complete, the effects of the second assault just weeks ago have caused a mere hiccup in the schedule, with workers resuming their efforts as if not a day had passed since. The Capellan people and their Canopian allies, who rallied here so soon after the first attack, remain dedicated to reviving the capital, and all reports indicate that volunteers organized themselves with incredible efficiency, sometimes even before state organizers were in place. This zeal is a true sign of the Capellan people's strength and proof of their defiance in the face of the Word of Blake's ongoing terror attacks.

An equally strong sign is the unity between our two nations, which will be strengthened considerably by tomorrow's wedding. The union promises a new era for both realms, an era of prosperity, justice and progress as never seen before. It is truly a great time to be Canopian *or* Capellan.

AND IN OTHER NEWS…

FOCHT'S APPEAL

Almost two decades ago, I asked the men and women of the Com Guards to stand with me against the greatest threat not just ComStar, but all of humanity, had ever faced. For twenty days, we fought and bled against the Clans. The price of victory came high, almost too high. But from the battlefield of Tukayyid ComStar arose reborn, rededicated to the mission Jerome Blake envisaged for it.

I cannot deny that the events of the past few years have shaken ComStar's very foundations, but today we face a challenge that dwarfs what we accomplished on Tukayyid. This challenge grows

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all the more difficult because we must now face those who stood beside us in that titanic struggle.

Once again, the fate of humanity hangs in the balance. Our duty in this grave matter is clear. Our oaths demand that we hold to our task, not surrender to disillusionment and despair. In the Word of Blake, we have seen all that is evil and dark in humankind's soul.

To stand against the darkness is the highest calling.

—Com Guard-wide address issued by Anastasius Focht, former Precentor Martial, Orestes, 6 August 3070

MARIAN RAIDERS HIT HUNTINGTON, HAZELDEAN!

(12 August 3070)

Huntington [SAN NICHOLAS TIMES]—Elements of the Marian Hegemony's IV Legion made lightning raids on Huntington and Hazeldean this week.

The raids were apparently purely punitive, targeting militia bases, major infrastructure assets such as DropPorts and power generating plants, and major manufacturing centers. The raiders made no attempt to occupy either planet.

Marian forces entered the Huntington system via a pirate point on 6 August and attacked without warning, overwhelming the Huntington Planetary Militia within hours. Sixty to seventy percent of DropShip support and heavy manufacturing centers throughout the capital city region are believed destroyed, but the attackers left political and commercial targets largely unscathed.

Planetary Governor Hazel Paterson characterized the attack as half a mugging: "They knocked us down, broke our kneecaps, then ran off without robbing us."

On 9 August, what appeared to be the same force—or at least a part of the same force—again used pirate points to strike the nearby Hazeldean system without warning.

The Hazeldean Planetary Militia mounted what observers described as a furious defense, delaying the assault for nearly a day before succumbing with more than 80 percent casualties. Destruction of Hazeldean's capital valley transportation and industrial assets was described as "about equal" to that on Huntington.

In both raids, as the Marian forces left the system, an officer identifying herself as Julie Gupton made an all-frequency broadcast stating that the Prima and Tertia cohorts of the IV Legion had launched these raids as reprisals for "unprovoked attacks on Illyria, Tronheimal and Trasjkis". Ms. Gupton did not specify the nature of those alleged attacks.

The IV Legion is known as the primary anti-pirate and counter-insurgency arm of the *Legiones Marianes*, the Marian Hegemony's armed forces.

INTEL BRIEF: MUNDO NUBLAR

>>>Encrypt/timestamp19:00hrs/08193070OR<<<
To: General Adam Steiner
From: Agent Nigel Hawkins, Outpost Somerset
Date: 19 August 3070

General Steiner,

Hopefully this report finds you well and in higher spirits than the last time we spoke. I know you're busy, Adam, but while my advisors on both sides don't quite agree with my assessment of the situation, I believe my previous reports to you with regard to the Deep Periphery and the Word of Blake justify my recent expenditure of troops.

Recently, our guard intercepted a badly damaged *Manatee* DropShip entering Lyran space from the Deep Periphery. On board was a small mercenary scout force, the Langford Wraiths. Two members were in bad shape, including a now-identified Word of Blake adept. Though he claims he parted company with the Word some time ago, we are holding him in our highest-security cell and have thoroughly interrogated him. Most of the others suffered from dehydration and malnutrition—one small bit of evidence that their allegedly hasty retreat was ill planned.

The merc commander claims their force encountered a base near a world called Mundo Nublar. They say this base was occupied by Blakist forces, mostly scientists and soldiers. But what astounds me, Adam, is their insistence that they saw a fantastic ship that can destroy whole worlds. They claim they encountered it near the Hanseatic League and barely escaped with the stolen *Manatee*.

I know it sounds fantastic, and I would have dismissed their claims outright—especially entering our space the way they did aboard such an ancient relic. Naturally, we assume that if something so ancient as the *Manatee* exists, with the level of internal technology upgrades we found, that it must belong to the Blakists. Most of my men believe the Wraiths are Blakist spies. But if that's true, then I have to hand it to them—they've apparently converted a Clanner to their cause.

I believe that the vessel they claim to have seen exists, at least in some form. Much to my advisors' disapproval, I've assembled a scout team to travel to that region to investigate. If the Blakists *have* assembled a ship that can destroy worlds, we have to find it and make it ours, or destroy it.

Forever loyal to you and the Alliance,

Agent Nigel Hawkins, Outpost Somerset

LATE 3070: THE TIME OF TRIALS

"DEFENDERS OF THE OUTBACK UNITE!"

This phrase—or one like it—has been used countless times to inspire people to join forces against a common threat, people who do not realize they have as much in common as they truly do. People unaware of their strengths, too focused on their individualism and isolation. But that is who we are.

For centuries now, we have all suffered the neglect of our "sovereigns." They constantly war with neighbors, often hundreds of light-years away from us. They come to take our children, our resources, our riches and our food—all for their own causes. In return, we receive promises, empty gestures and under-funded projects, hallmarked by incompetence and lack of commitment.

We ask ourselves, when is it our turn? We pay taxes and contribute. We pull our weight and then some for the team, an alliance wrought centuries ago, and we receive nothing. We need protection just as much as the people of the Capellan March or the Draconis March. Not a world among our ranks has not suffered at the hands of pirates. And in just the past two years, that suffering has increased tenfold. The past few months have seen particularly extensive pirate activity—including the return of the notorious "Lady Death" Trevaline—no doubt supported by the thrice-damned Blakists. Again, the AFFS provides nothing but promises, and the command to relocate the Brockton and Filtvelt training battalions closer to New Avalon, further stripping our home defenses.

We are tired of waiting on our "sovereign" to send us alms, band-aids and crackers to deal with our problems. We can no longer afford to constantly give while receiving nothing in return.

If the AFFS is so eager to abandon us, we no longer owe them enough to follow those suicidal orders. Thus, effective immediately, the Filtvelt Academy Training Battalion will form the core of the First Filtvelt Guardians, a force dedicated to the protection of our neighbors, and the destruction of the pirates we face. It is being joined by the Filtvelt Militia and local forces from Skepptana and Marielund. Together, we will forge a military coalition to oppose any and all invaders.

We ask all of you to join us, for our mutual defense. It is time we provide for ourselves. Together we can face any threat and defeat it.

Respectfully,

Colonel Erich LeBeau

—Official communiqué issued from the office of the Kommandant, Filtvelt Training Academy to "all military, paramilitary and mercenary commands in the Broken Wheel PDZ," Filtvelt, 30 September 3070

BETHEL ASSAULTED, IRREGULARS DESTROYED!

"This is Ashley Matherly, reporting for News 45 with this late-breaking story.

"KDNL News has just received a confirmed report from Capellan March military sources that elements of the Word of Blake's Tenth Division attacked and destroyed the DropShip Irregulars mercenary command on Bethel. The resulting attack devastated Bethel City and lay waste much of the northern continent.

"The report suggests Blakist Precentor Rebek Craines led the attack against the mercenary force in a second attempt to capture Dr. Rick Raisley and to avenge a prior defeat against the Irregulars. The Blakists last attempted to capture Dr. Raisley on Acamar, when the Irregulars intervened and saved him.

"The Irregulars deployed to engage the reinforced Level III outside the capital on the Plains of Sarong, where both forces traded artillery barrages before closing in for close-quarters combat. Irregulars commander Colonel Medron Pryde maneuvered his troops to put Craines in an untenable position, but the Blakists did not give up as easily as before.

"The battle finally turned against the Irregulars when Colonel Pryde was killed in 'Mech-to-'Mech combat with Craines. The apparently enraged Irregulars then fell upon the Blakists with reckless abandon, overwhelming Craines and her command.

"At that point—from what we have managed to ascertain—one of the Blakist 'Mechs sent out a special signal, possibly even Craines herself, to forces still in orbit, calling down a barrage of nuclear weapons fire. The assault struck both forces on the Plains of Sarong and annihilated them before moving on to saturate the nearby capital city and much of the northern continent. Casualty estimates from the assault are estimated in millions of lives and billions of pounds in infrastructure.

"We understand Dr. Raisley was in the capital at the time of the Blakist attack. His whereabouts are unknown, but AFFS officials say he is presumed missing, not dead."

—Special report by KDNL News (an FSNS affiliate), Daniels, 25 November 3070

PIRATE'S FEAST

[*Dark Eye*]: "It was too easy, I tell ya. No defense whatsoever, so the Lady was right. Them Suns are totally ripe for the pickin'."

[*Grimner's Blood*]: "Aye, verra true. Even Broken Wheel couldn'a handle our landings. Took off with a pile of raw ore and snagged us a pristine *Union* ta boot."

[*Uli's Hammer*]: "Seems whatever problems those Feddies're havin' up in New Avalon, they've pulled their guard back here. Wonderin' if the Bullies know 'bout it."

[*Silent Death*]: "Mebbe. But the Lady's got plans for the Concordat. They're jus' too ripe a vine to pluck at the moment, with all their attention split between their revolutionaries and the Pleiades."

[*Dark Eye*]: "Is good for us, then, aye? I mean, even Tortuga was never this easy."

[*Talbot*]: "I expect it has a lot more to do with our finally gettin' some decent weapons. With that fancy-pants Tyberias character sellin' us these new *T-bolts* and *Riflemen* for practically nothin', we're finally winnin' fights we'd've lost years ago. Where'd he get 'em, anyways, the back of an *Excalibur*?"

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[*Silent Death*]: "Don't question the gift horse. Heard the captain of the *Queen Mab* did just that, and he ended up spaced outside of Hellespont."

[*Grimner's Blood*]: "Long ways away from where we were told to hit."

[*Silent Death*]: "Exactly."

[*Uli's Hammer*] "So what's the plan now? I heard the Lady's off to meet up with some more recruits. This mean we can't raid anymore?"

[*Dark Eye*]: "Ya kidding, aren't ya, Hazel? We still get half-bounty for what we grab. And from what the scuttlebutt's sayin', we're hookin' up for something big this go-round. Seems the Lady's got a score to settle with the lords an' ladies along the Suns border."

[*Talbot*]: "Hear we're going to drop on Filtvelt. Steal us some more 'Mechs."

[*Grimner's Blood*]: "Well, we were hearin' something about a 'brown cash,' so most likely it's another ore raid."

[*Silent Death*]: "Eight pirate bands to just steal ore? Not likely. I'm bettin' on a target richer than we've ever hit, much less stolen. With all our groups—an' now the Tortugans, too—we're as strong as a whole passel of those Suns RCTs. Maybe this time, we're goin' ta steal a whole world to call our own…."

—Intercepted transmission dated 03093070; downloaded from MIIO Nadir Sat 9-XT, unknown system, 29 November 3070 (obtained by ISAP via unknown sources, veracity unconfirmed)

TESTING THE WATERS

(20 December 3070)

Taurus [CARTHAGE DAILY]—Taurian Defense Force officials confirmed late last week that recent rumors of an attack on Argos are true. While initial reports grossly exaggerated the attackers' force composition and even identity, Carthage's nearest neighbor was indeed raided on or around the first of the month.

Officials have denied that the attacking force originated in the Magistracy of Canopus, calling those claims "ludicrous and fanciful." They presented video evidence that the raiders were instead a small Fronc Reaches militia unit. While the raiders' precise origin remains unknown, it is certain that Argos suffered a probing attack by either that fledgling nation or by local bandits.

More surprising than the identity of the raiders, however, is the increasingly persistent rumor that no TDF units were on Argos at the time to defend against just such an attack. The amount of materiel taken in the raid is staggering, considering that any type of defense could have halved the amount of stolen goods. TDF officials refused to comment on the current deployment of nearby TDF units.

With the continued fighting along the Federated Suns borders and the Taurian government's ongoing preoccupation with the Calderon Protectorate, it appears many worlds along the Fronc border are being stripped bare of defenses. After the TDF's statement yesterday, Secession Party leader Professor Cody Bergen posted this message in the Carthage Observer:

"While these actions are certainly strategic in nature, they leave many civilians and valuable resources virtually undefended. If any organized attack comes from the Fronc worlds—or worse, the Magistracy—we may very well see the crippling of the Taurian economy as planets fall swiftly to enemy occupation. Our government's obsession with a pointless border war against the Suns is hurting those of us on the fringes. Will we too be left to defend our homes with kitchen knives and pitchforks, like our lost brothers in the Protectorate? Or is Grover actually going to buy a clue and figure out that it isn't the Suns that needs saving—it's his own people?"

In a quick poll conducted last night, sixty-four percent of the population agrees that Taurus needs to take a stronger look at the Fronc Reaches. Forty-eight percent believe that Protector Shraplen needs to abandon his crusade against the Federated Suns.

NEWS DOWNLOADER v3.7

IRIAN

Date & Title	Service	Status
(10 December 3069)		
"New Crow Helicopter Soars Into DCMS Arsenal"	[VotD]	COMPLETED
(30 December 3069)		
"Blakists See Mixed Success, Failure on Capellan Front"	[ISAP]	DOWNLOADING
(10 January 3070)		
"Official: New Coordinator Hohiro 'Unwell'"	[ISAP]	ACCESSING

A SERVICE OF IRIAN NEWS INTERSTELLAR

CHAOS UNLEASHED : BINGE, PURGE, FLUSH

BINGE, PURGE, FLUSH

Journal Entry #8771

Kalidasa. Never thought I'd return—leastwise, not with a bunch of mercs. Our contract has us hitting the system in a pinpoint raid, so it's a standard run for us. With all the contracts we've been getting lately, this one seems fairly simple.

That has me worried.

Our target is Precentor Timothy Mayo, newly assigned head of the local Word of Blake HPG garrison force. That alone has us triple-checking every system and warhead—those buggers took down an entire Com Guard command on Tall Trees back in the beginning of this whole mess.

Whatever reason our employer wants this force gone doesn't matter to us, really. We just want to make sure we can spend our pay. And maybe nab some nice Blakie gear in salvage—if it doesn't kill us first.

SITUATION

Ennis Weapons Range, Colbert Provincial County
Kalidasa, Blake Protectorate
6 July 3070

Mr. Askai has returned with another lucrative contract. Only a month ago, Kalidasa seceded from the Free Worlds League and went over to the enlarging Word of Blake Protectorate, taking several League militia forces with it. However, much noise has been made among local Leaguers that the planetary government was coerced into secession by the heavy-handed tactics of the local Word of Blake HPG garrison unit. Askai—or whomever he represents—wants the Blakists hammered. Capturing or killing the Precentor would net even more on the contract.

Any way you look at it, it's time to hunt some Wobblies.

CHAOS UNLEASHED: BINGE, PURGE, FLUSH

GAME SETUP

CBT: Use Wooded/Hills Terrain maps. The Defender chooses his home edge first.

AT2: Use at least two Space maps. One edge is the planetary surface and is set up according to the *Atmospheric Operations on the Space Map* rules (see p. 18, *AT2*).

RPG: Gamemasters may prepare an appropriate environment according to the players' plans. Gamemasters should use a setup similar to those described above for a ground or space battle. All WoB troops use the standard Soldier NPC template (see p. 207, *CBT: RPG*).

Attacker

The Attacker consists of up to 100 percent of the player group's total force. The Attacker begins the track at any two selected map edges. Attacking units may begin with any starting Velocity (if applicable).

Defender

The Defender consists of elements of the Third Division of the WoB Militia and is 125% of the Attacker's total defending force. These units are of Regular experience. The Defender secretly designates one unit as the commander of the on-site forces and two units as "gunslingers." All three of these units are the designated targets for objective purposes and have Veteran experience (RPG characters use the Elite template, p. 207, *CBT:RPG*). All forces are rolled on the B column of the Random Assignment Table: Word of Blake (see p. 131, *Field Manual: ComStar* or p. 220, *Field Manual: Updates*).

The Defender sets up all units within four hexes of his declared map edge. Defending units begin with a starting Velocity of 3 or less (if applicable).

WARCHEST

***Track Cost*:** 1,000 WP

Optional Bonuses (all bonuses cumulative):

+500 Shorthanded: The Attacker consists of up to 75 percent of the players' total force.

+500 Elite: The commander and up to two additional units of the Defender's force are Elite.

–700 Valuable Intel: The location of the Defender's commander is revealed to the Attacker before the start of the track.

Victory Bonuses (not cumulative):

+1,400 Partial Victory: Completing two objectives.

+1,900 Total Victory: Completing all objectives.

CHAOS UNLEASHED : BINGE, PURGE, FLUSH

OBJECTIVES

1. Sky high: Destroy all three designated targets.

2. Retribution: Destroy or cripple all defending forces.

3. POW: Capture the enemy commander (cripple or destroy his unit without killing the pilot).

SPECIAL RULES

The following rules are in effect for this track.

Fanatical Devotion

If a Defender's unit is reduced to a point where it must make a forced withdrawal, that unit instead increases its experience level to Elite and fights until destroyed or unable to function. The unit does not follow *Forced Withdrawal* rules. For *CBT: RPG* games, all enemy units that receive a Severe Wound gain +2 to Willpower and a +3 bonus to three skills. These bonuses last for the duration of the track.

Commander Loyalty

If the Defender's commander is killed, crippled or captured, all remaining units increase to Veteran and gain a +1 Initiative bonus. All units fight to the death. For *CBT: RPG* games, all enemy units gain +2 to all skill rolls for the duration of the track.

AFTERMATH

They say success comes with a price, and this supposed "milk run" was no exception. Oh, sure, you carried out your contract to the letter—but at what cost? The Word of Blake troops are as fanatical as the propaganda and the newsfeeds show—or don't. While there may be Blakists out there who are more civil, the troops you just faced down seemed more like rabid ki-rians on Rage than human beings.

The good news is, your boys and girls stared face first into the fire—and came through it alive. While you'll have to go again into the breach at some point, at least now there's hope that the Blakists can be beaten.

ADDITIONAL HOOKS

How does one handle a ticked-off, uncooperative Word of Blake commander? What if the slick-talking Precentor can work a deal another way, maybe converting the player force to the Blakist cause?

Expansion Ideas

Possible expansions depend on how the players want to approach the mission. While not under a pressing time constraint, they should not waste a lot of time here, as Kalidasa is heavily defended with at least two FWL militia forces temporarily stationed in the system.

Gamemasters may want to play up the angle with Mr. Askai. Who exactly is his employer, and why this specific Word of Blake force in this particular system? What part does Kalidasa play in the bigger picture?

NEXT TRACK

Celestial Calamity; Grim Death

CHAOS UNLEASHED: CELESTIAL CALAMITY

CELESTIAL CALAMITY

"Highness, they come as we were told. The Mask has succeeded lately in getting timely intelligence."

"Indeed, Colonel."

"Though I must say, it will put a damper on the coming ceremonies. I know the Chancellor ordered fireworks, but of this magnitude?"

"Yes, the 'Celestial Wisdom' has allowed his unique sense of humor to arise frequently these days. I must admit, in these things, he seems almost…prescient."

"Perhaps his time in the dark has truly perfected him. Such foresight bodes well for us, I would imagine."

"As long as we share the same path, Colonel. Nevertheless, our Capellan friends are threatened, and what kind of betrothed would I be if I allowed my groom to stand alone against these thrice-damned Blakists?"

SITUATION

Orbital Insertion, Polar Orbit
Sian, Capellan Confederation
13 September 3070

The mysterious Mr. Askai has returned with yet another lucrative deal. This one's a doozy: assist the Suns in an all-out assault on Sian. Retribution, you figure, for the way the Capellans humiliated Duke George Hasek. Only a few mercenary forces have been selected for this "honor," mainly as fast-strike forces to hit secondary targets. You receive assurances that a sizeable naval force will draw most of the aerospace defenses to facilitate your combat drop, but that's all your employer is saying. Once you've destroyed your target, the extraction zone coordinates will be transmitted and a Free Capella transport will spirit you away during the main assault.

Riiiiiight.

It all sounds well and good, but you call in some massive favors to guarantee you won't end up in a Cappie prison. A little inflation goes a long way—and in cases like this, splitting the revenue with other mercs isn't all that bad. You can spend the dough if you're still alive.

CHAOS UNLEASHED: CELESTIAL CALAMITY

GAME SET-UP

CBT: Use any Terrain Maps.
AT2: Use Space maps or any terrain.
RPG: Use any terrain.

Attacker

The Attacker consists of up to 100 percent of the players' total force and up to a full battalion of the Dragon's Breath mercenary force. The Attacker may enter the battlefield from any direction, including a combat drop (if applicable).

Defender

The Defender may field up to 200 percent of the Attacker's total deployed force and consists primarily of the Third Canopian Fusiliers, augmented by elements of the Death Commandos (at a rate of one Death Commandos lance for every full company of Fusiliers units). One of every four defending units may be deployed per Hidden Units rules (see p. 83 *BMR*), if using *CBT* or *CBT: RPG* rules. If played as an *AT2* track, one of every four defending units must be withheld at the start of the scenario, to enter on a later turn (secretly predetermined by the defending player). All of the Defender's units are Elite and will not retreat or surrender under any circumstances.

WARCHEST

***Track Cost*:** 2,000 WP

Optional Bonuses (all bonuses cumulative):

+800 Hurricane (planetside only): Use the *Blizzard* rules (see p. 153, *CBTComp* or p. 11, *MT*).

+800 Unexpected defenders (space only): Add elements of a Regular CCAF naval aerospace fighter squadron to the Defender's force. These additional forces should equal 50 percent of the Attacker's total deployed force.

Victory Bonuses (not cumulative):

+1,750 Partial Victory: Complete one objective.
+2,700 Total Victory: Complete both objectives.

OBJECTIVES

1. Retribution: Destroy 50 percent of the Defender's force.

2. Survival of the Fittest: More than 50 percent of the Attacker's force must survive at least fifteen turns.

SPECIAL RULES

The following rules are in effect for this track:

CHAOS UNLEASHED : CELESTIAL CALAMITY

Dragon's Breath

Recently battered by the ongoing strife in the Draconis Combine, and still struggling with a longstanding debt to the Lyran Alliance, this BattleMech battalion (augmented by a company of aerospace fighters picked up during their hasty retreat from Keisen) is all that remains battle-worthy of a once-great regiment. The Dragon's Breath has Regular experience. When building this force, roll on the D column of any Random Assignment Table: Mercenary (see p. 126, *FMMercs*).

The Dragon's Breath MechWarriors are adept sharpshooters with an eye toward salvage, and so can reduce the penalty for Called Shots by 1 (see p. 34, *BMR*).

More information on the Dragon's Breath appears in *MS2* (p. 31).

Third Canopian Fusiliers

As the dominant defending force, the Third Fusiliers' controlling player rolls Initiative for the Fusiliers and their Death Commando support. During any turn in which the Third Fusiliers wins the Initiative, they may move half their current units (round down) after all attacking units have moved first.

Time Minimum

In order to fulfill the requirements of the contract, the Attacker must remain on the battlefield for a minimal amount of time in order to draw Capellan troops away from the real objective—the Forbidden City. For every turn after the fifteenth that the Attacker retains at least 50 percent of their force, the Attacker earns an additional 250 Warchest Points. These points cease to be awarded once the Defender falls below 50 percent of his total deployed force.

Gift

If the player group achieves a Total Victory, Mr. Askai's employer gifts the merc command with equipment appropriate to its makeup (up to 10 percent of the players' total force as determined at the end of the track). To determine what units the player group receives, roll on the A column of any Random Assignment Table: Federated Suns (see p. 139, *Field Manual: Federated Suns* or p. 225, *Field Manual: Updates*).

AFTERMATH

Pissed doesn't begin to describe it. Bad intel? How about the fact that your little crystal eight ball gave more reliable intel than those damn Feddies? Not to mention that the only forces you saw hitting Sian were unmarked, which meant your "allies" could've been *anyone* out there. FedSuns, League, Blake—hell, even the Taurians!

All you know is that when you landed, nothing was where it was supposed to be and the place was crawling with Canopian and Death Commando troops. Yeah, you kept them from reinforcing wherever they were going, but the Dragon's Breath bought it. So much for favors. At least they shielded some of your boys and girls from getting smeared all over the planet's surface.

Mr. Askai offered an apology for the poor intelligence. Not much solace there, though that big fat bonus he gave you helped ease just a bit the anger you felt like venting on him. Okay, so he took care of your command, but you can't help feeling something's not right. It's almost like he's got a chip on his shoulder against mercs. Or maybe he just doesn't like the way you look.

Well, at least with the gigantic wad he dropped into your account, you can rest a bit before tearing back into your next target.

ADDITIONAL HOOKS

Fouled Up Beyond All Recognition sums up this nightmare-gone-wrong contract. So what *did* go wrong? Who the hell hit Sian? And how did those fanatic Commandos and Fusiliers know just where you were coming?

Expansion Ideas

From combat drop to extraction, a lot happens in this track. Being hunted isn't a fun feeling, but maybe the players can turn the tables and take some Capellans with them.

NEXT TRACK

Grim Death

CHAOS UNLEASHED: GRIM DEATH

GRIM DEATH

"I'm telling you it's not an option, Colonel Haarhar. I cannot condone such brutal police-state tactics, no matter what kind of violence is occurring out there."

"Dammit, Garin, you're making things too easy for those malcontents. You think they care about freedom and privacy anymore?"

"Yes, I know. Same old argument from you. But if we throw away our freedoms so that a military force can proclaim themselves judge, jury and executioner, we may as well ask the Capellans to take over."

"Look, Governor Latronis, I respect your views, but—" [repeated beeping] "Oh, shit."

"What now, Colonel? Another terror strike?"

"Worse. Invaders. Someone's taken an interest in Sheratan after all. We've got inbound bogies with no IFF from the pirate point."

"Maybe they've come for repairs, or they're on furlough."

"No, Governor Latronis. I suspect they've come to settle the question of who gets to run Sheratan once and for all."

SITUATION

Inbound, Pirate Point K-E7
Sheratan, Chaos March
29 November 3070

Just when you thought things were finally settling down, your Galatean liaison nabs a sweet little deal offered by a "concerned Federated Suns citizen." Backtracking this mysterious employer's identity confirms connections to several Suns and League corporations, with the money to back the sizable contract. So even though you'd like to give your people some rest and refit, it's too good to pass up. Well, that and the fact that you're the only merc command nearby with free time.

The simply worded contract says, "Eliminate the Grim Determination from Sheratan." That's it. Someone out there either has a massive grudge against those hard-luck mercs or wants them removed from the system so whoever it is can swoop right in—which makes the Federated Suns connections a lot clearer.

The Grim Determination has suffered constant terror strikes in and around their bases, as well as around the facilities housing the planetary government—which seems to have pro-Davion leanings, but likes to play the independence game, too. Best guess? Someone down there wants to make a power play and shove the system firmly into the Feddie camp. And they want you to do the dirty work.

Okay. As long as the credit's good.

CHAOS UNLEASHED: GRIM DEATH

GAME SET-UP

For any game system—*CBT, AT2* or *CBT: RPG*—use any Terrain Maps.

Attacker

The Attacker consists of 100 percent of the players' total force. This contract calls for the elimination of the Grim Determination as a viable combat command, so the players may use all the assets at their disposal. They have, in essence, free rein.

Defender

The Defender consists of the Grim Determination mercenary regiment. At no time when engaged with the Attacker should the Defender exceed 100 percent of the players' total deployed force.

WARCHEST

***Track Cost*:** 1,800 WP
Optional Bonus Points (all bonuses cumulative):

+500 Groundswell of support: The Sheratan militia sides with the Grim Determination to help save the planet from invasion. Increase the Defender's total force by 25 percent with Green units.

Victory Bonuses (not cumulative):

+2,500 Total Victory: Complete the objective.

OBJECTIVE

Eliminate the Grim Determination: Destroy the mercenary command as a viable combat force (as determined by the gamemaster).

SPECIAL RULES

The following rules are in effect for this track:

Grim Determination

A troubled mercenary force with a storied past, the Grim Determination has suffered constant terrorist attacks on Sheratan

CHAOS UNLEASHED : GRIM DEATH

for a few years. Ever since the dissolution of the Second Star League, this command has seen an upswing in violent attacks against it and the pro-Federated Suns government. Increased demands by the people for the system to rejoin the Suns is met almost daily with deadly attacks against government officials, military installations, and most recently, power stations, railways and the massive DropPort.

The Grim Determination is a Regular command; for equipment, roll on the C column of any Random Assignment Table: Mercenary (see p. 126, *FMMercs*). When randomly determining force composition, the Grim Determination player may not choose any assault 'Mechs and should re-roll any heavy units that have a Walking/Cruising MP of 4 or less, taking the second result regardless of its MP. In addition, the Determination suffers a –1 Initiative penalty when operating in any formation larger than a company, reflecting its greater emphasis on small-scale warfare and mobility.

AFTERMATH

Breaking a merc force is satisfying and painful. It's got the potential for good PR if played right—or a disaster if the wrong message gets out. So far, breaking the Determination has been neither good nor bad. Absorbing most of the mercs' assets into your own after shattering them was a fat plus, but you have to absorb all their problems, too—like the continued violence now directed at your people as the sole military force on Sheratan.

Sniper attacks, bomb threats and even an exploding package—you get the distinct feeling someone doesn't want any military presence here. So within hours of accounting for the last of the Determination's assets, you boost.

Three days later, you catch wind from the local INN feed that it wasn't the Feddies who wanted the system—it was the Word of Blake. They've had some business with the planetary government for years, and this new Precentor who just showed up—one Garin Latronis—just declared the system's formal adoption into the Word of Blake Protectorate… Wait, wasn't that Latronis guy the former governor?

Not that it's your business. Actually, Blakist money is worth a hell of a lot more than Suns currency…and you just noticed a fat bonus in your account. Where there's war, there are mercs. What could be better than that?

ADDITIONAL HOOKS

Players may approach this track in an infinite number of ways, and gamemasters should be prepared for anything. Exploring the relationship between the Word of Blake, the Sheratan planetary government and the terror groups might uncover some ugly—or not-so-ugly—truths. Who's funding whom, and what kind of power play is going on here? Who *really* hired you to off the Grim Determination?

Expansion Ideas

While not a planetary invasion per se, gamemasters should help players decide what the best routes may be to destroy the Grim Determination. The possibilities are as endless as the configuration of the player group. Gamemasters can stretch out any number of scenarios into a linked campaign to fit this track.

NEXT TRACK

None. Repair and refit while awaiting the next campaign!

TAKING STOCK

TAKING STOCK

After we compiled the reports of the past two years, we received even more recent articles that have yet to be exhaustively researched and verified. But while the reliability of these reports remains suspect, those presented here offer glimpses of events that we at INN feel may yet have deeper significance in the times ahead, possibly too much significance for us to ignore. We therefore present these supplemental reports with the sage advice of eternal vigilance to our readers: take the following information, follow up with your own research and draw your own conclusions. Because this war isn't just about nobles, politics, power plays and territory. It is about the very fabric of our humanity, as the Word of Blake seeks to destroy our way of life, our will.

Let us hope we can survive it.

—Michael Bosworth, INN Special Correspondent

RENDER UNTO CAESAR…

Honored Caesar:

I regret to inform you that the II Legio has left Paulinus. The Secunda Cohors, under my command, suffered sixty percent casualties, two-thirds of which should be recoverable within a month, while the Quinta Cohors under Legatus Geddy West suffered 25 percent losses, most of which should be back in service under the same time-frame. The soldiers of the Secunda Cohors fought well, given that we were pushing back a group of Lothian rebels who boasted mercenary support twenty percent in excess of our own. During the last assault, however, a second force—displaying tactics similar to the Black Warriors—hit us from behind. They destroyed our logistical support units and assaulted my command century. I personally held them off with my forces until the cohort could pull back and regroup.

Normally I would take full responsibility and blame for such a failure. However, the Quinta Cohors had two goals: keep peace in the cities and protect my rear. They did neither. Rather, I was forced to pull back until I reached them. Apparently, Legatus West heard rumors of a Star League facility and went in search of it. I can confirm the Legatus' assertions that he found it; I hope the knowledge of the *Dukempic Foods Flavor Research Center* may allow the Hegemony to achieve the glory it so deserves. I'm sure Legatus West can propose a plan for investigating that while I work to retake Paulinus for the Hegemony.

Your loyal servant,

Legatus Eren Tloth

—Personal communiqué reportedly found among the remains of an MHAF command post on Paulinus by the Ghosts of Lothario resistance group, dated 17 July 3070

FREE WORLDS REJECT COMSTAR AID

(12 August 3070)

Orestes [INN]—The Word of Blake launched its campaign to disrupt the Inner Sphere's interstellar communications back in 3068. Even now—two years and millions of man-hours of effort later—the HPG network has yet to be completely restored. Thanks to the dedication and skill of ComStar technicians, great strides have been made in the Lyran Alliance, Draconis Combine and Federated Suns to clean up the disruptions and delays caused by Blakist program viruses and interference. These nations continue to benefit from our services, enjoying a close relationship with ComStar. Unfortunately, without our aid, progress has been painfully slow in the Free Worlds League and Capellan Confederation. Both nations made the critical mistake of relying on the breakaway Word of Blake. Now, with their communications in shambles, the Confederation and the League are suffering great difficulty coordinating their defense against the Blakists.

Understanding the need for unity in these difficult times, Primus Gavin Dow has extended an offer of aid to these two beleaguered states, citing that to date, only ComStar has proved that we possess the resources and skills needed to restore the HPG network to its former capacity. Regretfully, Precentor Adrian Marsh's mission to members of the Free Worlds Parliament has met with reactions ranging from disinterest to outright hostility.

"It appears the League chooses to judge us by the actions of our former brothers and sisters," Marsh reported after departing League space.

Meanwhile, contact with Precentor Maria Hess' mission to offer similar aid to the Capellan Confederation has ceased, though officials on Orestes express optimism that this situation is temporary.

REVENGE ABOVE ALL

I am tired.

I'll never let the crew know it, but I am loath to face the fact that age is winning this battle. Time is beginning to take its toll and I am not happy about it.

It's all those damn Davions' fault. By locking me up for so long, they have stolen decades of my life. If they'd stayed out of my business and let me alone, I'd not be so insistent on burning their ships and killing their people.

Or maybe not. I have to admit, I enjoy putting those puling Davions in their place. It's a matter of pride to see those "high and mighty" House Lords cower because of my actions. I am flattered they spent so much time and effort in capturing me, and in that hole they called my prison! How many D-bills did they burn just to keep me contained?

More than I've stolen from them, I'll wager. But pretty soon I'm sure I'll pass up that total. After all, my debt to them hasn't been repaid yet. They still owe me many, many years of madness for stealing the best years of my life away.

That pile of uranium back in '67 was only the beginning. I still have that *Leopard*—the *Strawberry Bitch* (Such a fitting name; very symbolic, I think). The first of many payments the Davions owe me.

Now it's time to rest and refit. Gerous and Michael are due back soon with more reinforcements. They managed to get the *Shen-sé Tian* to see things my way. Our burning of Filtvelt went

TAKING STOCK

wonderfully, and we snagged those prizes Kernoff wanted in the Orgona Mountains. Never seen a a storehouse like that before—need to see if I can get more info on another one somewhere from Kernoff—or better yet, from Cameron. But for now, we wait for Vicore to get us another shipment. With new bodies, I'll need new machines to put them in.

Then I can get back to killing more Davions. They've got many more payments to make and I intend to collect every last one.

—Excerpt from a purported journal entry by Paula "Lady Death" Trevaline, dated 31 August 3070

BLAKE'S NEW PROGRAM

So why did they leave WarShips parked over New Avalon, Luthien, Tharkad and Northwind? Yeah, I know, they needed them for the initial invasion. They're WarShips after all. They're nice for laying down firepower on the battlefield, assuming you don't get under your own fire. And if you're going to send in strikes against other targets, you definitely want them leading your flotilla of DropShips.

So why did the Word of Blake leave WarShips parked over four planets that can really be defended by their super DropShips? What can be so important about these systems that a traditional blockade will not suffice?

Answer: That's where the Word of Blake is setting up their "re-education" camps.

Brainwashing is a better way to describe it, considering the things I've been hearing. Guys going in, never coming out save for the off-planet transports that launch every week. Some of the people going in are your regular Joes, save for the fact that the Word is taking able-bodied warriors. But everybody with prior military service is at the top of the list. And nobody is exempt. I saw pictures of two kommandants and a major-general going in. Guys you wouldn't think would be handed a rifle and stuck on the line.

When the Lyran government found out about these camps, they sent in a small detachment to attempt a rescue. Led by the semi-famous Harry "Herbie" Clemens, the unit managed to evade Word of Blake patrols for a week as they slowly worked their way toward their goal. The mission was classified, but I did manage to get the name of the mission's second: Jon Clark. Sadly, the mission failed; the entire unit was captured or killed.

The biggest surprise is that the Word of Blake actually distributed a press release about it! They did not name their opponents, but they noted that Demi-Precentor Ricky "Rumor" Iguchi and his Level II (seconded by Adept Tom Brainard) battled unknown forces outside Tharkad City around the time the Lyrans were in the area.

In any case, we have the Word of Blake expanding its pool of military forces through less-than-honorable means. Four strongholds, four important words, and the best people to put up any resistance are being turned into foot soldiers for the next round of assaults by the Word. The only question is, where will it end?

—Renegade Kestrel InterWeb posting by "Starling," 1 October 3070

AUTOPSY REPORT: MORI, S.

Autopsy Report: Mori, S.

Date: 31 October 3068

Attendees: Dr. Irene Quershi, Dr. Peter Olsen (Trainee)

[*0925: Voice activation enabled*]

[*Quershi*]: "Autopsy of female, approximately octogenarian, primarily of Asian descent. Victim has minimal bruising and lividity. Large wound across the neck, ventral to dorsal, ragged and uneven. Apparent cause of death—"

[*Olsen*]: "Apparent? C'mon, IQ, we know she was killed with a shard of glass…"

[*Quershi*]: "Trainee Olsen, that's enough. We conduct a complete autopsy for every patient. And that's *Doctor* IQ to you. Continuing…we have post-mortem bruising on the face. Oh, such a nice person, a broken rib too. Okay, hand me the saw, we're going to crack her chest…"

[*Olsen*]: "Yes, ma'am."

[*Quershi*]: "Stop sulking and using that 'ma'am' stuff, or you're buying lunch. Let's see what we've got in here. You get the stomach contents; I'm going to look at the cardiovascular system. Lungs look pretty good…heart…ahhhh…"

[*Olsen*]: "What is it?"

[*Quershi*]: "Kilen-Watts Syndrome. Parasitic infection causing degeneration of the smooth muscles. Destroys the heart. Advanced state. She could've had only few weeks to live anyway, and didn't even know it. This little bugger can lie dormant for quite a while and then boom; you never see it coming. Let's check out the cranium. What do you have on the stomach…?"

[*Olsen*]: "Nothing unusual. A little wine, some fish and rice, a light dinner…"

[*Quershi*]: "Wine, eh? Let's weigh the brain and check the tox results…"

[*1053: Standby*]

[*1223: Resumed*]

[*Quershi*]: "Brain weight slightly above normal. Tox scans show nothing other than a little alcohol, 0.02 percent BAC. Short a few pints. Okay, I'm calling it death due to exsanguination. Rest in peace, Primus."

[*1302: Autopsy Concluded*]

—Autopsy report on Sharilar Mori, late Primus of ComStar, declassified by ComStar Archives 1 November 3070

WHO IS "THE MASTER"?

(1 November 3070)

Alexandria [INN]—Is it destined to become one of the great unanswered questions of the age? Will future generations look back, asking it in the same breath as, "Who assassinated First Lord Simon Cameron?" and "Whatever happened to the LAS *Arthur Steiner-Davion*?"

Who is "The Master"? Who is this shadowy figure rumored to be running the Word of Blake, possibly since its inception?

TAKING STOCK

Are we fated to know this "Master" only as a shadowy figure lurking in the background, manipulating events like some Illuminati bogeyman?

Could it be William Blane? This is the most obvious answer. Considering how many prominent members of the Word of Blake stood out before him, it is amazing that Blane rose to such high position—effectively becoming the Blakist Primus in all but name. Look a little closer and a pattern emerges—a pattern of all opposition to the seemingly benign William Blane being removed with ruthless efficiency. Though he has not appeared in public since the assault on Tharkad, Blane remains a prime candidate.

Another startling theory that recently surfaced proposes that the "Master" is none other than Hanse Davion. For years after the Fourth Succession War, rumors circulated that "the Fox" created a double using cutting-edge cosmetic surgery at the NAIS. Some now believe it was this double—and not the First Prince—who died in 3052, and that the real Hanse was content to remain "dead" until the FedCom Civil War ripped apart everything he had worked so long to create. Using deep-cover agents who had infiltrated ComStar, Hanse allegedly manipulates as "the Master" from behind the scenes, creating conditions ripe for his return to reunify the Inner Sphere under his control.

Another theory claims that the Word of Blake is under the control of another as-yet unknown group. Just who could be pulling the Blakists' strings remains a hotly debated subject, including such outlandish notions as the descendants of Clan Wolverine or perhaps even intelligent aliens.

TRAGIC NEWS FOR THE ALLARD-LIAOS

(15 November 3070)

St. Ives [XSFP]—With the deepest regret, XSFP must announce that tragedy has once more visited the noble house of Allard-Liao. Still mourning the loss of Duchess Candace Allard-Liao, and the sacrifices made in the recent defense of Tian-tin, Duke Kai Allard-Liao's family has suffered yet another blow, with news released today that the duke's eldest son, David Lear, is missing and presumed lost along with the passengers and crew of the JumpShip *Capellan Star*.

When the *Capellan Star* failed to arrive on schedule at Milos five weeks ago, authorities immediately launched an extensive search of the surrounding systems. No trace of the *Merchant*-class JumpShip or its attached *Monarch*-class liner has been discovered, and today CCAF officials formally declared the vessels lost. While authorities consider an engineering casualty during jump to be the most likely cause, the possibility of Davion or Blakist interference cannot be ruled out.

David Lear will be remembered for his unceasing efforts on behalf of the Capellan people in the latest reconstruction efforts on Sian. A promising new student at the prestigious University of Sian, seventeen-year-old David was traveling home to St. Ives to be with his family for the New Year.

Our thoughts and prayers are with the Allard-Liao family in this time of loss.

HOLDING THE LINE

(3 December 3070)

New Syrtis [NSNS]—Last week, Beid became the latest FedSuns world to suffer the horror of the Blakist scourge. A raiding force believed to be operating from Kittery, Maladar or Redfield struck at the planetary capital of Newpost.

Initially, the attackers—reportedly comprised of three or four Level IIs of 'Mechs and infantry—threatened to rout the poorly equipped local militia, but at the last moment a demi-company of AFFS BattleMechs materialized on the invaders' flank. Thrown into confusion and facing a reinvigorated militia, the Blakists fell back to their DropShips and fled the system.

When the dust settled on Beid, it became clear that the heroes of the AFFS formation were led by Leftenant David McKinnon, cousin of Ross McKinnon, captain of the legendary Fox's Teeth command. Leftenant McKinnon had cobbled together his relief force from a medium lance temporarily stranded on Beid by a malfunctioning DropShip, along with wounded MechWarriors and damaged BattleMechs in transit back from the Capellan front.

Always outspoken and controversial, Leftenant McKinnon augmented his ad-hoc command with salvage taken from the retreating Blakists. Speaking from the cockpit of a captured *Black Knight*, McKinnon has announced his intent to remain on-planet and protect Beid until such time as the AFFS command sees fit to dispatch an adequate garrison force.

On New Syrtis, Field Marshal Nathaniel Hasek has yet to comment on McKinnon's disregard of his existing orders to rejoin the Twentieth Avalon Hussars. Such grand—and possibly futile—gestures will surely do little to redeem McKinnon's already colorful record.

OVER AND OUT

Rho/Chi:772-ECHO-10z9:09.12.70

Precentor Degora—

We finally finished the critical repairs to relay TF4—the "white-out" virus apparently hit most of our relays into Clan space in addition to affecting the HPG-A stations. When we burned through the backlog of gibberish and noise, we managed to download a few gigabytes of messages from our other operatives in the homeworlds as well as some SLDF business. This one seems important, but considering that Tukayyid is a wasteland at this point, I'm unsure where to route it.

I've got one more batch to dump out of TF4, but I'm giving my team some time off to recharge. We've been at this for two months straight, and we still have five more relays to check. Hopefully we can access them via our HPG; I'd hate to have to send out a team to physically repair them. If it comes to that, I'd recommend it get slotted low on the priority list. Any batch messaging in those will be too outdated to address anyway.

—Stephan

TAKING STOCK

>>Message Date 08/03/68

To: Colonel Andrew Redburn, SLDF

Pardon me for being frank, sir, but it's all gone to hell. I don't even know if you'll get this or not; we've not had any communications from any agency in the Inner Sphere since before the Conference. I've been acting on my own command. I've tried to do what's right according to the Star League Articles we agreed to with the Clans, but it's just gotten out of hand.

We have arranged transport back to an Explorer Corps base—I believe it's called Columbus Station? The Ravens had heard of our situation and offered us a Trial for transport. I'm not completely surprised, as the last I'd heard from intel was that the Ravens had a fleet or two out in that direction. We are, however, leaving without Colonel Barclay and her ELH contingent. The Scorpions informed me that Barclay had accepted another Trial for the Lootera complex and the troops therein, though her reasons elude me. Unlike the previous engagement, the ELH lost. Seems the Scorpions are adapting to standard war doctrine—from the battle ROMs I saw, they made no attempt to maintain Clan *zellbrigen*.

So we're abandoning all our nonessential equipment here. We only have room for our staff and important documents, though there's not much of that. I'll contact you from Columbus once we arrive in a few months' time. We can then discuss—if possible—this situation in full.

—EJL

COLUMBUS FALLS!

>>>999-ALPHA-11a7:23.12.70<<<

Precentor Martial:

After exhaustive work, we've finally finished downloading the remaining information from relay station TF9. This relay satellite is located outside of Columbus Station; we only recently coaxed the system back online. The virus that hit TF9 was different than the "white-out" bugs we saw to date, but until last night we couldn't figure out why. This attack on Columbus was planned. What concerns me most is that Blakists knew about TF9; we put that deep sat in place after the Schism, and only Precentor Luchenko, Precentor Trevaine and myself knew about it. I know where I stand on this…and I hope like hell Luchenko didn't turn, because I don't think Death himself would want to face Alexi in a dark alley.

But at least we know what happened to Columbus. Unfortunately, we can add yet more victims to the Blakist scourge—the tagged transmission date is December 3068, almost two years ago. I'll dispatch an EC crew ASAP just in case anyone still survives, but at this point it's going to take an act of God.

—Precentor Marko Stephenson

>>File attached<<

*"**ALERT! PRIORITY ONE RED S.O.S.…**[static]…ease respond! Repeating, this is Explorer Corps Commander Duncan Sinclair to any vessels within range of Columbus Station. We are in an emergency situation and need immediate relief! The Word of Blake hit us three days ago and…*[static]…rtsmouth *is destroyed. The* Roslare *is destroyed. They burned the entire base to the ground. The 151st is gone, their barracks were vaporized. We've found no survivors…**ALERT! PRIORITY ONE RED S.O.S.…**Blake WarShips just burned everything from orbit. All aerospace assets have been torched. We have almost no food and water. Power is minimal and draining. We need immediate evacuation before they come back…*[static]…*estimate six weeks at maximum rationing. Please assist! Will repeat this message until our power runs out. Main generator destroyed; we are operating on backup generator, not much fuel left… **ALERT! PRIORITY ONE RED S.O.S.…**Any vessel, please respond! Repeating, this is Explorer Corps Commander Duncan Sinclair…"*

>>End Attachment<<

HEAR THE WORD OF BLAKE

(31 December 3070)

Terra [VOICE OF BLAKE]—As the struggle to save humankind enters its fourth year, let us reflect on the progress made to date. In accordance with the plans laid down by the Blessed Blake—which our Master has revealed in all their glory—we have extended our protection to many worlds near to sacred Terra. Though the corrupt House Lords attempted to prevent us from bringing peace and security to worlds such as New Earth, Dieron and Demeter, we threw back the foul forces of Steiner, Kurita and Davion.

To our sorrow, the brave warriors of the SLDF were beguiled by the lies of the villains who allowed the Star League to fall. They turned down our offer of support and rejected our vision for the future. With great regret we were forced to fight against them.

Then Blessed Terra itself was attacked! But Blake gave us strength, and we stood firm against the onslaught.

Bringing enlightenment, we unmasked the puppet-Primus and the pretender who sat at the head of the Free Worlds League. We did not even have to take action against the spy, as Mori was slain by her own aide. Seeing the truth at last, many of our brothers and sisters returned to embrace the true Word of Blake. Just as heartening were the others who have chosen to join our great crusade, and many from the Free Worlds League flocked to our banner.

Once more we appeal to the peoples of the Inner Sphere! Embrace Blake's vision! Allow us to complete the mission with which he charged us! Re-create the Star League and usher in a golden age for all humanity.

People of the Inner Sphere, listen to us! Embrace Blake's wisdom or prepare to face the full fury of Blake's wrath!

RULES ANNEX

RULES ANNEX

The following section provides additional rules for the *Classic BattleTech* board game that cover new units and equipment. Though many of the units debuted during the Word of Blake Jihad (specifically, the period from 3068 to 3070), some—such as the weapons of mass destruction featured here—have seen widespread use in other eras, such as the Amaris Civil War and the First and Second Succession Wars.

Terminology: In these rules, the term unit is used as it is in the *BMR*, to refer to a single battlefield unit such as a 'Mech, vehicle or infantry platoon. The term *force* is used to denote a large combat formation, such as a regiment or Galaxy.

NUCLEAR WEAPONS

The best known and most common among modern weapons of mass destruction (WMDs), nuclear weapons come in a variety of sizes and styles. Most of these devices are throwbacks to the Amaris Crisis and the early Succession Wars, mothballed for so long that time has rendered them largely harmless. However, the technology to restore or replace them exists at the heart of the industrial nations in the Inner Sphere and Periphery, and in many cases through the centuries, ancient stockpiles have been opened and refurbished either for desperate measures or to maintain a secret level of nuclear readiness, despite the fact that nearly every civilized state in human-occupied space regards the use of such WMDs as morally repugnant.

It is important to note that these rules are not designed to replicate real-world nuclear weapons, or to simulate all the various ways in which such weapons can be delivered. Instead, these rules provide a relatively realistic framework for the use of "standard" nuclear weapons within *Classic BattleTech* and *AeroTech 2* game play and within the established fictional setting of the *Classic BattleTech* universe. How these rules are implemented in game play is left up to the gamemaster and the individual gaming group. For example, the detonation of a WMD is effectively an "act of God" and will usually annihilate everything on a playing field. Therefore, in place of simply tossing a nuclear weapon into hex XX of a *CBT* game on four mapsheets and destroying everything, entire campaigns can be played in an effort to stop such a detonation from obliterating a vital target. Or a campaign may take place on the fringes of such a detonation, or gaming groups may generate "to survive despite the horror"-type scenarios and post-apocalyptic storylines. The possibilities are endless.

While nuclear weapons are the best-known WMD, other such weapons exist, including biological and chemical weapons, as well as more esoteric devices. Such WMDs will be covered in future Jihad-related sourcebooks.

GAME RULES

By and large, nuclear weapons should never be used in game play, as even the lightest of such devices can significantly alter the outcome of a scenario or a campaign. To reflect this, nuclear weapons have no Battle Value to speak of. Game scenarios that use BV as a balancing factor should not permit the use of any nuclear weapons. More importantly, given the overwhelming nature of such weapons in standard game play, all players should read through these rules and agree to their use before play begins.

Nevertheless, for campaign purposes, any military force may acquire functional nuclear weapons. The Standard Nuclear Weaponry Table below indicates the most common nuclear weapon types found in the stockpiles of the various Inner Sphere and Periphery powers. To acquire such weapons, a force's controlling player need only spend the amount of C-bills indicated in the Weapon Acquisition and Costs Modifiers Table, and then make a 2D6 roll against the Availability Target Number (TN) of the weapon's class, modified as appropriate for the force's experience, reliability, size, affiliation and equipment ratings. A roll result equal to or exceeding the target number will grant the force one of the desired weapons. This roll may be made only twice per month, per type of weapon desired, by the force attempting to obtain such weapons. The C-bills are deducted regardless of success. Rolls made for larger commands may not be repeated for sub-forces (such as for a battalion within the same regiment) or vice versa (for each battalion and then the regiment they belong to) within the same month.

Classic BattleTech RPG: Though describing in detail the use and acquisition of nuclear weapons in *Classic BattleTech RPG* (*CBT: RPG)* campaigns is beyond the scope of this book, players and gamemasters wishing to do so may model their own attempts to obtain such weapons on these rules. In such an event, nuclear weapons are considered to have a *minimum* base Tech Level/Availability/Legality rating of C/E/F.

Consequences of WMD Use: Per Articles I and VI of the Ares Conventions, the use of WMDs is considered a "crime against humanity," and by the letter of the law (even these largely defunct ones), any force that uses said weapons should be branded rogue by every state, including the force's own government. Reality, however, is not so cut and dried. In the fog of war, when the use of such weapons raises its ugly head—such as during the First and Second Succession Wars or the Amaris Crisis—it is all too common to find governments looking the other way, while finding a means to excuse the use of WMDs due to "extreme circumstances." The Jihad, of course, is no exception. Especially with most governments already declaring the Word of Blake "rogue" for their reported WMD use, it is all to easy for such states to look the other way when one of their own retaliates in kind.

Given the complexities involved—based on era, the type of force wielding the weapon (House, mercenary or others), the general level of WMD use by various states at the time and so on—the gamemaster determines how the consequences of WMD use play out in a given campaign. Guidelines for rogue mercenaries appear on pp. 98-99 of *Mercenaries Supplemental II*; gamemasters are free

RULES ANNEX

NUCLEAR WEAPON ACQUISITION COSTS AND MODIFIERS

Base Weapon Cost: Base Availability TN x Kiloton Yield x 25,000 C-bills

Base Availability TNs		*Force Size/Rating Modifiers*		*Force Affiliation/Equipment Modifiers*	
Davy Crockett-I	19	Elite	–2	Word of Blake/Taurian Concordat*	–3
Davy Crockett-M	18	Regular	+2	ComStar or Periphery (Non-Taurian)	–2
Alamo	17	Green	+3	Capellan, Free Worlds or Mercenary	–1
Santa Ana	18	Fanatical	–2	Clan (Any)	+2
Peacemaker	20	Questionable	+4	Equipment A or Clan Front-Line	–1
Era: 2866-3067	+2	Per Full Regiment/Cluster	–1 (max –3)	Equipment D-F (or Periphery C)	+2

* Includes Calderon Protectorate

to adopt elements of those rules and apply them as best suited to each gaming group's campaign, as well as specific circumstances.

Base Rules (CBT/AT2)

The statistics for the most common nuclear weapons in the *CBT* universe are listed in the Standard Nuclear Weaponry Table. This table covers only the tactical weapons used in the *CBT* universe (those with a yield of 500 kilotons or less). While larger strategic weapons have appeared in *CBT*'s history—as high as 50 megatons in yield, deployed mostly during the days of the Amaris Coup and the early Succession Wars—their use in game play is beyond the scope of these rules.

The weapons are listed in the order of their attack yields (in kilotons). Each weapon listed has a *Base Damage* rating, which defines its maximum damage in *CBT* points at ground zero (the hex of impact on a *CBT* map) and an *AT2 Capital Damage* rating, which gives its Capital-scale damage to armor (and its chance for a critical hit; see below). The *Degradation by Hex* values then define the rate at which the weapon's base damage drops off on the *CBT* board for each hex away from ground zero, indicating the rate of damage degradation in a ground blast on the left of the slash, or an airburst on the right. The *Secondary Radius* gives the maximum range of secondary effects from a *CBT* nuclear weapon strike, again with the ground burst radius (in hexes) to the left of the slash, and the airburst radius to the right. The *Crater Depth* caused by such nuclear weapons on a *CBT* map (ground strike only) is then given, indicating the number of levels of elevation an exploding weapon will dig up at ground zero (this crater depth reduces by one level for every 2 hexes from the impact hex, until it reaches the base terrain elevation). The weapon's range is given next in terms of its appropriate rules set (*CBT* or *AT2*), with *CBT* ranges—if any—appearing to the left of the slash and *AT2* ranges to the right. Finally, the weapon's listed mass indicates (chiefly for cargo purposes) how much a given nuclear weapon weighs.

Specific details for using these weapons in game play are covered in the descriptions on pp. 134-135, but their effects in *CBT* and *AT2* combat are the same once deployed:

Ground Zero Hex: The Ground Zero Hex is defined as the target hex where a nuclear device strikes. If the attack is a nuclear weapon in atmosphere (see p. 133), a Ground Zero Hex on a *Classic BattleTech* game board must be determined (this can be done by the gamemaster, randomly, or in some other fashion agreed upon by all players).

Any units and or buildings within the Ground Zero Hex are completely annihilated.

STANDARD NUCLEAR WEAPONRY TABLE

Weapon (Nuclear Yield)	Base Damage (Ground Zero)	*AT2* Capital Dmg. (Crit)	Degradation by Hex (Ground/Air)	Secondary Radius (Ground/Air)	Crater Depth	Range (*CBT**/*AT2*)	Mass
Davy Crockett-I (0.5 Kiloton)	100	1 (11+)	5 / 4	40 / 53	0	2 / NA	3 tons
Davy Crockett-M (0.5 Kiloton)	100	1 (11+)	5 / 4	40 / 53	0	As Launcher** / NA	1 ton
Alamo (5 Kilotons)	1,000	10 (10+)	23 / 17	86 / 115	1	20 / Medium†	5 tons
Santa Ana (50 Kilotons)	10,000	100 (9+)	109 / 82	184 / 245	3	10,000 / As Killer Whale†	50 tons
Peacemaker (500 Kilotons)	100,000	1,000 (8+)	505 / 379	396 / 528	5	20,000 / As Kraken†	100 tons

*In *CBT* boards (1 board = 17 hexes)

**Davy Crockett-Ms are deployed only by Long Tom or Arrow IV artillery units; use the base range as indicated by the launcher

†Range in *AT2* game play (Alamo uses Detailed Weapon Range as AC/10; Santa Ana and Peacemaker as indicated capital missile)

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Crater Area: More powerful nuclear weapons, delivered in a ground burst, can create a crater in the terrain, the deepest point of which is inflicted at the Ground Zero Hex (the depth is indicated in the weapon's *Crater Depth* rating). For every two hexes away from the Ground Zero Hex, this crater depth reduces by one level, until it reaches a relative depth of 0.

All terrain, structures and units in this affected region are annihilated.

Blast Area (*CBT*): The Blast Area is defined as the total number of hexes on a playing map(s)—radiating outward from the Ground Zero Hex—within which a nuclear device delivers direct damage (this does not include *Secondary Effects*, see p. 133).

In a *CBT* game, unless annihilated at the Ground Zero Hex, within a Crater Area, or sheltered by a building, each unit in the Blast Area of a nuclear attack suffers damage as outlined below. For units in buildings, this damage affects the building first, then transfer any remaining damage to the units inside.

CBT units within a Blast Area suffer a number of points equal to the weapon's Base Damage, reduced by the number of points equal to the nuclear weapon's Damage Degradation rating times the number of hexes away from the Ground Zero Hex. (So, a unit standing 8 hexes from the Ground Zero hex of a ground-bursting Davy Crocket would suffer 60 points of damage, rather than the full 100 the weapon can generate: 100 [Base Damage] – [8 (hexes away) x 5 (Degradation by Hex)] = 100 – 40 = 60.) This damage is delivered in 5-point clusters, determined using the attack direction that faces the Ground Zero Hex.

In a Blast Area, airborne units—such as VTOLs, airships, jumping BattleMechs and low-flying aircraft—operating within eighteen kilometers' height (3,000 levels) directly above the Blast Area also sustain full damage from the nuclear attack.

'Mech and airborne units within the Blast Area (that survive the damage) must make immediate Piloting Skill Rolls at a +6 modifier (in addition to all other applicable modifiers for massive damage and critical hits) to avoid falling or crashing. No roll is required for units without a Piloting Skill level.

Protecting Terrain: Outside of the Ground Zero Hex and the Crater Area, only intervening hills (or buildings strong enough to withstand the damage) may block the effects of a nuclear groundburst. To gain the protection of such terrain, the "hiding" unit must be directly adjacent to the hill or building, and the hill or building must be taller than the "hiding" unit's height and cannot be destroyed by the effects of the weapon's blast damage. If all these conditions are met and the "hiding" unit makes a 2D6 roll of 9+, the unit is successfully protected against the damage effects of the attack.

No terrain protects against a nuclear airburst.

Salvage: *All* units destroyed by a nuclear weapon attack (whether on the ground, in atmosphere or in space), whether located in the Ground-Zero Hex, a Crater Area, or damaged to the point of destruction within the Blast Area, are always considered to be unsalvageable.

Terrain Damage (*CBT*): Beyond the Crater Area, nuclear damage to terrain reduces all Woods and Jungle hexes by one level (from Super-heavy to Heavy to Light) for every 20 full points of damage inflicted against the hex. Woods or Jungle reduced below Light become Rough terrain, as does any non-water hex that suffers 200 points of damage or more. Water terrain within a Blast Area—but not within a Crater Area; all terrain in a Crater Area is annihilated—is reduced by one level for every 3,000 points of damage. Any "partially destroyed" water features immediately refill their lost space in the following turns based on the volume of water left to fill the area (and the gamemaster's discretion).

Any non-crater, non-water hexes within the Blast Area occupied by woods, buildings or units prior to a nuclear attack may be set aflame per the rules for *Fire* (see pp. 79-80, *BMR*); units set aflame are considered to be the target of a successful inferno missile attack, with a duration lasting until the end of the scenario, or until the unit is submerged, which ever comes first. For purposes

SECONDARY NUCLEAR EFFECTS TABLE

2D6 Roll*	Results
2–4	Unit is Destroyed (crew/pilot/troopers all killed; engines shut down; all applicable unit types suffer 1D6 critical hits**)
5–6	Unarmored infantry outside buildings are killed; armored infantry/infantry within buildings suffer 50% casualties (round up); Conventional and support vehicles suffer two critical hits, plus one automatic Crew Killed critical hit; 'Mech and fighter units suffer two critical hits and must make a Shutdown Avoid Check at 10+ (Pilots of these machines suffer four hits).**
7–10	Unarmored infantry outside buildings suffer 50% casualties (round up); armored infantry and infantry within buildings suffer 25% casualties (round up); conventional and support vehicles suffer one critical hit, plus one automatic Crew Stunned critical hit; 'Mech and fighter units suffer one critical hit and must make a Shutdown Avoid Check at 6+ (Pilots of these machines suffer two hits).**
11+	Unit sustains no damage

*Add +2 to the roll for combat vehicles, 'Mechs, battle armor and aerospace craft, as well as an additional +2 for any unit within a hardened structure.

**Critical hits are resolved randomly, the locations determined for each by rolling on whichever side of the unit faces the Ground Zero Hex.

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of this effect, consider this an attack on the terrain/building by an energy weapon. Non-Woods/non-Building hexes that qualify for this effect have a modifier of 0 for the roll.

Secondary Effects (*CBT*): The radioactive and electromagnetic effects of a nuclear attack disperse even farther than the blast and fire. To reflect these combined effects, all units and structures within twice the radius of the blast damage (and that are not already destroyed by the initial blast; see Standard Nuclear Weaponry Table, p. 131) must make a 2D6 roll and consult the Secondary Nuclear Effects Table on p. 132. Regardless of the outcome, all units within the effect radius will suffer electromagnetic interference (EMI) for the remainder of the scenario, including a +2 to-hit modifier for all Ranged Weapon Attacks and a –2 modifier to all Missile Hits Table rolls. No terrain protects against secondary nuclear effects, and all airborne units within the same radius are affected up to an altitude of eighteen kilometers (3,000 levels).

Multiple Attacks (*CBT*): Multiple nuclear weapon attacks against a target area are resolved separately, and do not stack for purposes of determining Blast Area and secondary effects. In the wake of a nuclear attack, additional effects may be imposed on the affected region, including continuous EMI as well as the effects of Toxic Atmosphere (Radiation) within the same area and all terrain "downwind" of the attack, for a number of kilometers equal to 2D6 x the weapon's kiloton yield. (See pp. 164, *Handbook: House Marik,* for detailed rules on Toxic Atmosphere effects; determine "downwind" using the *Spreading Fires* rule on p. 80, *BMR*.)

Nuclear Weapons in Space (*AT2*): In space, nuclear weapons must make actual contact to deliver their damage, as the effects of vacuum and the radiation shielding carried by all spacecraft sharply reduces their effectiveness. Furthermore, they must penetrate the target's armor sufficiently to make up for the loss of most of their yield in order to inflict any major damage. To reflect these effects, a successful nuclear attack against any *AT2* unit in space inflicts the weapon's Capital Scale Damage value against the target. However, as with a capital missile hit, all nuclear weapons may inflict additional damage on a successful critical hit. The chances for a critical hit from each nuclear weapon are noted on the table in parentheses next to the Capital Scale Damage value; this critical chance replaces that of any similar capital missile on which the weapon may be based.

Instead of inflicting a critical hit as listed on the damage location table, a critical hit from a nuclear weapon delivers ten times the weapon's normal Capital Scale Damage directly to the target's structural integrity (SI). However it is inflicted, damage to structural integrity by nuclear weapons is *never* halved. Additional critical hit effects resulting from damaged structural integrity are resolved normally.

Any target fortunate enough to survive the damage from a nuclear strike must make an immediate Control Roll with a +4 target modifier, but suffers no additional effects.

Nuclear Weapons in Atmosphere (*AT2*/*CBT*): In atmosphere, nuclear attacks against an aerospace unit use the same rules as those in space, but the attack receives a –2 to-hit modifier and any nuclear attack that hits its target automatically destroys it. If the attack occurs within eighteen kilometers of the planetary surface, treat the affected area on the surface directly below the

ALTERNATIVE ENVIRONMENTS TABLE

*Defending Unit is underwater and within the blast radius of…**	
(Nuclear Airburst)	Divide damage to submerged targets by their current depth x 10 (based on pre-blast depth levels)*
(Nuclear Ground Burst)	Divide Damage Degradation Rate by 2**
*Nuclear Explosion is Subterranean…**	
(At/Within Max. Crater Depth)†	Use standard rules for ground-burst attack, centered over ground zero.
(Over 1x to 2x Max. Crater Depth)†	Treat blast as standard ground-burst attack, using only 10% of base *CBT* damage at ground zero (damage degrades normally, centered over ground zero).
(Over 2x to 5x Max. Crater Depth)†	Treat area above the weapon's normal cratering area (radius of 2x crater depth, centered over ground zero) as a severe earthquake, imposing a +5 penalty on all rolls for the turn of detonation.
(Over 5x Max. Crater Depth)†	No effect.
Atmospheric Pressure‡	
Vacuum	Multiply Damage Degradation Rate by 10
Trace	Multiply Damage Degradation Rate by 3
Thin	Multiply Damage Degradation Rate by 1.5
Standard	Multiply Damage Degradation Rate by 1
High	Multiply Damage Degradation Rate by 0.67
Very High	Multiply Damage Degradation Rate by 0.5

*Units underwater and units subjected to the effect of subterranean explosions at deeper than 1x the weapon's maximum crater depth do not suffer secondary effects.

**Underwater units add 1 hex of distance from ground zero count for each full 5 levels of depth. A "ground burst" is considered to be any nuclear attack that occurs at or near the water's surface.

†Crater depth for Davy Crocketts is considered 1.

‡Relative to Terran standard; round up fractions

point of impact as the focus of an airburst attack by the same weapon; determine a Ground Zero Hex (see *Ground Zero Hex*, p. 131). Any other aerospace craft within the same low-altitude hex (or on the Radar Map, if using the *Abstract Ground Support Rules*, pp. 41-42, *AT2*) as the recipient of a nuclear attack must make a Control Roll with a +6 modifier (in addition to all other applicable condition modifiers). Failure indicates the unit crashes and is destroyed. Additional atmospheric effects may occur as determined by the gamemaster.

Special Conditions (*CBT*/*AT2*): As demonstrated between the space, atmospheric and surface-burst effects described above, nuclear weapons have different effects based on the environment in which they are used. While none of the weapons described here may be detonated underwater or can burrow underground, underwater units may be caught in the blast radius; likewise, combat in caverns underground may lead to sub-surface detonations that can affect other battlefield units in the vicinity. The Alternate Environments Table lists the modifiers for existing nuclear weapon effects based on such conditions as underground detonations, effects on underwater units and variable atmospheric pressures. Additional effects, such as those for alternative atmospheric compositions, may occur at the discretion of the gamemaster or with player agreement.

STANDARD NUCLEAR WEAPONS

The following rules outline the five most common types of nuclear ordnance used in the *Classic BattleTech* universe.

Davy Crockett-I

The versatile and compact Davy Crockett warhead has two different incarnations. This infantry support model—somewhat unpopular, as its range is too limited to keep the attackers out of harm's way—is a one-shot artillery weapon that includes a special launcher system and booster rockets to give the weapon respectable range. Only one may be deployed per conventional infantry platoon and automatically makes the unit a motorized platoon (reflecting the mobile launcher, which adds three tons to the base platoon weight). Platoons reduced to fewer than seven troopers may not operate the weapon. In all other respects, the Davy Crockett-I attacks as an artillery weapon, including shell-flight time and scatter rules.

The Davy Crockett-I always attacks as a ground burst.

Davy Crockett-M

Both versions of the Davy Crockett-M deliver the same damage. Essentially designed as the farther-reaching artillery version of the infantry model, the DC-M is a warhead upgrade for Long Tom and Arrow IV munitions. This version gains the same range and attack methods as its relevant weapon system (range dependent on launcher used), including shell flight times and the scatter effects of standard artillery ordnance. The modified munitions are heavier than standard Long Tom shells or Arrow missiles, but otherwise function in the same way.

The Davy Crockett-M always attacks as a ground burst.

Alamo

The Alamo missile is a special fighter-carried space-to-space (or air-to-ground) nuclear ordnance designed for use by aerospace and conventional fighters. Though powerful and fairly lightweight, it occupies 10 bomb points on a fighter, imposing a corresponding loss of 2 Thrust Points for every Alamo carried.

The Alamo may not be fired from space into atmosphere or vice versa. As a space-to-space or air-to-air weapon, the Alamo has the range profile of an Autocannon/10 (both in standard-scale and Detailed Weapon Ranges), but it may be "fired" from an aerospace fighter at other targets in flight like a capital missile (and may be affected by Advanced Point Defense Weapons fire as appropriate). Resolve space-to-space Alamo attacks as indicated in the rules for Nuclear Weapons in Space (see p. 133), and air-to-air Alamo attacks as per Nuclear Weapons in Atmosphere (see p. 133).

Alamo attacks used in air-to-ground fire are treated as an off-board artillery attack with the base range equivalent of a Long Tom, using the equivalent off-board location corresponding to where the fighter ends its turn in the air (that is, a fighter 3 low-altitude hexes away from the target mapsheet treats the Alamo attack as artillery fire from 3 boards away). Alamos in flight move faster than artillery shells, however, and can traverse 10 boards per turn. Alamo missiles fired in this fashion may not be targeted by ground-based anti-aircraft or anti-missile systems.

At the moment of firing, the attacker designates whether the Alamo is to deliver an airburst or a ground burst.

Santa Ana

The Santa Ana is a Killer Whale ship-to-ship or ship-to-surface missile modified to carry a nuclear warhead. It may be launched per the normal capital missile rules from any Killer Whale or AR10 launcher, and follows the same profile as the Killer Whale for determining heat and range. It may be fired ship-to-ship, ship-to-surface and surface-to-orbit (from special multiple use, purpose-built silos) per standard *AT2* rules, except as modified by the *AT2* rules given above.

The Santa Ana may also be fired surface-to-surface to deliver a ground attack, carried out as if by a standard orbit-to-surface launcher. This attack may deliver a ground burst or an airburst at the attacker's discretion (declared upon firing). When delivering a surface attack, the Santa Ana uses artillery rules for targeting, but flies 144 boards (72 kilometers) per turn, to a maximum atmospheric range of 5,000 kilometers (10,000 boards). A Santa Ana surface silo is considered a Level 2 building with a CF of 100 and may be located in a 2-sublevel to reflect an underground silo. A missile silo destroyed before it can fire (or more than 70 points of

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damage delivered to the missile itself from units inside the silo) will render the weapon harmless.

Peacemaker

The largest of the tactical nuclear weapons, the Peacemaker is a bigger surface-launched missile that shares much in common with the Santa Ana except that it can only be launched from the surface (against spaceborne or surface targets) via a purpose-built silo, and uses the range profile of the Kraken capital missile, rather than the Killer Whale. The Peacemaker's silo may not be mounted in any vessel or vehicle, and is considered a Level 3 building with a CF of 100, which may be located in a 3-sublevel to reflect an underground silo. If the silo is destroyed before it can fire, or the missile destroyed by taking more than 100 points of damage from units inside, the Peacemaker is rendered harmless.

Like the Santa Ana, Peacemakers maybe fired surface-to-surface similar to artillery, and travel 144 boards (72 kilometers) per turn. They have a maximum range of 10,000 kilometers (20,000 boards).

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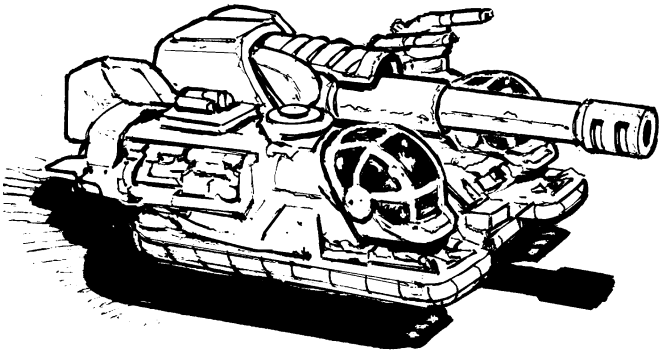
NEW VEHICLES

The following section provides new battlefield units that debuted between 3068 and 3070.



SM1 TANK DESTROYER
Mass: 50 tons
Movement Type: Hover
Power Plant: 165 Standard Fusion
Cruising Speed: 86.4 kph
Flank Speed: 129.6kph
Armor: Advanced Compound Beta
Armament:
4 Series 2c Light Machine Guns
1 Type 10 Ultra Autocannon/20
Manufacturer: LAW-Barcella
Primary Factory: Barcella
Communications System: Unit 2J2 "Basher"
Targeting and Tracking System: Able-Seven Sensor Suite

Overview

When Clan Nova Cat debuted the Shoden assault vehicle in 3064, the tactics of the Clan changed with it. Slowly but steadily, the Nova Cats began to embrace the combined-arms doctrine of Inner Sphere combat, with several vehicle crews beginning to shine among the Galaxies of the Cat Touman.

Bolstered by the success of the Shoden, Khan West authorized several new projects proposed by Nova Cat scientists to develop new combat vehicles. Nothing stood out in particular until Luthien Armor Works approached the Cats' merchant caste on Barcella in 3065. After several months of secret negotiations, LAW struck a deal with the Nova Cat merchants to help design and manufacture a cheap but deadly hovertank using Clan technology on a proven Inner Sphere design. In return, the Cats agreed to retool a defunct LAW vehicle factory on Barcella and allow the company to produce and sell the new combat vehicle, though the first five years of production would go directly to the Clan.

Capabilities

The design team's first priority was to make a vehicle platform—based loosely on the venerable Saladin—that could protect the vehicle crew from more common avenues of vehicle destruction, such as catastrophic ammunition explosions or internal fires. Using a concept first applied to underwater drilling submarines, LAW proposed a "dual bubble" design that would place two crew members each inside a bubble cockpit encompassed by almost 80 percent ferroglass. Positioned on either side of the large main gun, the total crew of four enjoys a 240-degree field of vision. More importantly, the bubbles incorporate an arrangement that functions like a BattleMech's cockpit ejection system. If a fire erupts in the body of the tank, the bubbles can "fire," launching the crew away from the ensuing explosion. Redundant controls in the two bubbles even allow this tank to continue operations (though at reduced efficiency) in the event of crew loss.

The "double bubble" cockpit made assembly easy for the LAW factory, as each half of the tank could be manufactured separately and then joined around the Ultra-series autocannon. A small remote turret containing four light-defense machine guns—operated via the cockpits' controls—would then be attached on the top.

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Despite the unusual appearance of the SM1 (dubbed the "Suicide Machine" by pilots reacting to the exposed feeling of the all-glass cockpits), prototype testing went without a hitch. After performing in a Trial of Position with a volunteer vehicle crew in front of several Galaxy commanders, the SM1 was overwhelmingly approved. LAW began cranking out the new tanks, with the initial production run ending on 5 December 3068.

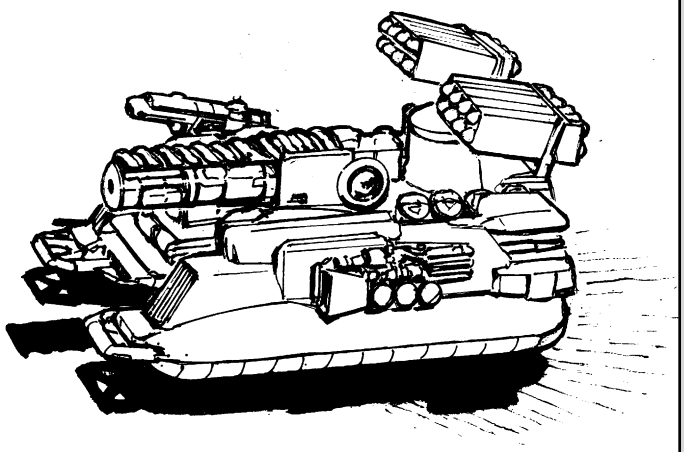
Deployment

After initial reports of Sphere-wide attacks by the Word of Blake, LAW went into overdrive, tripling production in 3069. Despite disparaging remarks by Nova Cat warriors regarding the tank's unusual appearance, it has become a common sight among many Nova Cat Galaxies. Several SM1s have even been spotted in the Ryuken, apparently prizes won in Trials with their Nova Cat neighbors.

Type: **SM1 Tank Destroyer**
Technology Base: Clan
Movement Type: Hover
Tonnage: 50
Battle Value: 1,204

Equipment		**Mass**
Internal Structure:		5
Engine:	165	10
Type	Fusion	
Cruising MP:	8	
Flank MP:	12	
Heat Sinks:	10	0
Control Equipment:		2.5
Lift Equipment:		5
Turret:		.5
Armor Factor:	144	7.5
	Armor Value	
Front	43	
R/L Side	29/29	
Rear	19	
Turret	24	

Weapons and Ammo	**Location**	**Tonnage**
Ultra AC 20	Front	12
Ammo (Ultra) 30	Body	6
4 Light Machine Guns	Turret	1
Ammo (LMG) 100	Body	.5



CONDOR HOVERTANK (UPGRADED)
Mass: 50 tons
Movement Type: Hover
Power Plant: Core Tek 215 XL
Cruising Speed: 97.2 kph
Flank Speed: 151.2 kph
Armor: Starslab/9.5 Ferro-Fibrous Mk II
Armament:
2 SureFire Mini-Guns
1 Valiant Arbalest LRM 15-pack
1 Mydron Excel 5SG LB-X AC
Manufacturer: Quikscell
Primary Factory: Richvale
Communications System: TharHes KR-A P/Comm
Targeting and Tracking System: TharHes Mars 1

Overview

The Red Devil Industries manufacturing plant on Pandora was lost when the Jade Falcons overran that world in 3064. However, just before the Clan assault, the Quikscell Company (another Pandora-based manufacturer) acquired the rights to several of Red Devil's products, among them the Condor hovertank. Quikscell had already begun relocating, and had moved one of its manufacturing lines to Richvale (at some cost to the Lyran taxpayer). With the FedCom Civil War finally over, Quikscell aggressively targeted local militias (who had been stripped of equipment during or after the war) and regular forces desperate enough to buy almost anything, even products with Quikscell's reputation.

Capabilities

Quikscell's engineers faced the challenge of matching the hype coming out of the marketing department. Taking the Condor design, the engineers had the luxury of choosing from a smorgasbord of advanced technology that before the FedCom Civil War had been available in limited quantities only to the most favored manufacturers. Replacing the old 165 Jones ICE with a powerful

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215-rated XL engine, the new Condor could boast even greater speed and agility. Replacing the lasers with a turret-mounted LRM-15 launcher gave it the long-range striking power needed on the modern battlefield, and the new LB-X autocannon (with magazine space for a variety of ammunition types) promised to be an effective weapon against infantry and vehicles. The experiences of the FedCom Civil War prompted the addition of an extra machine gun, as conventional infantry (often better equipped and trained than ever) were beginning to pose far more of a threat than they had during the Succession Wars. When the design team finished, the upgraded Condor (sporting ferro-fibrous armor) bore little resemblance to the Red Devil Industries design of a decade earlier.

Deployment

Even the most optimistic projections fell short of the demand generated by an aggressive marketing campaign. With commands like the Fourth Skye Rangers and Sixth Lyran Guards leading the way, orders began to outstrip the capacity of the Richvale production line.

While hurrying to commission a second production line, Quikscell executive Burton Richards hit upon the idea of packaging the unassembled components and selling the Condor in kit form (at a small discount) to the growing list of impatient customers. The concept proved remarkably popular, though the resulting vehicles had problems with reliability in direct proportion to the competence of the tech crews given the task of assembling these "flat-pack" tanks. On more than one occasion, worried customers found themselves with an apparently completed Condor and a pile of unidentifiable components for which they could see no obvious use.

Following the surprise attacks by the Word of Blake after the dissolution of the Second Star League, demand for the Condor has continued to soar. Duke Robert Kelswa-Steiner has personally purchased two companies of this vehicle to help outfit the newly formed Second and Third Skye Guard.

Type: **Condor**
Technology Base: Inner Sphere
Movement Type: Hover
Tonnage: 50
Battle Value: 714

Equipment		**Mass**
Internal Structure:		5
Engine:	215 XL	10
Type	Fusion	
Cruising MP:	9	
Flank MP:	14	
Heat Sinks:	10	0
Control Equipment:		2.5
Lift Equipment:		5
Power Amplifier:		0
Turret:		1
Armor Factor:	108	6
	Armor Value	
Front	32	
R/L Side	21/21	
Rear	14	
Turret	20	

Weapons and Ammo	**Location**	**Tonnage**
LB 5-X AC	Front	8
Ammo (LB-X) 40	Body	2
2 Machine Guns	Front	1
Ammo (MG) 100	Body	.5
LRM 15	Turret	7
Ammo (LRM) 16	Body	2

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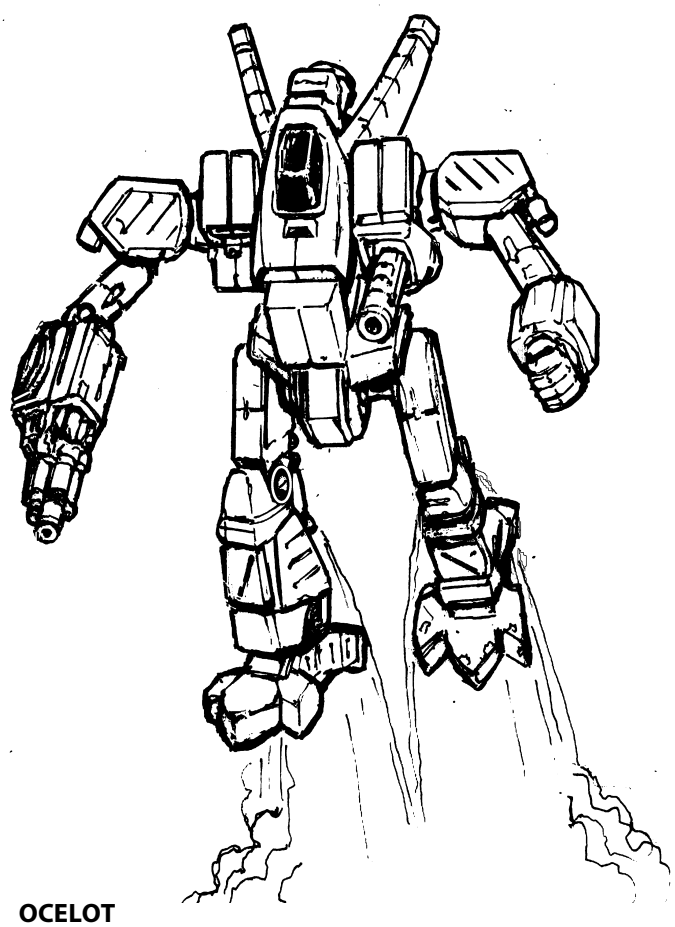


OCELOT
Mass: 35 tons
Chassis: CurtissFox Ocelot
Power Plant: 210 General Systems XL
Cruising Speed: 65 kph
Maximum Speed: 97 kph
Jump Jets: Leaper Model L6
Jump Capacity: 180 meters
Armor: Forging FF01 Ferro-Fibrous
Armament:
2 Series 2d ER Medium Lasers
1 Model X Heavy Large Laser
1 Irecian "Squealer" Light Active Probe
Manufacturer: Irece Alpha
Primary Factory: Irece
Communications System: Raldon R1
Targeting and Tracking System: Dalban HiRez II

Overview

When Clan Nova Cat was Abjured from Clan space, Khan Santin West knew his Clan needed a symbol of their rebirth. Having recently gained as *isorla* a Smoke Jaguar scientist team during the Cats' frantic flight from Clan space, Khan West saw his opportunity in a vision. He quickly assigned a few Nova Cat scientists to the Jaguar group and charged them to develop a BattleMech that could be manufactured in quantity and quickly put on the front lines.

Capabilities

The project began with several failures, as the new design featured a light BattleMech centered on one heavy weapons system, much like the Lyran-produced *Hollander*. Clan-made ER PPCs were in short supply at the time, with much of the Nova Cats' stockpile going toward repairing their shattered touman after the brutal Abjuration, followed by the Combine-Ghost Bear War. In 3065, a chance encounter with a Diamond Shark trade fleet at Itabaiana jump-started the project. Winning a stockpile of Model X heavy lasers in a short and furious bidding war with Shark merchants, the Nova Cats found the weapon they needed (while incidentally laying the groundwork for the Sharks' eventual annexation of Itabaiana).

Taking a cue from Clan Wolf-in-Exile's *Pack Hunter* design, the Nova Cat scientists developed a light 'Mech chassis that could be manufactured with the Nova Cats' sparse resources in the Irece Prefecture. After initially attempting to duplicate that 'Mech's structural design, the development team found that the shoulder-mounted heavy laser was overbalanced. The focusing requirements of the laser needed more stability, so the designers placed it in the torso where special shock mounts could absorb the jarring impact of the 'Mech as it sped over the landscape. In addition, the awkward weight forced them to develop a sturdy "snub wing" design for the jump pack, keeping the new 'Mech balanced in flight so that warriors could fire the heavy laser with minimal loss of accuracy.

Deployment

In early 3067, the development team, which still included all of the original Jaguar scientists, displayed a functioning prototype for saKhan Devalis at the new Curtiss Fox plant on Irece. Not particularly impressed with the initial demonstration, the saKhan took the prototype out onto the live-fire range, much to the designers' horror. After taking down three 'Mechs in quick succession—a *Pack Hunter*, a *Kit Fox*, and an *Adder*—the saKhan returned to the dumbstruck scientists. When asked if he found the design acceptable, Devalis nodded and responded, with a cryptic smile, "Agile as a jaguar, swift as a panther, deadly as a Nova Cat. Though our warriors are superior in soul, it is good to have the weapon of the Jaguar. I welcome the *Ocelot* to the Clan so that we may merge the warrior spirit with the claws of battle."

Variants

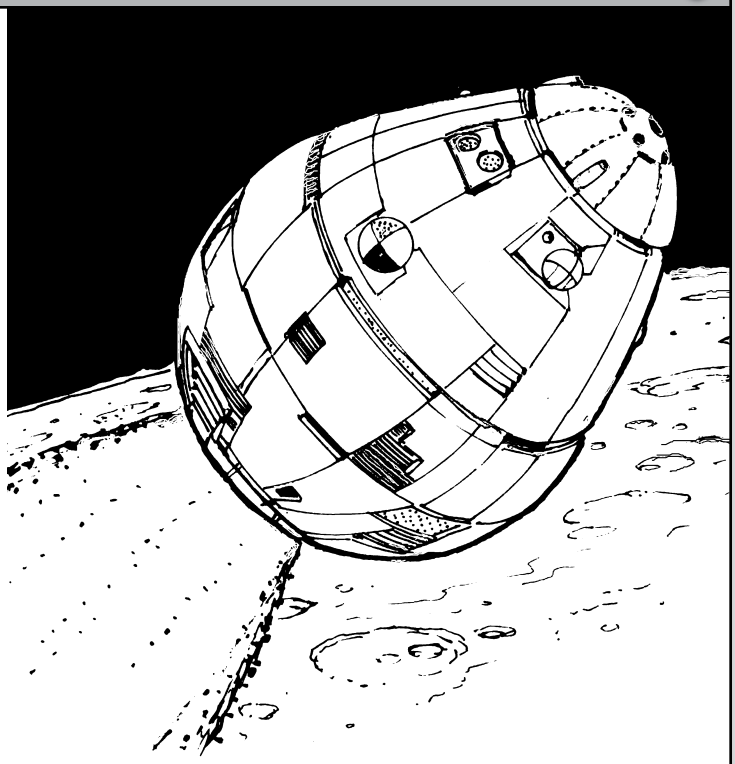
Only one other variant has so far appeared, a prototype test bed equipped with one less heat sink, a half-ton less armor and without the light probe but sporting the more common extended-range PPC system.

RULES ANNEX

Type: **Ocelot**
Technology Base: Clan
Tonnage: 35
Battle Value: 1,422

Equipment			**Mass**
Internal Structure:			3.5
Engine:	210 XL		4.5
Walking MP:	6		
Running MP:	9		
Jumping MP:	6		
Heat Sinks:	15 [30]		5
Gyro:			3
Cockpit:			3
Armor Factor:	119		6.5
	Internal Structure	*Armor Value*	
Head	3	9	
Center Torso	11	16	
Center Torso (rear)		6	
R/L Torso	8	12	
R/L Torso (rear)		4	
R/L Arm	6	12	
R/L Leg	8	16	

Weapons and Ammo	**Location**	**Critical**	**Tonnage**
Heavy Large Laser	LT	3	4
2 ER Medium Lasers	RA	2	2
Light Active Probe	H	1	.5
Jump Jets	LT	3	1.5
Jump Jets	RT	3	1.5



NEW DROPSHIPS: "POCKET WARSHIPS"

The following DropShip designs, which debuted in the early years of the Jihad, represent two of the first so-called "pocket WarShips." Similar in concept to the Overlord-A3, these vessels can oppose full-scale WarShips at a fraction of the cost—though this same mission role, regarded by many as suicidal at best, leaves the widespread deployment of such vessels in doubt.

EXCALIBUR-CLASS "POCKET WARSHIP" UPGRADE

The unique genesis of the *Excalibur* "Pocket WarShip" is a testament to the trifecta power of nobility, money and boardroom connections, combined with the apparent blindness of the largest military bureaucracy since the first Star League.

While details remain few and not wholly confirmed, this project apparently originated with Interconnectedness Unlimited, an interstellar conglomerate currently struggling to reclaim its interstellar recognition after years of steady downturns and the loss of an ambitious Class Six Stadium on Solaris VII. Regardless of their diminished stature—or the growing firestorm of accusations of potential Blakist dealings surrounding their doomed Solaris VII endeavor—the company, and the Steffelbus family backing it, apparently garnered enough support to reach a deal with Duke Aleksandr Philip McCorkendale of Federated-Boeing Interstellar to refit several upgraded *Excalibur*-class DropShips on IU's D-bills. By law, such military upgrades fall under the auspices of the AFFS' Quartermaster Department, which means Field Marshal Melvin Israel Aleixandre likely signed off on the project. As rumors still swirl about "unauthorized depots" built by the DotQ before and during the FedCom Civil War, this is certainly possible.

However, considering the revenue spent on the AFFS' WarShip fleet, combined with the *Overlord-A3* and *Conquistador* assault DropShips already well in the planning stages at the time (the *Conquistador* by none-other-than Federated-Boeing) the reasons for the *Excalibur* refit remain unclear. Nevertheless, the ship is certainly a fully functioning test bed for the potential of such "Pocket WarShips."

In the refit, the *Excalibur*'s five cavernous troop bays were virtually gutted, and the vessel—now designated an assault DropShip—became a flying magazine. A formidable array of eight versatile AR10s and two heavy launchers capable of hurling the new Kraken ship-killers were fed from the all-but-hollow core. Carrying more than six thousand tons of capital missiles, the *Excalibur* can briefly rival the firepower of many light WarShips, while the technological upgrade of the ship's existing weaponry, and the added hangar space for a squadron of aerospace fighters beneath the primary magazines and the main drive add to its

RULES ANNEX

menace. Equipped with a flag deck (normally found on cruisers or battleships), the assault *Excalibur* appears intended to serve as a flagship for special assault squadrons. Such squadrons, coincidentally enough, formed during the first ships' debut in Operation Bulldog, and it was in this role that the refits first served. "Teething" problems with the assault *Excaliburs*' fire control systems kept them from making any major contributions to the campaign, which—as much as Victor's year-long disappearance from the Inner Sphere, small army and all—kept the new class out of the spotlight.

The design's greatest weaknesses, however, stemmed from the haste in which the refits were undertaken. Retaining the original engine, structure and armor, the DropShip is far more fragile than the *Overlord-A3*, *Nekohono'o* or *Conquistador* classes. In a bid to offset this disadvantage, engineers mounted an array of anti-missile systems and screen launchers to form an impressive point defense system.

Only seven *Exclaibur* refits were produced before the project was cancelled—though whether this was due to IU's financial troubles or other, deeper agendas is unclear. The *Gorgon* was lost during Operation Bulldog, and the *Bellerophon* and *Thunderchild* were paid off, becoming the property of mercenary crews who had served in special Star League-sponsored assault squadrons against the Smoke Jaguars. The *Guardian* (erroneously depicted in recent holoflicks as carrying a naval PPC) was destroyed over Kathil in the opening stages of the FedCom Civil War when it rammed the FCS *Robert Davion*. More recently, the *Stanley Castle* was scrapped after suffering heavy damage during Operation Sovereign Justice. Only the *Tyrannosaurus Rex* and *March Harrier* remain in service with the AFFS, both in the Draconis March.

Faced with a surprisingly powerful Word of Blake WarShip fleet, and the success of the dedicated assault DropShips such as the *Overlord-A3* and *Conquistador*, the AFFS reluctantly returned to the oddball "pocket WarShip" concept in 3068. The orbital yards over Galax were in the midst of hastily refitting ten more *Excalibur*s when they fell to Word of Blake forces in 3069. It is believed that the Blakists captured at least six of these partially completed vessels, and scattered reports suggest that they have since completed refitting the other four in the two years since.

Excalibur-Class "Pocket WarShip"
Type: Military Spheroid
Use: Pocket WarShip
Tech: Star League
Introduced: 3059
Mass: 16,000 tons
Battle Value: 24,056

Dimensions
Length: 113 meters
Width: 113 meters
Height: 124.9 meters
Fuel: 300 tons (9,000)
Tons/Burn-day: 1.84
Safe Thrust: 3
Maximum Thrust: 5
Heat Sinks: 445
Structural Integrity: 14

Armor
Nose: 200
Sides: 180
Aft: 150

Cargo

Bay 1: Cargo (420 tons)	1 Door
Bay 2: Fighters (6)	2 Doors

Escape Pods: 25
Life Boats: 4
Crew: 9 officers, 21 enlisted/non-rated, 20 gunners, 28 marines, 12 bay personnel

Ammunition: 32 rounds gauss ammunition (4 tons), 72 rounds LRM 10 ammunition (6 tons), 432 rounds AMS ammunition (36 tons), 60 rounds screen ammunition (60 tons), 20 Kraken-T missiles (2,000 tons), 32 Killer Whale missiles (1,600 tons), 32 White Shark missiles (1,280 tons), and 48 Barracuda missiles (1,440 tons).

Notes: Equipped with 47 tons of standard armor.

RULES ANNEX

Weapons: Arc (Heat) Type	Capital Attack Values (Standard) Short	Medium	Long	Extreme	Class
Nose (113 Heat)					
2 Kraken-T (20 missiles)	20	20	20	20	Capital Missile
1 Gauss Rifle (32 rounds)	2 (15)	2 (15)	2 (15)	—	Autocannon
1 LRM 10+Artemis (24 rounds)	1 (8)	1 (8)	1 (8)	—	LRM
1 ER Medium Laser	1 (5)	1 (5)	—	—	Laser
3 AMS (72 rounds)	1 (9)†	—	—	—	AMS
FL/FR (86 Heat)					
2 AR/10					
(8 KW, 8 WS, 12 B)	*	*	*	*	Capital Missile
1 ER PPC	1 (10)	1 (10)	1 (10)	—	PPC
2 LRM 10+Artemis (24 rounds)	2 (16)	2 (16)	2 (16)	—	LRM
2 ER Medium Laser	1 (10)	1 (10)	—	—	Laser
3 AMS (72 rounds)	1 (9)†	—	—	—	AMS
1 Screen Launcher (20 screens)	—	—	—	—	Screen
AL/AR (65 Heat)					
2 AR/10					
(8 KW, 8 WS, 12 B)	*	*	*	*	Capital Missile
1 ER Large Laser,	2 (18)	2 (18)	1(8)	—	Laser
2 ER Medium Lasers					
3 AMS (72 rounds)	1 (9)†	—	—	—	AMS
Aft (30 Heat)					
1 ER Large Laser,	1 (13)	1 (13)	1 (8)	—	Laser
1 ER Medium Laser					
3 AMS (72 rounds)	1 (9)†	—	—	—	AMS
1 Screen Launcher (20 screens)	—	—	—	—	Screen

†Only against missiles.
*By missile type (heat factored as for Killer Whale)

RULES ANNEX

MULE-CLASS "POCKET WARSHIP" ("Q-SHIP")

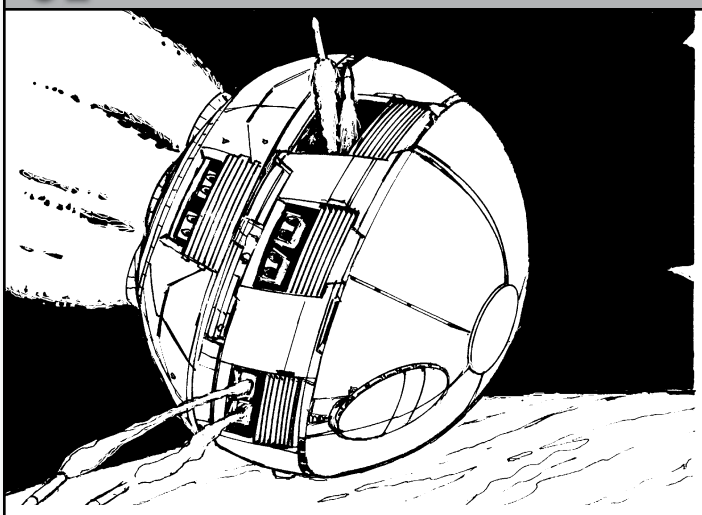
Deception has likely been a component of warfare since humankind first began practicing war. A particularly famous form of deception is named for the Trojan Horse of legend. A naval adaptation of this ruse is known as the Q-ship, an armed vessel disguised as a merchant ship or a merchant vessel armed with heavy weaponry. Often, such vessels hide their weaponry to prevent detection until the Q-ship is ready to engage its target. Historically, Q-ships have been used to raid enemy merchant shipping, or to provide escort for friendly merchant shipping, but on occasion they have engaged and defeated opposing WarShips.

The Word of Blake navy contains a variety of craft that can be designated as Q-Ships. One of the most nefarious of these may be their modified *Mule*-class DropShips. Eight AR10 launchers are installed in the upper cargo bays, with each cargo door hiding two. The lower cargo bay contains most of the missile magazines, and also provides berths and quarters for a squadron of fighters and their support staff. The squadron uses one of the lower cargo doors, properly modified for fighter launch and recovery, while the other door provides access to the vessel's remaining cargo hold.

The vessel's armor is more than doubled in mass, particularly reinforcing the nose and doors. It provides protection on a par with that of other combat DropShips. This increase in armor is difficult to detect at range, and with the vessel's AR10 launchers hidden behind its doors, the modified *Mule* is nearly indistinguishable from normal vessels.

Based on several recovered *Mule* Q-Ships developed by the original Star League Navy to help protect its shipping lines from predation by pirates, the Word of Blake replaced the existing brace of White Shark and Barracuda launchers with more efficient AR10 launchers, with decidedly less ammunition available. To confuse the enemy, and perhaps to cause him to over-estmate the vessel, the Blakists seem to have installed empty launcher housings next to the AR10's. Numerous visible missiles tubes on Mule Q-ships have never been observed firing ordnance. Considering the suc-

RULES ANNEX



cess of the vessel since its initial deployment over Altair in 3068, the Word of Blake has begun a crash program to adapt more *Mule*-class DropShips to Q-Ship configuration. So far, those vessels appear to have armor identical to normal *Mule* DropShips, likely because the Word of Blake is rushing additional vessels into service.

The *Mule* Q-ships so far have had devastating effects, inflicting tremendous damage on worlds such as Altair, Asta and Yorii. They have also caused economic disruption across the Inner Sphere, forcing authorities to take expensive and time-consuming measures to attempt to screen all *Mules*. This situation has led to discussion of whether other such Q-Ships might appear in the future, causing further strain. It is difficult to gauge whether the Word of Blake prioritizes this economic disruption over the immediate ability to deploy capital missiles and WMDs, but certainly they are converting as many *Mule*s as they can.

***Mule*-Class "Pocket WarShip" (Q-Ship)**

Type: Military Spheroid
Use: Pocket WarShip (Q-Ship)
Tech: Star League
Introduced: 3068
Mass: 11,200 tons
Battle Value: 13,961

Dimensions
Length: 158 meters
Width: 158 meters
Height: 100.4 meters

Armor
Nose: 176
Sides: 154
Aft: 132

Fuel: 319 tons (9,570)
Tons/Burn-day: 4.22
Safe Thrust: 3
Maximum Thrust: 5
Heat Sinks: 160 (320)
Structural Integrity: 10

Cargo

Bay 1: Cargo (354 tons)	1 Door
Bay 2: Fighters (6)	2 Doors

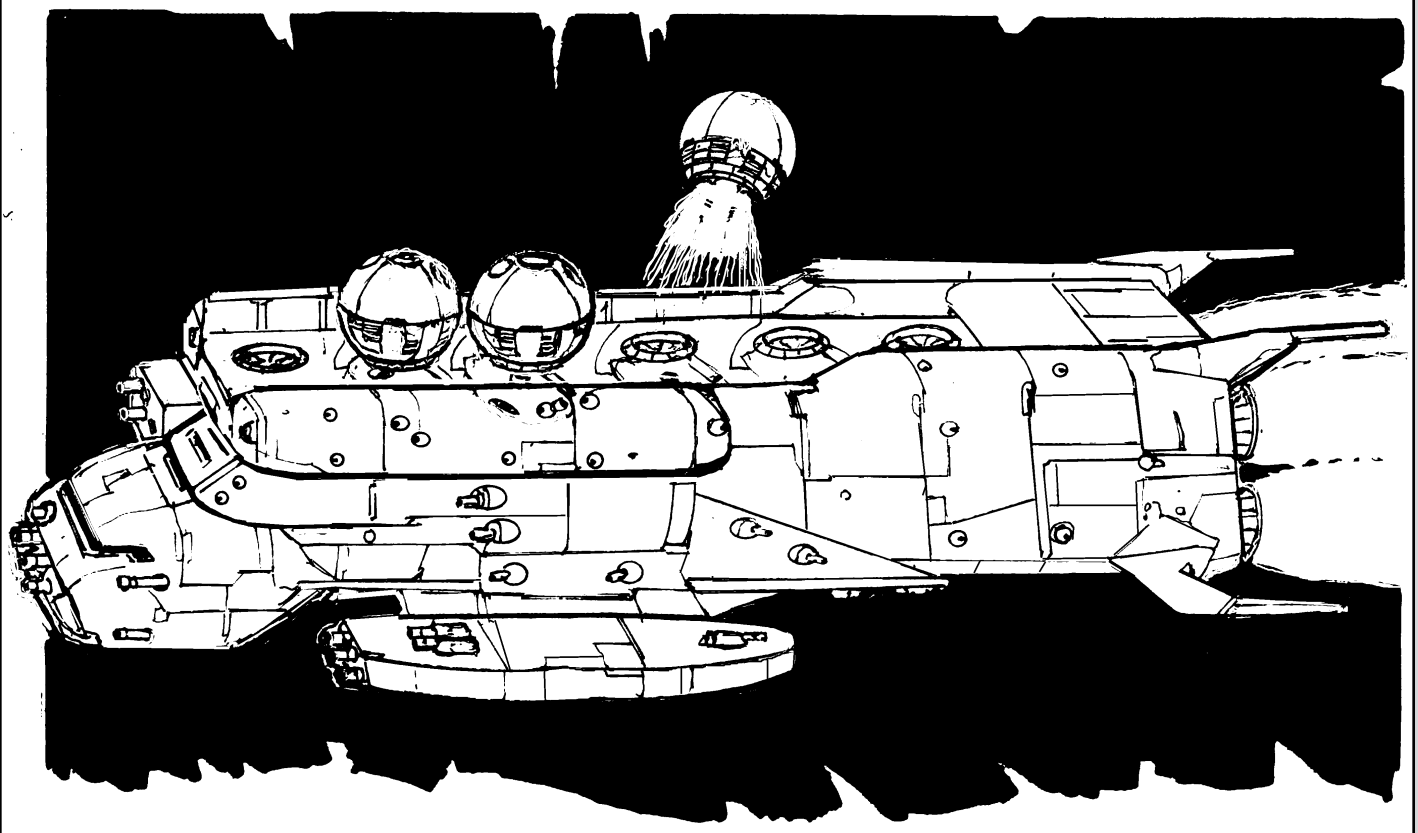
Escape Pods: 2
Life Boats: 2
Crew: 3 officers, 4 enlisted/non-rated, 11 gunners, 12 bay personnel

Ammunition: 40 Killer Whale missiles (2,000 tons), 40 White Shark missiles (1,600 tons), 40 Barracuda missiles (1,200 tons), 40 rounds Autocannon/5 ammunition (2 tons), 30 rounds SRM-6 ammunition (2 tons)
Notes: Equipped with 36 tons of standard armor.

RULES ANNEX

Weapons:	**Capital Attack Values (Standard)**				
Arc (Heat) Type	**Short**	**Medium**	**Long**	**Extreme**	**Class**
Nose (6 Heat)					
1 Autocannon/5 (40 rounds)	1 (5)	1 (5)	—	—	Autocannon
1 Medium Laser	1 (5)	—	—	—	Laser
2 Small Lasers	1 (6)	—	—	—	Point Defense
FL/FR (90 Heat)					
4 AR/10 (20 KW, 20 WS, 20 B)	*	*	*	*	Capital Missile
1 SRM 6 (15 rounds)	1 (8)	—	—	—	SRM
2 Medium Lasers	1 (10)	—	—	—	Laser
AL/AR (11 Heat)					
1 Large Laser, 1 Medium Laser	1 (13)	1 (8)	—	—	Laser
Aft (11 Heat)					
1 Large Laser, 1 Medium Laser	1 (13)	1 (8)	—	—	Laser

* By missile type (heat factored as for Killer Whale)



RULES ANNEX

THARKAD-CLASS BATTLECRUISER (LCS INVINCIBLE)

Designed in 2685 as the first of a new generation of WarShips for the LCAF navy, the first *Tharkad*-class battlecruiser, the LCS *Tharkad*, slipped its moors at the Bolson-Tamar Shipyards in 2690. Seen by many as the pride of Lyran military might, the massive vessel boasted incredible firepower, armor and maneuverability for its day. More than twenty vessels of its class were built over the next century, before a Kurita raiding force shattered the yards in the opening moves of the First Succession War. With the exception of one—the LCS *Invincible*—all of these ships were lost in various engagements along the Combine, Terran Hegemony and Free Worlds League borders.

As Lyran WarShip power waned with the ravages of the Succession Wars, qualified crews grew scarce in proportion, and the few remaining capital ships soon found themselves anchored around key systems, with the *Invincible* herself (by this time in fairly poor condition) moored above Tharkad by 2850. When the Draconis Combine laid siege to Hesperus II, however, a desperate Commonwealth leadership called upon the aging ship and a shorthanded crew of equally venerable naval officers to undertake one last battle for their nation's defense.

The *Invincible*'s timely arrival over Hesperus II in 2853 turned the tide of what to this day remains the most epic chapter in Lyran military history, but the victorious battlecruiser was lost on her return flight to Tharkad, presumably destroyed by a jump drive failure. In the centuries since, numerous theories about the lost ship surfaced, with many romantics hopelessly convinced—even in the face of ridicule by more "realistic" experts—that the *Invincible* simply remained adrift in deep space, waiting to be found.

Only on the fateful morning of 5 December 3067 was the fate of the LCS *Invincible* revealed, when the ship reappeared in the skies above Tharkad City. Refurbished and cloaked in the colors of the newly defunct Second Star League, she came to unleash the rage of her new masters, the Word of Blake.

RULES ANNEX

Tharkad-Class Battlecruiser (LCS Invincible)
Tech: Star League
Introduced: 2690
Mass: 900,000 tons
Length: 975 meters
Sail Diameter: 1,490 meters
Fuel: 3,952 tons (9,880)
Tons/Burn-day: 9.77
Safe Thrust: 3
Maximum Thrust: 5
Sail Integrity: 5
KF Drive Integrity: 18
Heat Sinks: 7,000
Structural Integrity: 80
Battle Value: 205,482

Armor
Nose: 145
Fore -Sides: 140
Aft-Sides: 140
Aft: 130

Cargo

Bay 1: Fighters (36)	6 Doors
Bay 2: Small Craft (8)	2 Doors
Bay 3: Cargo (44,9144.5 tons)	1 Door

DropShip Capacity: 6
Grav Decks: 2 (95-meter diameter)
Escape Pods: 30
Life Boats: 35
Crew: 62 officers, 213 enlisted/non-rated, 87 gunners, 112 bay personnel

Ammunition: 80 rounds NAC/35 ammunition (80 tons), 92 rounds NAC/30 ammunition (74 tons), 138 rounds NAC/25 ammunition (83 tons), 90 rounds NAC/20 ammunition (36 tons), 80 rounds Heavy N-Gauss ammunition (40 tons), 60 Killer Whale missiles (3,000 tons), 360 rounds LRM-20 ammunition (60 tons), 360 rounds LRM-10 ammunition (30 tons).

Notes: Equipped with lithium-fusion battery systems and 983.5 tons of ferro-carbide armor.

Weapons:	Capital Attack Values (Standard)				
Arc (Heat) Type	**Short**	**Medium**	**Long**	**Extreme**	**Class**
Nose (992 Heat)					
3 NL55	17	17	17	17	Capital Laser
3 Medium NPPC	27	27	27	27	Capital PPC
2 NAC/25 (46 rounds)	50	50	50	—	Capital AC
6 Killer Whale (60 missiles)	24	24	24	24	Capital Missile
3 Large Laser, 6 Medium Laser	5 (54)	2 (24)	—	—	Laser
FL/FR (611 Heat)					
3 Medium NPPC	27	27	27	27	Capital PPC
2 NAC/25 (46 rounds)	50	50	50	—	Capital AC
2 Heavy N-Gauss (40 rounds)	60	60	60	60	Capital Gauss
LBS/RBS (1,559 Heat)					
4 NL55	22	22	22	22	Capital Laser
3 Heavy NPPC	45	45	45	45	Capital PPC
2 NAC/35 (40 rounds)	70	70	—	—	Capital AC
2 NAC/30 (46 rounds)	60	60	60	—	Capital AC
4 LRM 20 (60 rounds), 6 LRM 10s (120 rounds)	8 (84)	8 (84)	8 (84)	—	LRM
4 Large Laser, 8 Medium Laser	7 (72)	3 (32)	—	—	Laser
AL/AR (713 Heat)					
2 NL35	7	7	7	—	Capital Laser
3 Medium NPPC	27	27	27	27	Capital PPC
2 NAC/20 (30 rounds)	40	40	40	—	Capital AC
5 LRM 20 (120 rounds), 3 LRM 10 (60 rounds)	8 (78)	8 (78)	8 (78)	—	LRM
3 Large Laser, 6 Medium Laser	5 (54)	2 (24)	—	—	Laser
Aft (850 Heat)					
4 NL45	18	18	18	18	Capital Laser
2 Heavy NPPC	30	30	30	30	Capital PPC
2 NAC/20 (30 rounds)	40	40	40	—	Capital AC

CLASSIC BATTLETECH™

HOVER VEHICLE RECORD SHEET

VEHICLE DATA

Type: SM1 TANK DESTROYER

Movement Points:
Cruising: 8
Flank: 12
Movement Type: Hover
Engine Type: Fusion

Tonnage: 50
Tech Base: Clan
3068

Weapons & Equipment Inventory (hexes)

Qty	Type	Loc	Dmg	Min	Sht	Med	Lng
1	Ultra AC/20	Front	20/Sht (DB,RC)	—	4	8	12
4	Light MGs	Turret	1 (DB,AI)	—	2	4	6

Ammo: (Ultra AC/20) 30
Ammo: (Light MG) 100

Cost: 3,095,500 C-bills **BV:** XXX

CREW DATA

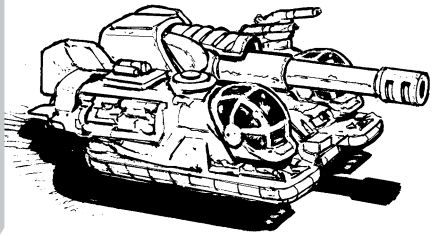
Crew: 4
Gunnery Skill: ___ **Driving Skill:** ___

Commander Hit +1
Modifier to all Skill rolls

Driver Hit +2
Modifier to Driving Skill rolls

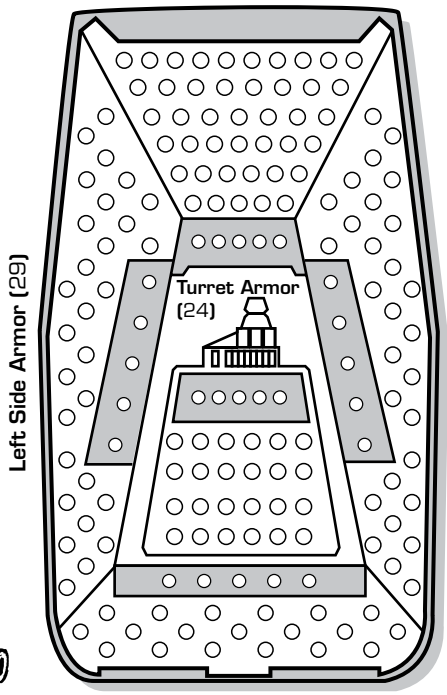
CRITICAL DAMAGE

Turret Locked ☐ Engine Hit ☐
Sensor Hits +1 +2 +3 D
Motive System Hits +1 +2 +3
Stabilizers
Front ☐ Left ☐ Right ☐
Rear ☐ Turret ☐



ARMOR DIAGRAM

Front Armor (43)



Rear Armor (19)

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GROUND COMBAT VEHICLE HIT LOCATION TABLE

	ATTACK DIRECTION		
2D6 Roll	FRONT	REAR	SIDE§
2*	Front (critical)	Rear (critical)	Side (critical)
3	Front†	Rear†	Side†
4	Front†	Rear†	Side†
5	Right Side†	Left Side†	Front†
6	Front	Rear	Side
7	Front	Rear	Side
8	Front	Rear	Side (critical)*
9	Left Side†	Right Side†	Rear†
10	Turret	Turret	Turret
11	Turret	Turret	Turret
12*	Turret (critical)	Turret (critical)	Turret (critical)

*A result of 2 or 12 (or an 8 if the attack strikes the side) may inflict a critical hit on the vehicle. For each result of 2 or 12 (or 8 for side attacks), apply damage normally to the armor in that section. The attacking player then automatically rolls once on the Ground Combat Vehicle Critical Hits Table below (see *Combat*, p. 192 in *Total Warfare* for more information). A result of 12 on the Ground Combat Vehicles Hit Location Table may inflict critical hit against the turret; if the vehicle has no turret, a 12 indicates the chance of a critical hit on the side corresponding to the attack direction.
†The vehicle may suffer motive system damage even if its armor remains intact. Apply damage normally to the armor in that section, but the attacking player also rolls once on the Motive System Damage Table at right (see *Combat*, p. 192 in *Total Warfare* for more information). Apply damage at the end of the phase in which the damage takes effect.
§Side hits strike the side as indicated by the attack direction. For example, if an attack hits the right side, all Side results strike the right side armor. If the vehicle has no turret, a turret hit strikes the armor on the side attacked.

MOTIVE SYSTEM DAMAGE TABLE

2D6 Roll	EFFECT*
2–5	No effect
6–7	Minor damage; +1 modifier to all Driving Skill Rolls
8–9	Moderate damage; –1 Cruising MP, +2 modifier to all Driving Skill Rolls
10–11	Heavy damage; only half Cruising MP (round fractions up), +3 modifier to all Driving Skill Rolls
12+	Major damage; no movement for the rest of the game. Vehicle is immobile.

Attack Direction Modifier:

Hit from rear	+1
Hit from the sides	+2

Vehicle Type Modifiers:

Tracked, Naval	+0
Wheeled	+2
Hovercraft, Hydrofoil	+3
WiGE	+4

*All movement and Driving Skill Roll penalties are cumulative. However, each Driving Skill Roll modifier can only be applied once. For example, if a roll of 6-7 is made for a vehicle, inflicting a +1 modifier, that is the only time that particular +1 can be applied; a subsequent roll of 6-7 has no additional effect. This means the maximum Driving Skill Roll modifier that can be inflicted from the Motive System Damage Table is +6. If a unit's Cruising MP is reduced to 0, it cannot move for the rest of the game, but is not considered an immobile target. In addition, all motive system damage takes effect at the end of the phase in which the damage occurred. For example, if two units are attacking the same Combat Vehicle during the Weapon Attack Phase and the first unit inflicts motive system damage and rolls a 12, the –4 immobile target modifier would not apply for the second unit. However, the –4 modifier would take effect during the Physical Attack Phase. If a hover vehicle is rendered immobile while over a Depth 1 or deeper water hex, it sinks and is destroyed.

GROUND COMBAT VEHICLE CRITICAL HITS TABLE

	LOCATION HIT			
2D6 Roll	FRONT	SIDE	REAR	TURRET
2–5	No Critical Hit	No Critical Hit	No Critical Hit	No Critical Hit
6	Driver Hit	Cargo/Infantry Hit	Weapon Malfunction	Stabilizer
7	Weapon Malfunction	Weapon Malfunction	Cargo/Infantry Hit	Turret Jam
8	Stabilizer	Crew Stunned	Stabilizer	Weapon Malfunction
9	Sensors	Stabilizer	Weapon Destroyed	Turret Locks
10	Commander Hit	Weapon Destroyed	Engine Hit	Weapon Destroyed
11	Weapon Destroyed	Engine Hit	Ammunition**	Ammunition**
12	Crew Killed	Fuel Tank*	Fuel Tank*	Turret Blown Off

*If Combat Vehicle has ICE engine only. If Combat Vehicle has a fusion engine, treat this result as Engine Hit.
**If Combat Vehicle carries no ammunition, treat this result as Weapon Destroyed.

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CLASSIC BATTLETECH™

HOVER VEHICLE RECORD SHEET

VEHICLE DATA

Type: CONDOR HOVERTANK (UPGRADE)

Movement Points:
Cruising: 9
Flank: 14
Movement Type: Hover
Engine Type: Fusion

Tonnage: 50
Tech Base: Inner Sphere
3066

Weapons & Equipment Inventory (hexes)

Qty	Type	Loc	Dmg	Min	Sht	Med	Lng
1	LB 5-X AC	Front	5/Sht (DB,C/S/F)	3	7	14	21
2	MGs	Front	2 (DB,AI)	—	1	2	3
1	LRM 15	Turret	1/Msl (M,C,S)	6	7	14	21

Ammo: (LB 5-X) 40
Ammo: (MG) 100
Ammo: (LRM 15) 16

Cost: 7,360,333 C-bills **BV:** XXX

CREW DATA

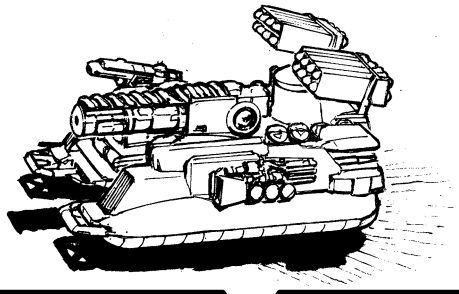
Crew: 4
Gunnery Skill: ___ **Driving Skill:** ___

Commander Hit +1
Modifier to all Skill rolls

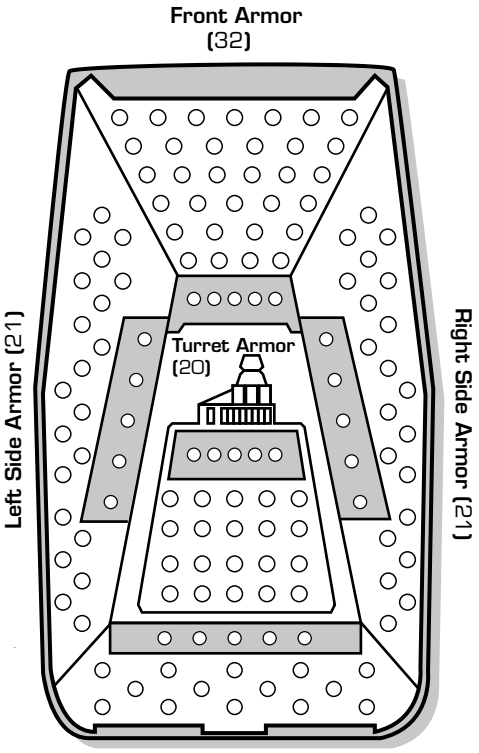
Driver Hit +2
Modifier to Driving Skill rolls

CRITICAL DAMAGE

Turret Locked ☐ Engine Hit ☐
Sensor Hits +1 +2 +3 D
Motive System Hits +1 +2 +3
Stabilizers
Front ☐ Left ☐ Right ☐
Rear ☐ Turret ☐



ARMOR DIAGRAM



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GROUND COMBAT VEHICLE HIT LOCATION TABLE

2D6 Roll	ATTACK DIRECTION FRONT	REAR	SIDE§
2*	Front (critical)	Rear (critical)	Side (critical)
3	Front†	Rear†	Side†
4	Front†	Rear†	Side†
5	Right Side†	Left Side†	Front†
6	Front	Rear	Side
7	Front	Rear	Side
8	Front	Rear	Side (critical)*
9	Left Side†	Right Side†	Rear†
10	Turret	Turret	Turret
11	Turret	Turret	Turret
12*	Turret (critical)	Turret (critical)	Turret (critical)

*A result of 2 or 12 (or an 8 if the attack strikes the side) may inflict a critical hit on the vehicle. For each result of 2 or 12 (or 8 for side attacks), apply damage normally to the armor in that section. The attacking player then automatically rolls once on the Ground Combat Vehicle Critical Hits Table below (see *Combat*, p. 192 in *Total Warfare* for more information). A result of 12 on the Ground Combat Vehicles Hit Location Table may inflict critical hit against the turret; if the vehicle has no turret, a 12 indicates the chance of a critical hit on the side corresponding to the attack direction.
†The vehicle may suffer motive system damage even if its armor remains intact. Apply damage normally to the armor in that section, but the attacking player also rolls once on the Motive System Damage Table at right (see *Combat*, p. 192 in *Total Warfare* for more information). Apply damage at the end of the phase in which the damage takes effect.
§Side hits strike the side as indicated by the attack direction. For example, if an attack hits the right side, all Side results strike the right side armor. If the vehicle has no turret, a turret hit strikes the armor on the side attacked.

MOTIVE SYSTEM DAMAGE TABLE

2D6 Roll	EFFECT*
2–5	No effect
6–7	Minor damage; +1 modifier to all Driving Skill Rolls
8–9	Moderate damage; –1 Cruising MP, +2 modifier to all Driving Skill Rolls
10–11	Heavy damage; only half Cruising MP (round fractions up), +3 modifier to all Driving Skill Rolls
12+	Major damage; no movement for the rest of the game. Vehicle is immobile.

Attack Direction Modifier:
Hit from rear +1
Hit from the sides +2

Vehicle Type Modifiers:
Tracked, Naval +0
Wheeled +2
Hovercraft, Hydrofoil +3
WiGE +4

*All movement and Driving Skill Roll penalties are cumulative. However, each Driving Skill Roll modifier can only be applied once. For example, if a roll of 6-7 is made for a vehicle, inflicting a +1 modifier, that is the only time that particular +1 can be applied; a subsequent roll of 6-7 has no additional effect. This means the maximum Driving Skill Roll modifier that can be inflicted from the Motive System Damage Table is +6. If a unit's Cruising MP is reduced to 0, it cannot move for the rest of the game, but is not considered an immobile target. In addition, all motive system damage takes effect at the end of the phase in which the damage occurred. For example, if two units are attacking the same Combat Vehicle during the Weapon Attack Phase and the first unit inflicts motive system damage and rolls a 12, the –4 immobile target modifier would not apply for the second unit. However, the –4 modifier would take effect during the Physical Attack Phase. If a hover vehicle is rendered immobile while over a Depth 1 or deeper water hex, it sinks and is destroyed.

GROUND COMBAT VEHICLE CRITICAL HITS TABLE

2D6 Roll	LOCATION HIT FRONT	SIDE	REAR	TURRET
2–5	No Critical Hit	No Critical Hit	No Critical Hit	No Critical Hit
6	Driver Hit	Cargo/Infantry Hit	Weapon Malfunction	Stabilizer
7	Weapon Malfunction	Weapon Malfunction	Cargo/Infantry Hit	Turret Jam
8	Stabilizer	Crew Stunned	Stabilizer	Weapon Malfunction
9	Sensors	Stabilizer	Weapon Destroyed	Turret Locks
10	Commander Hit	Weapon Destroyed	Engine Hit	Weapon Destroyed
11	Weapon Destroyed	Engine Hit	Ammunition**	Ammunition**
12	Crew Killed	Fuel Tank*	Fuel Tank*	Turret Blown Off

*If Combat Vehicle has ICE engine only. If Combat Vehicle has a fusion engine, treat this result as Engine Hit.
**If Combat Vehicle carries no ammunition, treat this result as Weapon Destroyed.

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CLASSIC BATTLETECH™

'MECH RECORD SHEET

'MECH DATA

Type: OCELOT

Movement Points:
- Walking: 6
- Running: 9
- Jumping: 6

Tonnage: 35
Tech Base: Clan
3067

Weapons & Equipment Inventory (hexes)

Qty	Type	Loc	Ht	Dmg	Min	Sht	Med	Lng
2	ER Medium Laser	RA	5	7 (DE)	—	5	10	15
1	Heavy Large Laser	LT	18	16 (DE)	—	5	10	15
1	Light Active Probe	LT	—	(E)	—	—	—	3

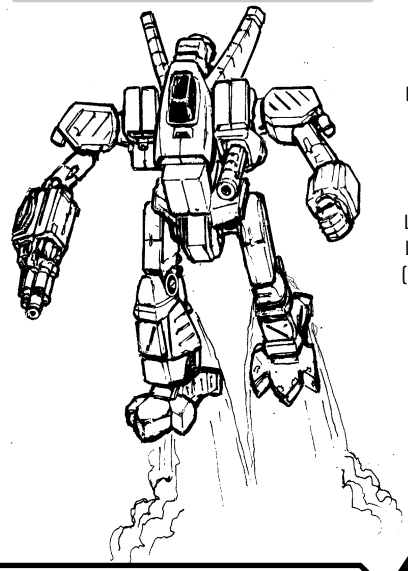
Cost: 5,854,410 C-bills **BV:** 1,439

WARRIOR DATA

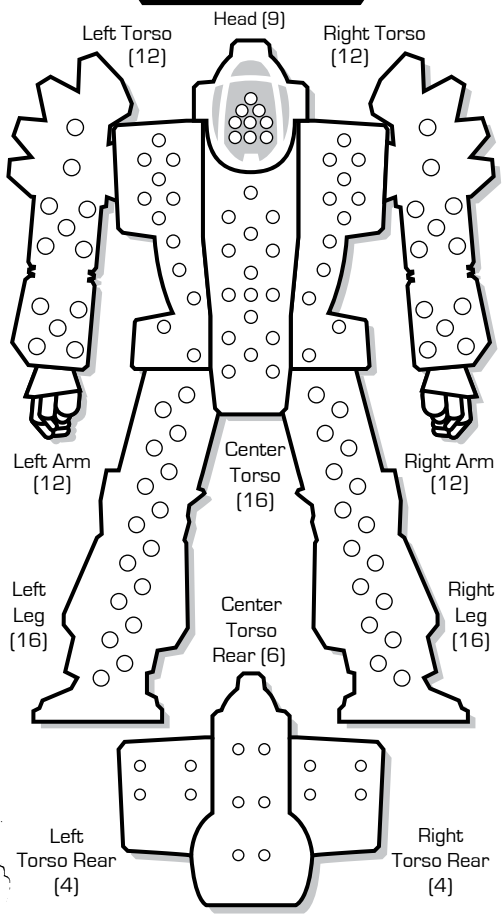
Name: _____

Gunnery Skill: ___ **Piloting Skill:** ___

Hits Taken	1	2	3	4	5	6
Consciousness#	3	5	7	10	11	Dead



ARMOR DIAGRAM



CRITICAL HIT TABLE

Left Arm
1. Shoulder
2. Upper Arm Actuator
3. Lower Arm Actuator
4. Hand
5. Ferro-Fibrous
6. Ferro-Fibrous

1. Ferro-Fibrous
2. Roll Again
3. Roll Again
4. Roll Again
5. Roll Again
6. Roll Again

Left Torso
1. XL Engine
2. XL Engine
3. Double Heat Sink
4. Double Heat Sink
5. Double Heat Sink
6. Double Heat Sink

1. Jump Jet
2. Jump Jet
3. Jump Jet
4. Heavy Large Laser
5. Heavy Large Laser
6. Heavy Large Laser

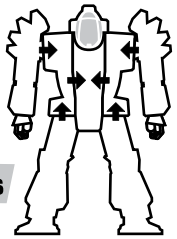
Left Leg
1. Hip
2. Upper Leg Actuator
3. Lower Leg Actuator
4. Foot Actuator
5. Ferro-Fibrous
6. Ferro-Fibrous

Head
1. Life Support
2. Sensors
3. Cockpit
4. Light Active Probe
5. Sensors
6. Life Support

Center Torso
1. XL Engine
2. XL Engine
3. XL Engine
4. Gyro
5. Gyro
6. Gyro

1. Gyro
2. XL Engine
3. XL Engine
4. XL Engine
5. Roll Again
6. Roll Again

Engine Hits ○○○
Gyro Hits ○○
Sensor Hits ○○
Life Support ○



Damage Transfer Diagram

Right Arm
1. Shoulder
2. Upper Arm Actuator
3. Lower Arm Actuator
4. Hand
5. Double Heat Sink
6. Double Heat Sink

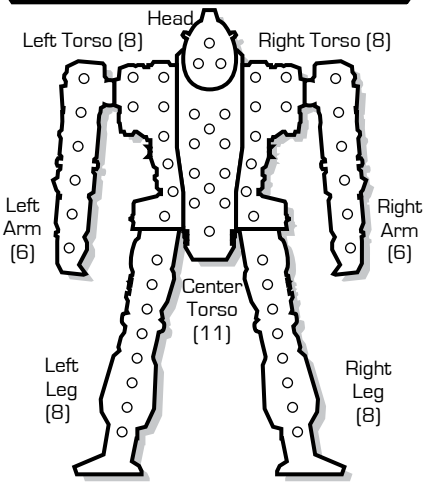
1. Double Heat Sink
2. Double Heat Sink
3. Double Heat Sink
4. Double Heat Sink
5. ER Medium Laser
6. ER Medium Laser

Right Torso
1. XL Engine
2. XL Engine
3. Double Heat Sink
4. Double Heat Sink
5. Double Heat Sink
6. Double Heat Sink

1. Jump Jet
2. Jump Jet
3. Jump Jet
4. Roll Again
5. Roll Again
6. Roll Again

Right Leg
1. Hip
2. Upper Leg Actuator
3. Lower Leg Actuator
4. Foot Actuator
5. Ferro-Fibrous
6. Ferro-Fibrous

INTERNAL STRUCTURE DIAGRAM



HEAT DATA

Heat Level*	Effects	Heat Sinks: 15 (30) Double
30	Shutdown	
28	Ammo Exp. avoid on 8+	
26	Shutdown, avoid on 10+	○○
25	−5 Movement Points	○○
24	+4 Modifier to Fire	○○
23	Ammo Exp. avoid on 6+	○○
22	Shutdown, avoid on 8+	○○
20	−4 Movement Points	○
19	Ammo Exp. avoid on 4+	○
18	Shutdown, avoid on 6+	○
17	+3 Modifier to Fire	○
15	−3 Movement Points	○
14	Shutdown, avoid on 4+	○
13	+2 Modifier to Fire	
10	−2 Movement Points	
8	+1 Modifier to Fire	
5	−1 Movement Points	

Heat Scale

Overflow
30*
29
28*
27
26*
25*
24*
23*
22*
21
20*
19*
18*
17*
16
15*
14*
13*
12
11
10*
9
8*
7
6
5*
4
3
2
1
0

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CLASSIC BATTLETECH™

'MECH RECORD SHEET

'MECH DATA

Type: OCELOT 2

Movement Points:
- Walking: 6
- Running: 9
- Jumping: 6

Tonnage: 35
Tech Base: Clan
3067

Weapons & Equipment Inventory (hexes)

Qty	Type	Loc	Ht	Dmg	Min	Sht	Med	Lng
2	ER Medium Laser	RA	5	7 (DE)	—	5	10	15
1	ER PPC	LT	15	15 (DE)	—	7	14	23

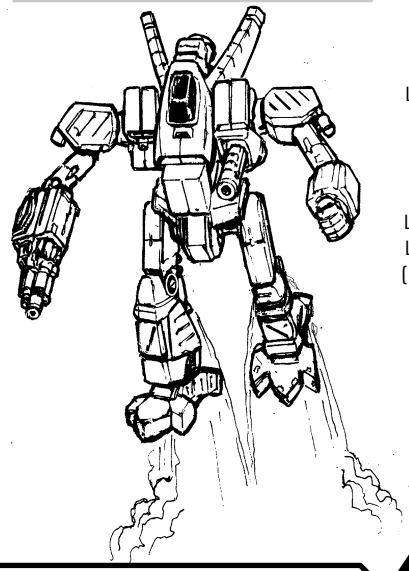
Cost: 5,697,810 C-bills **BV:** 1,734

WARRIOR DATA

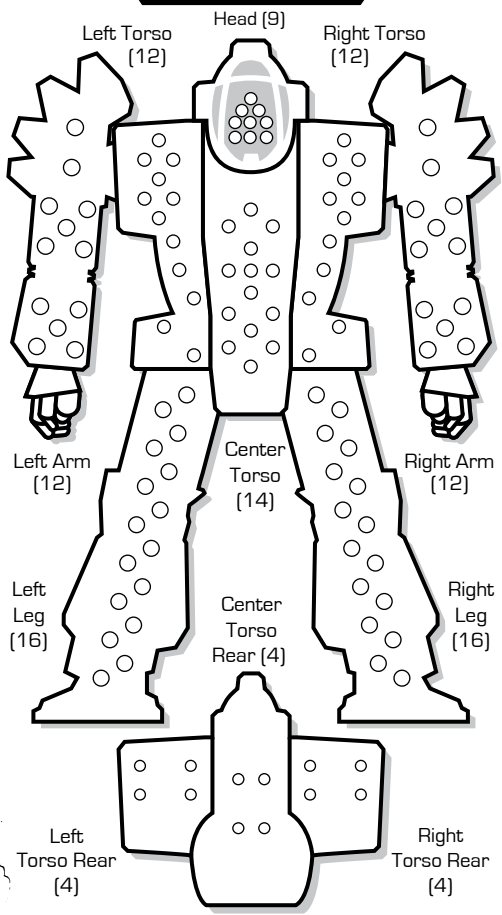
Name: _____

Gunnery Skill: ___ **Piloting Skill:** ___

Hits Taken	1	2	3	4	5	6
Consciousness#	3	5	7	10	11	Dead



ARMOR DIAGRAM



CRITICAL HIT TABLE

Left Arm
1. Shoulder
2. Upper Arm Actuator
3. Lower Arm Actuator
4. Hand
5. Ferro-Fibrous
6. Ferro-Fibrous

1-3

1. Ferro-Fibrous
2. Roll Again
3. Roll Again
4. Roll Again
5. Roll Again
6. Roll Again

4-6

Left Torso
1. XL Engine
2. XL Engine
3. Double Heat Sink
4. Double Heat Sink
5. Jump Jet
6. Jump Jet

1-3

1. Jump Jet
2. ER PPC
3. ER PPC
4. Roll Again
5. Roll Again
6. Roll Again

4-6

Left Leg
1. Hip
2. Upper Leg Actuator
3. Lower Leg Actuator
4. Foot Actuator
5. Ferro-Fibrous
6. Ferro-Fibrous

Head
1. Life Support
2. Sensors
3. Cockpit
4. Roll Again
5. Sensors
6. Life Support

Center Torso
1. XL Engine
2. XL Engine
3. XL Engine
4. Gyro
5. Gyro
6. Gyro

1-3

1. Gyro
2. XL Engine
3. XL Engine
4. XL Engine
5. Roll Again
6. Roll Again

4-6

Engine Hits ○○○
Gyro Hits ○○
Sensor Hits ○○
Life Support ○

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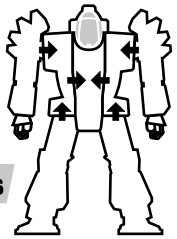


Damage Transfer Diagram

Right Arm
1. Shoulder
2. Upper Arm Actuator
3. Lower Arm Actuator
4. Hand
5. Double Heat Sink
6. Double Heat Sink

1-3

1. Double Heat Sink
2. Double Heat Sink
3. Double Heat Sink
4. Double Heat Sink
5. ER Medium Laser
6. ER Medium Laser

4-6

Right Torso
1. XL Engine
2. XL Engine
3. Double Heat Sink
4. Double Heat Sink
5. Double Heat Sink
6. Double Heat Sink

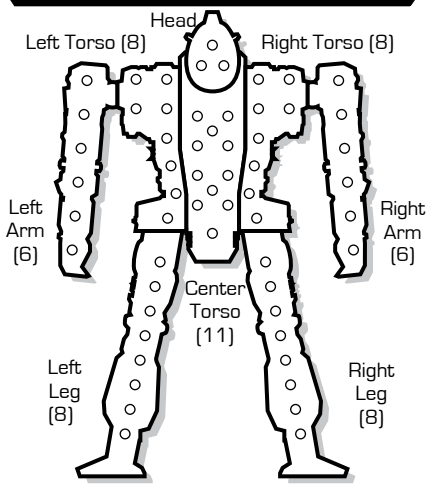
1-3

1. Jump Jet
2. Jump Jet
3. Jump Jet
4. Roll Again
5. Roll Again
6. Roll Again

4-6

Right Leg
1. Hip
2. Upper Leg Actuator
3. Lower Leg Actuator
4. Foot Actuator
5. Ferro-Fibrous
6. Ferro-Fibrous

INTERNAL STRUCTURE DIAGRAM



HEAT DATA

Heat Level*	Effects	Heat Sinks: 14 (28) Double
30	Shutdown	
28	Ammo Exp. avoid on 8+	
26	Shutdown, avoid on 10+	○○
25	−5 Movement Points	○○
24	+4 Modifier to Fire	○○
23	Ammo Exp. avoid on 6+	○○
22	Shutdown, avoid on 8+	○
20	−4 Movement Points	○
19	Ammo Exp. avoid on 4+	○
18	Shutdown, avoid on 6+	○
17	+3 Modifier to Fire	○
15	−3 Movement Points	○
14	Shutdown, avoid on 4+	○
13	+2 Modifier to Fire	
10	−2 Movement Points	
8	+1 Modifier to Fire	
5	−1 Movement Points	

Heat Scale

Overflow
30*
29
28*
27
26*
25*
24*
23*
22*
21
20*
19*
18*
17*
16
15*
14*
13*
12
11
10*
9
8*
7
6
5*
4
3
2
1
0

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CLASSIC BATTLETECH™

SPHEROID DROPSHIP RECORD SHEET

DROPSHIP DATA

Type: MULE (POCKET WARSHIP)

Name: _____ **Tonnage:** 11,200

Thrust: **Tech Base:** Inner Sphere 3068

Safe Thrust: 3

Maximum Thrust: 5

Fighters/Small Craft: 6/0 **Launch Rate:** 4/Turn

Weapons & Equipment Inventory

Capital Scale

Bay	Loc	Heat	SRV (1–12)	MRV (13–24)	LRV (25–40)	ERV (41–50)
4 AR10	FL/FR	80	*	*	*	*

Standard Scale

Bay	Loc	Heat	SRV (1–6)	MRV (6–12)	LRV (13–20)	ERV (21–25)
1 Autocannon/5	Nose	1	1(5)	1(5)	–	–
1 Medium Laser	Nose	3	1(5)	–	–	–
2 Small Laser	Nose	2	Point Defense			
1 SRM 6	FL/FR	4	1(8)	–	–	–
2 Medium Laser	FL/FR	6	1(10)	–	–	–
1 Large Laser	AL/AR	11	1(13)	1(8)	–	–
1 Medium Laser						
1 Large Laser	Aft	11	1(13)	1(8)	–	–
1 Medium Laser						

Cargo: Bay 1: Cargo (409 Tons, 1 door)
Bay 2: Fighters (6) (2 doors)

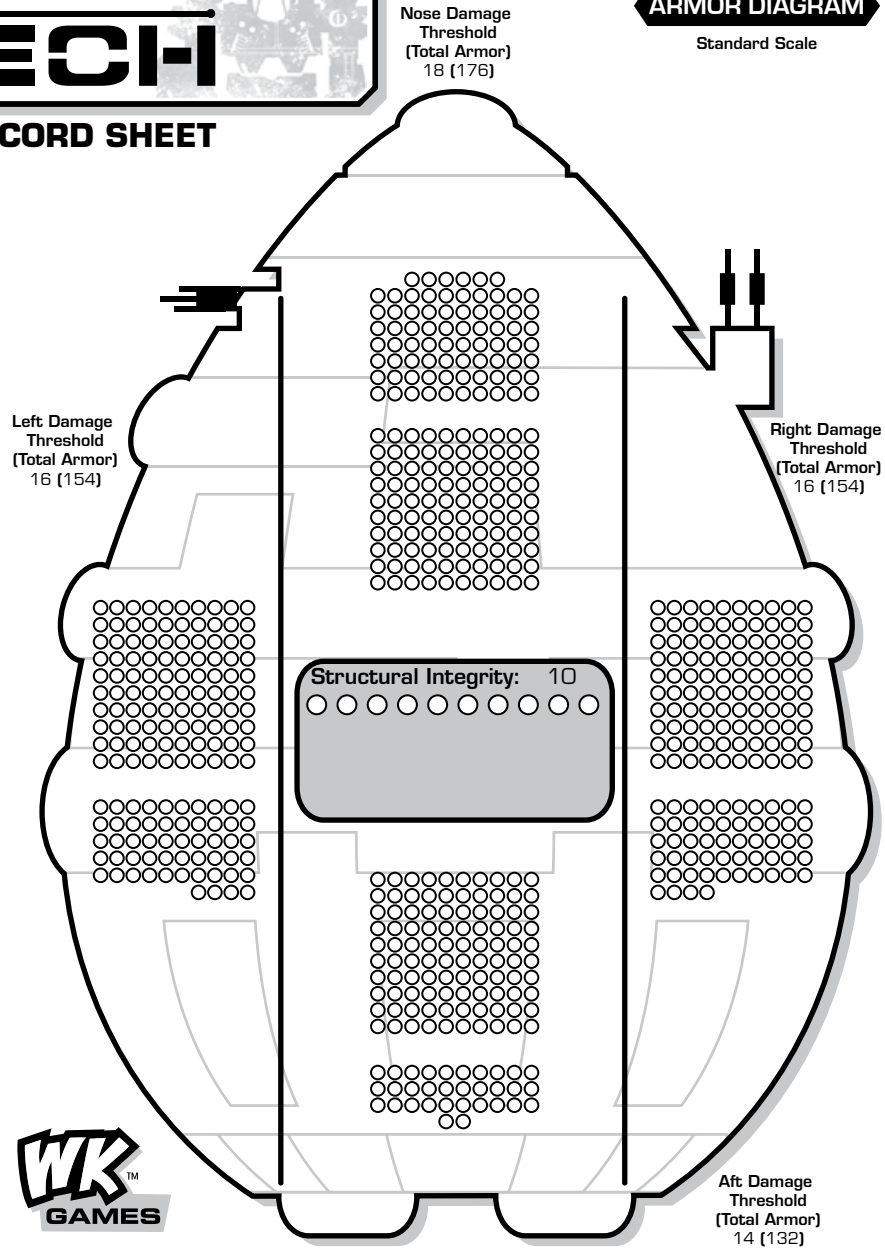
Ammo: SRM 6 (30) AC/5 (40)

AR10 Missiles : 40 Killer Whale, * AV=4
40 White Shark, *AV=3
40 Barracuda, *AV=2

Cost: 296,676,128 **BV:** XX,XXX

ARMOR DIAGRAM

Standard Scale



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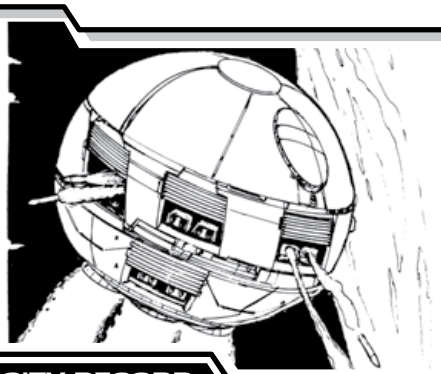

CREW DATA

Gunnery Skill: ___ **Piloting Skill:** ___

Hits Taken	1	2	3	4	5	6
Modifier	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5	Incp.

Crew:	17	Marines:	0
Passengers:	0	Elementals:	0
Other:	12	Battle Armor:	0

Life Boats/Escape Pods: 2 / 2

CRITICAL DAMAGE

Avionics	+1	+2	+5	Gear	+5	
FCS	+2	+4	D	Life Support	+2	
Sensors	+1	+2	+5	K-F Boom	D	
Thrusters				Docking Collar	D	
Left	+1	+2	+3	D		
Right	+1	+2	+3	D		
Engine	–1	–2	–3	–4	–5	D

VELOCITY RECORD

Turn #	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Thrust										
Velocity										
Effective Velocity										
Altitude										

Turn #	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
Thrust										
Velocity										
Effective Velocity										
Altitude										

HEAT DATA

Heat Sinks: 160 (320) Double

Heat Generation Per Arc

Nose:	6	Aft:	11
Fore-Left:	90	Aft-Left:	11
Fore-Right:	90	Aft-Right:	11

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CLASSIC BATTLETECH™

SPHEROID DROPSHIP RECORD SHEET

DROPSHIP DATA

Type: EXCALIBUR (POCKET WARSHIP)

Name: _____ **Tonnage:** 16,000

Thrust: **Tech Base:** Inner Sphere

Safe Thrust: 3 3059

Maximum Thrust: 5

Fighters/Small Craft: 6/0 **Launch Rate:** 4/Turn

Weapons & Equipment Inventory

Capital Scale

Bay	Loc	Heat	SRV (1–12)	MRV (13–24)	LRV (25–40)	ERV (41–50)
2 Kraken-T	Nose	100	20	20	20	20
2 AR10	FL/FR	40	*	*	*	*
1 Screen Launcher	FL/FR	10	—	—	—	—
2 AR10	AL/AR	40	*	*	*	*
1 Screen Launcher	Aft	10	—	—	—	—

Standard Scale

Bay	Loc	Heat	SRV (1–6)	MRV (6–12)	LRV (13–20)	ERV (21–25)
1 Gauss Rifle	Nose	1	2(15)	2(15)	2(15)	—
1 LRM 10+Artemis IV	Nose	4	1(8)	1(8)	1(8)	—
1 ER Medium Laser	Nose	5	1(5)	1(5)	—	—
3 AMS	Nose	3		Point Defense		
1 ER PPC	FL/FR	15	1(10)	1(10)	1(10)	—
2 LRM 10+Artemis IV	FL/FR	8	2(16)	2(16)	2(16)	—
2 ER Medium Laser	FL/FR	10	1(10)	1(10)	—	—
3 AMS	FL/FR	3		Point Defense		
1 ER Large Laser	AL/AR	22	2(18)	2(18)	1(8)	—
2 ER Medium Laser						
3 AMS	AL/AR	3		Point Defense		
1 ER Large Laser	Aft	22	2(18)	2(18)	1(8)	—
2 ER Medium Laser						
3 AMS	Aft	3		Point Defense		

Cargo: Bay 1: Cargo (420 Tons, 1 door)
Bay 2: Fighters (6) (2 doors)

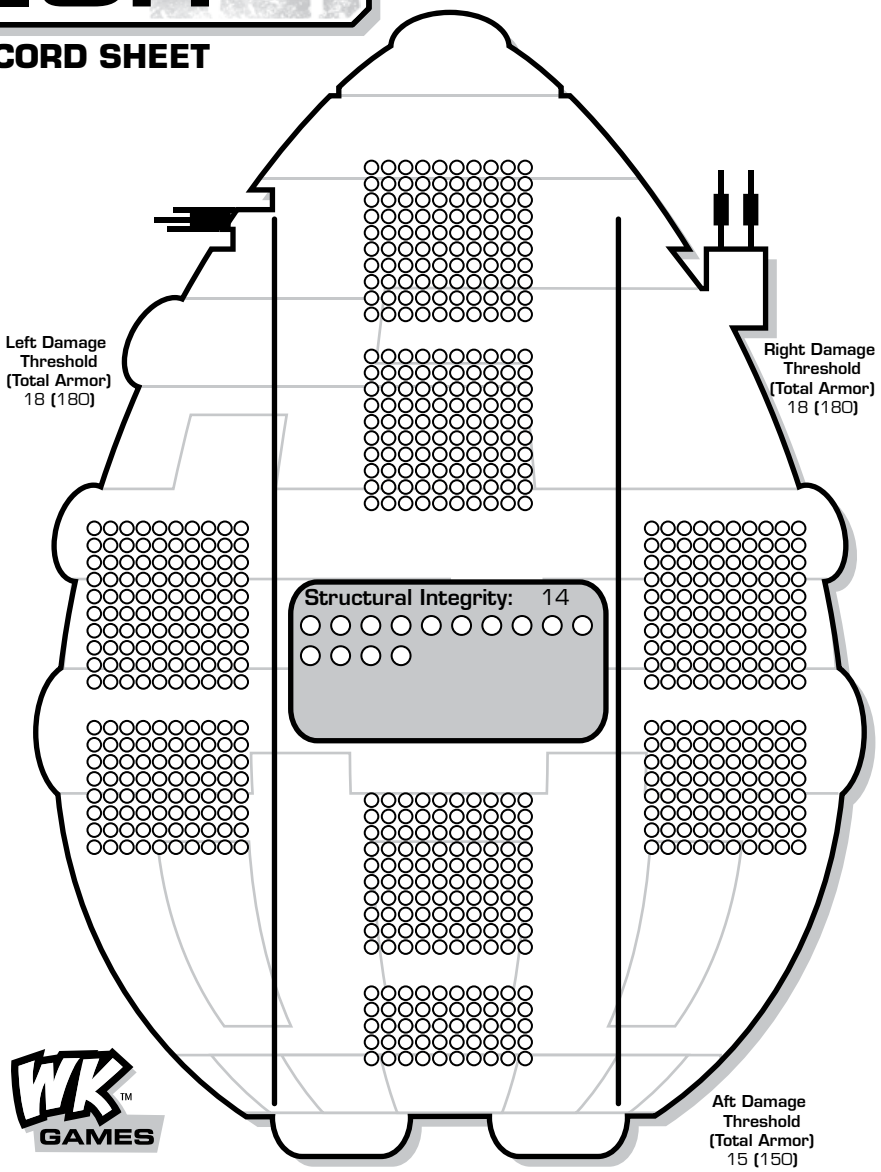
Ammo: Screen (60) AMS (432)
LRM (72) Gauss (32) Kraken-T (20)

AR10 Missiles : 40 Killer Whale, * AV=4
40 White Shark, *AV=3
40 Barracuda, *AV=2

Cost: 572,017,600 **BV:** XX,XXX

ARMOR DIAGRAM

Standard Scale



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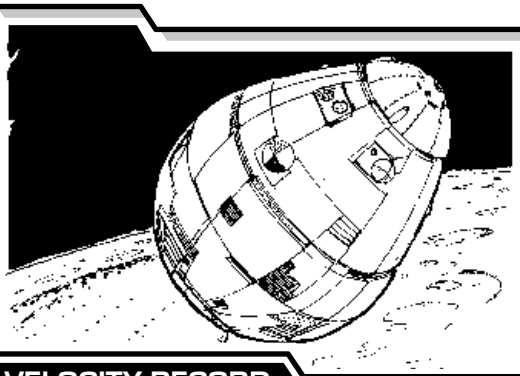

CREW DATA

Gunnery Skill: ___ **Piloting Skill:** ___

Hits Taken	1	2	3	4	5	6
Modifier	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5	Incp.

Crew:	50	Marines:	28
Passengers:	0	Elementals:	0
Other:	12	Battle Armor:	0

Life Boats/Escape Pods: 4 / 25

CRITICAL DAMAGE

Avionics	+1	+2	+5	Gear	+5	
FCS	+2	+4	D	Life Support	+2	
Sensors	+1	+2	+5	K-F Boom	D	
Thrusters				Docking Collar	D	
Left	+1	+2	+3	D		
Right	+1	+2	+3	D		
Engine	−1	−2	−3	−4	−5	D

VELOCITY RECORD

Turn #	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Thrust										
Velocity										
Effective Velocity										
Altitude										

Turn #	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
Thrust										
Velocity										
Effective Velocity										
Altitude										

HEAT DATA

Heat Sinks: 445 Single

Heat Generation Per Arc

Nose:	113	Aft:	30
Fore-Left:	86	Aft-Left:	65
Fore-Right:	86	Aft-Right:	65

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CLASSIC BATTLETECH™

WARSHIP RECORD SHEET

WARSHIP DATA

Type: THARKAD (BATTLECRUISER)

Name: _____ **Tonnage:** 900,000

Thrust: **Tech Base:** Inner Sphere

Safe Thrust: 3 3059

Maximum Thrust: 5

DropShip Capacity: 6

Fighters/Small Craft: 36/8 **Launch Rate:** 16/Turn

Weapons & Equipment Inventory

Capital Scale

Bay	Loc	Heat	(1-12) SRV	(13-24) MRV	(25-40) LRV	(41-50) ERV
3 NL55	Nose	255	17	17	17	17
3 Medium NPPC	Nose	405	27	27	27	27
2 NAC/25	Nose	170	50	50	50	–
6 Killer Whale	Nose	120	24	24	24	24
3 Medium NPPC	FL/FR	405	27	27	27	27
2 NAC/25	FL/FR	170	50	50	50	–
2 Heavy N-Gauss	FL/FR	36	60	60	60	60
4 NL55	L/RBS	340	22	22	22	22
3 Heavy NPPC	L/RBS	675	45	45	45	45
2 NAC/35	L/RBS	240	70	70	–	–
2 NL35	AL/AR	104	7	7	7	–
3 Medium NPPC	AL/AR	405	27	27	27	27
2 NAC/20	AL/AR	120	40	40	40	–
4 NL45	Aft	280	18	18	18	18
2 Heavy NPPC	Aft	450	30	30	30	30
2 NAC/20	Aft	120	40	40	40	–

Standard Scale

Bay	Loc	Heat	(1-6) SRV	(7-12) MRV	(13-20) LRV	(21-25) ERV
3 Large Laser 6 Medium Laser	Nose	42	5(54)	2(24)	–	–
4 LRM 20 6 LRM 10	L/RBS	48	8(84)	8(84)	8(84)	–
4 Large Laser 8 Medium Laser	L/RBS	56	7(72)	3(32)	–	–
5 LRM 20 3 LRM 10	AL/AR	42	8(78)	8(78)	8(78)	–
3 Large Laser 6 Medium Laser Lithium Fusion Battery	AL/AR	42	5(54)	2(24)	–	–

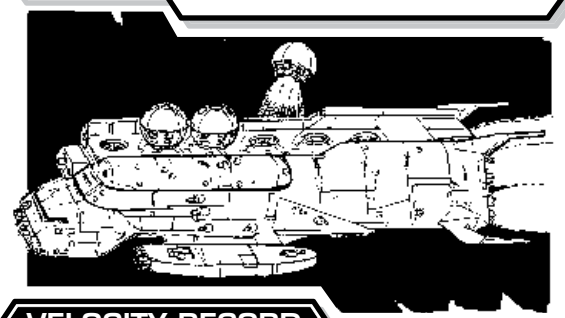
Grav Decks: Grav Deck #1 - 2 (95-meter diameter)

Cargo: Bay 1: Fighters (36) (6 doors)
Bay 2: Small Craft (8) (2 doors)
Bay 3: Cargo (44,914.5 Tons, 1 door)

Ammo:

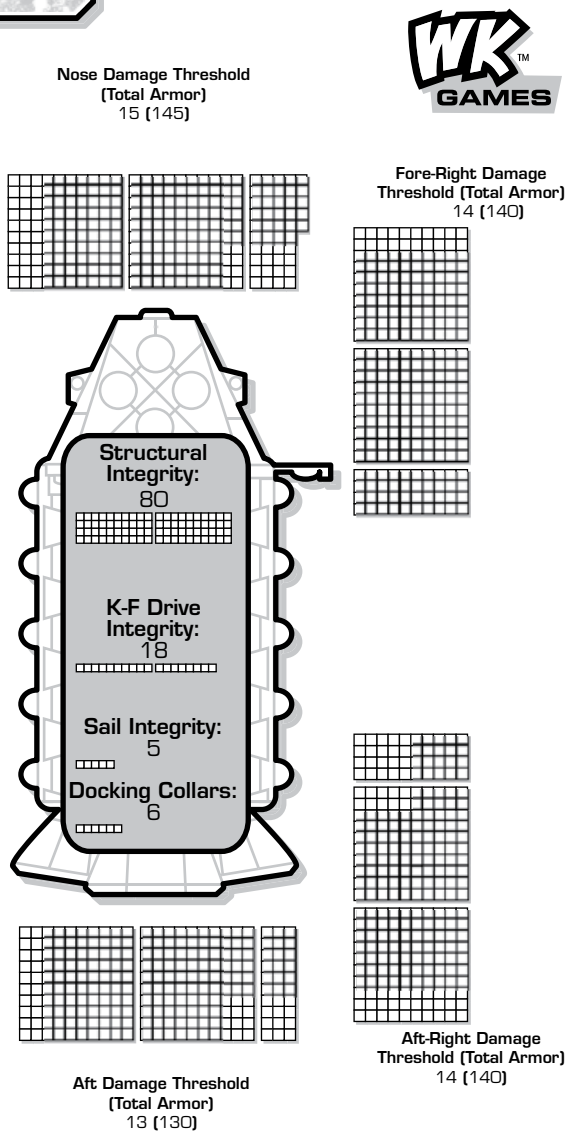
LRM 20 (360)	NAC/20 (90)	LRM 10 (360)
Hvy. N-Gauss (80)	NAC/30 (92)	NAC/35 (80)
	Killer Whale (60)	NAC/25 (138)

Cost: 20,341,685,416 **BV:** XXX,XXX,XXX,XXX



ARMOR DIAGRAM

Capital Scale



CREW DATA

Gunnery Skill: ____ **Piloting Skill:** ____

Hits Taken	1	2	3	4	5	6
Modifier	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5	Incp.

Crew:	362	**Marines:**	0
Passengers:	0	**Elementals:**	0
Other:	112	**Battle Armor:**	0

Life Boats/Escape Pods: 35/30

CRITICAL DAMAGE

Avionics	+1	+2	+5	Life Support	+2	
CIC	+2	+4	D			
Sensors	+1	+2	+5			
Thrusters						
Left	+1	+2	+3	D		
Right	+1	+2	+3	D		
Engine	–1	–2	–3	–4	–5	D

VELOCITY RECORD

Turn #	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Thrust										
Velocity										
Effective Velocity										
Altitude										

Turn #	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
Thrust										
Velocity										
Effective Velocity										
Altitude										

HEAT DATA

Heat Sinks: 7,000 Single

Heat Generation Per Arc

Nose:	992	**Aft:**	850
Left:		**Right:**	
Fwd:	611	**Fwd:**	611
Broadside:	1,559	**Broadside:**	1,559
Aft:	713	**Aft:**	713

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