

**BATTLECORPS**

# **CASE WHITE: TO SERVE AND PROTECT**

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**BATTLECORPS**

*"The Voice of Terra interrupts your regular programming to bring you this important news bulletin from TerraSec C-and-C in Geneva: At approximately 1500 hours TST, hostile forces bearing the insignia of ComStar reportedly entered Terran airspace on multiple attack vectors and have engaged the planetary space defense network. At this hour, it has been confirmed that DropShips have entered Terran atmosphere in multiple areas.*

*"Precentor TerraSec David Alsace has declared a state of emergency throughout the following provinces: [In Europe]: Bavaria, Latvia, Normandy; [In North America] Coahulia, Tex-Austin, Tex-Peco. All civilians in these areas and all neighboring provinces are advised to proceed to the nearest shelters in a calm and orderly fashion. Do not bring personal effects beyond necessary medications. Police units are already on scene to assist in evacuations.*

*"Be advised that TerraSec Special Security units and local Word of Blake Militia have scrambled to these regions as well. Civilians are advised to not impede these forces, who are deploying for our collective defense.*

*"Repeating: The Voice of Terra interrupts your regular programming ... "*

**Near Carentan  
Normandy, Terra  
Word of Blake Protectorate  
14 March 3068**

Tearing across a landscape already scarred by countless lasers and gouged by the running feet of multi-ton metal warriors, the bone-white *Raijin* looked for all the world like a giant, armored headless chicken.

But this bird bristled with weapons—weapons that even now swung about to unleash manmade lightning and a trio of scarlet energy darts at its target. Less than one hundred and fifty meters downrange, an Irian Technologies ITW-80 *Inquisitor* suffered the particle cannon blast in mid-stride. The bolt of hellish energy slashed a deep gash across the SecurityMech's blue-and-white paneled torso, while the *Raijin*'s three medium pulse lasers seared even more armored flesh from its upper body, vaporizing more than one ton of armor in less than an eyeblink. The thirty-five-ton SecurityMech staggered, nearly overwhelmed, but miraculously remained upright.

Lumbering forward, the *Inquisitor* raised its right arm menacingly, but even as its twin machine guns revved up to fire, a deafening roar announced a powerful burst of autocannon fire unleashed from off to the SecurityMech's right flank. Bursting from a hedge-row, the ComStar *Champion* followed up its blistering assault with a pair of ruby bolts from its Magna Mk II medium lasers, scoring deep into the hide of the battered TerraSec machine.

Barely built well enough to withstand confrontation with even a single BattleMech—let alone two—the *Inquisitor* shuddered as an explosion blew its right-side SRM rack clean off its mount. The gout of golden fire that followed threw the machine onto its left side like an unwanted rag doll. Wracked with explosions and spewing fire and smoke, the TerraSec machine—and the warrior inside—died in a heartbeat, blackening the earth.

Almost a kilometer away, TS3 Sergeant Alec Lancey winced at the piercing scream in his neurohelmet.

“Mech down! ‘Mech down!” a voice exclaimed. “Son of a bitch, Sarge! That was—!”

“I know, Driscoll! I know!” Lancey snapped into his microphone as he fought the controls of his lurching KTO-19 *Kintaro*. The ma-

chine's fifty-five-ton bulk pitched violently, threatening to skate out of control as he took another corner at more than eighty kilometers per hour ...

Hot on the trail of a white *Beowulf*.

"Goddamn it, Sarge!" Driscoll said, panicked outrage bleeding through the static. "They're creaming us! We've lost both the *Inquisitors* and these guys aren't even dented! We've got to fall back!"

*No shit, Jerry!* Lancey thought, grinding his teeth. He forced his ancient BattleMech to an earth-pounding run, eyes focused on the tracking reticle that even now wavered over the *Beowulf*'s fleeing, goat-legged form.

On the sensor map, the invader glowed red hot as it wove its way through the cramped residences of Carentan, shattering roads and crushing parked cars in a determined race toward a gathering of five more red icons less than half a kilometer ahead. Facing *them*—nearly six hundred meters from Lancey and his quarry—there were now only three blue icons.

All that remained of the elite Special Security forces assigned to TerraSec District FR-40.

"Hang back, Jerry," Lancey growled into the mic as he jerked his crosshairs over the *Beowulf*. Training told him to wait for the crosshairs to flash gold before he fired, but the seconds were ticking by too quickly. Six Com Guard 'Mechs against his squad's motley collection of armored vehicles and outdated BattleMechs wasn't a contest.

It was a slaughter.

These Com Guard bastards had already trashed District FR-30's command at Cherbourg, and now they were in Carentan, doing the same to *his* men. Lancey sucked in a breath, held it, and thumbed the trigger.

Storming across the cracked pavement at a run, his *Kintaro* spat twin beams of crimson from its right arm Magnas—

And missed.

The target kept running, as if he wasn't even there.

*What the hell am I doing here?* Lancey wondered...

**L'Chat Bleu Lounge**  
**Le Mans, Terra**  
**Word of Blake Protectorate**  
**11 January 3068**

Still grinning from the noisy reception, Officer Alec Lancey shook his head as he took in the crowd surrounding him at the L'Chat Bleu Lounge. The self-described home away from home for the off duty members of Precinct 111FR was crowded with bodies tonight, basking in the low-intensity glow of fluorescents and projections from holovid sets anchored to the ceiling corners. A haze of gray cigar and cigarette smoke lingered overhead, filling the room with an acrid bouquet that Lancey thought he'd never forget.

Looking up, Lancey could hardly stifle a laugh as he noticed the banner and did a double take. There, in the center—smack in the middle of the capital “O” in the words “Congratulations, Officer Lancey!”—was the crude silhouette of a BattleMech.

“Cute!” he said to the brunette beside him.

“Thanks!” Officer Celestra replied, her brown eyes dancing. “I drew it myself!”

“Hey, ‘Mech jock!” someone shouted from the bar. “You’re outta uniform!”

Instinctively, Lancey looked down, and scanned the familiar navy blue fatigues and badge of office that came with his job—the uniform of a TerraSec Civilian Sector patrolman. Arching an eyebrow, he looked to Celestra, just in time to see her forcing her way through the crowd and up to the bar. A row of men and women—most in their off-duty “civvies”—greeted her as she barked an order at the balding man behind the bar.

“C’mon, now, Hastings!” she shouted toward the voice. “We’ve all already seen Lance in his underwear!”

The roar of laughter was nearly deafening.

Lancey laughed with them.

Officer Brandon Hastings, a lanky man equal to Lancey in both his 185-centimeter height and twenty-four years of age, broke ranks with the barflies and rose from his stool. Dressed in simple blue denim jeans and a baggy gray shirt—rather than his usual bulky

TerraSec fatigues and gear—he looked practically naked himself. Reaching out, he shook Lancey's hand as Celestra returned with two foaming glasses.

"Congrats, you hound," Hastings said. "Looks like you made it."

"Thanks, Brand," Lancey said. "Still couldn't believe it when the chief gave me the word."

"I'll say," Celestra added, motioning to a table that cleared before them with little more prompting than the batting of her eyelashes. "He froze so long in the chief's office, we all figured he'd had a stroke."

Hastings shook his head and chuckled. "That figures, Lance," he said. "Why'd you go for the position if you didn't think you had a shot?"

"Blake's Blood, Brand," someone else piped up from behind them in a gravelly voice wrecked by years of too much tobacco and screaming at cadets. "You have to ask that, you'll never make sergeant in this outfit!"

Lancey caught Celestra's eye-roll as he took the glass from her. As he sipped the lager, he felt his stomach churn at the sound of Lieutenant James Roget's disdainful tone.

"Hey there, Officer Lancey," Roget drawled. "Mind if I join you kids?"

Lancey turned and looked at the lieutenant. The dark man was only edging past forty-five, but looked ten years older. His short, curling hair thinned around his scalp and grayed at his temples, while the wrinkles of his leathery skin and the sag of his cheeks made him look perpetually tired.

But his gaze was intense and now fixed on Lancey, dark pools of oblivion staring into the deep blue of Lancey's own eyes. His question hung in the air for just one more awkward moment.

"Why not, Lieutenant?" Lancey finally said. "We're all family here."

Roget managed something close to a smile—Lancey reckoned it as more of a sneer—and claimed one of the four metal chairs surrounding their cluttered table. A waitress, winding her way through the noisy mob, cleared away the bottles and glasses left by the table's previous occupants as the older officer launched into his speech.

"You got your big break today, Lance," Roget grumbled, and Lancey caught an unmistakable smell that reminded him of a German brewery he once visited. "MechWarrior training. Prestige job. Hope you're up on your scriptures."

"Scriptures?" Lancey asked, over the brim of his glass.

Roget nodded. "Blakie Scriptures, of course," he said. "You know the Word don't like it if you start up your 'Mech without quotin' one. I hear they score extra points for finding something truly obscure and meaningful."

Celeste groaned and Hastings scoffed, and Lancey chewed on his bottom lip for a second.

"Jesus, El-Tee—" Celeste began.

"Nope," Roget cut her off. "None of them include that name."

"Last I checked, Roget"—Lancey reveled in the fact that the transfer meant he didn't need to stick with the pleasantries of titles—"I was accepted to TS3, not the Word Militia."

"Think so, eh?" said the lieutenant. "You really think MechWarrior service is a cushy gig the Blakies threw us out of the goodness of their own white-robed hearts? Huh? Seriously, Lancey. First it was this 'Precentor TerraSec' business, and now we got 'TerraSec Special Security'? Anybody here remember that ComStar never felt it necessary to impose their rank structures on us, or for SWAT forces to pilot BattleMechs to preserve the peace?"

"So?" Hastings asked, thin fingers spinning his glass around on the table. "Seems to me that ComStar never trusted TS or the BTA to handle its business without sending someone along to watch. Allowing Geneva a little more latitude's hardly subversive."

"The motto's 'Serve and Protect', Hastings," Roget snapped without taking his eyes off Lancey. "BattleMechs don't do either very well. Seen the DE-85 District's force? Two *Atlases* and a *Thug*, with a pair of *Manticores* and one of those Leaguer *Inquisitors*. A neat, six-unit team there. They say its goal is protection of the Krupp Works. Against what, exactly? What threat does TS need *military* hardware to handle? Expecting a wave of riots across Europe?"

"Cops on other worlds in the Sphere have milspec units on the roster, El-Tee," Celeste noted mildly.

"This is *Terra*, Officer!" Roget practically exploded. He stabbed a finger at Lancey. "Mark my words: Your partner here—like all the other TS3s out there—may have sold his soul to more than just some brainchild of our newly appointed Precentor TerraSec. This is a military force, being raised all over the globe. Meanwhile, the newsvids we keep getting from Voice of Truth are talking about a war out there—*everywhere* out there."

Roget's eyes found and locked onto Lancey's again, alive with outrage as his words tumbled out in a frenzy.

"Word's scared, kids," he said. "Scared bad. You can look down your nose at me all you like, Lancey, but I look out for the family, too. The Blakies are prepping you for the front line, and they're expecting that front line to come *here*. With only a few 'Mechs a pop, there's only one thing you can expect to happen when *that* comes to pass . . . ."

## Near Carentan

### 14 March 3068

Another blue icon blinked out of existence as the *Beowulf* leapt into the sky ahead of Lancey's *Kintaro*. An unintelligible shriek came over his neurohelmet speakers, followed by a stream of sobbing French. Lancey could barely identify the voice as that of Officer Keri Deleure, commander of the team's missile support unit, a venerable *Quickdraw*.

"Eject, Keri!" Driscoll cut in. "*Eject!*"

Lancey forced the *Kintaro* around another corner, and felt a moment's drag when the BattleMech's jutting left hip clipped—and promptly shattered—a street lamp. Though the snag was hardly more of an obstacle to the lumbering metal titan than a low-hanging tree branch, the combination of the unexpected nudge and the smoothness of the ferroconcrete threatened to send him into an uncontrolled skid.

Lancey bit down on his lip hard, tasted blood.

Cars were screaming past, braving the lumbering BattleMechs that had drifted into the city proper in an effort to escape the expected carnage. Lancey spared a moment to wonder why these civvies ignored the calls to get to shelters.

In his speakers, Deleure was still wailing, a sound that chilled Lancey's blood as he remembered the iron-willed officer from Precinct 508FR.

*God, why hasn't she ejected?*

"Driscoll!" Lancey snarled. "Talk to me!"

"Sarge! Officer Deleure is down. Took a hit square to the cockpit from a—oh, sweet Jesus!"

The external speakers picked up the sound of weapons fire. Over the centuries-old rooftops of Carentan's northern residential district, he could see the rising columns of smoke. And that was when he saw the orange fireball.

"Son of a bitch, *no!*" Lancey cursed, loud enough to activate his microphone. Swallowing hard and trying not to blink, he took another glance at the sensor board and found the image was blurred. *ECM! Shit!*

“Fall back, Driscoll!” he finally croaked, hoping his words would somehow penetrate the interference. “I’m coming up on your nine! We’ll regroup at the Grande-Niner!”

“Hurry up, Sarge!” Driscoll shouted out, his voice nearly lost to the static.



## Lafayette Training Center Paris, Terra 20 February 3068

"I tell you, guys. It's all gone to Hell in a handbasket out there," Officer Jericho Driscoll said. Despite the wad of powdered eggs he'd just stuffed in his mouth, his voice was clear. He swallowed quickly, greasy fingers snatching another rubbery length of bacon from the platter in front of him, all the while sweeping his hazel-eyed gaze back and forth between Lancey and Deleure.

Whether he had any idea that Deleure was busy brushing her hand along Lancey's exposed thigh beneath the cafeteria table was anyone's guess, but Lancey managed to betray no sign of her activities.

Nor did the well-tanned brunette. She even managed to snatch a sausage from her own platter with her free hand while meeting Driscoll's look head-on.

"You aren't kidding," she answered. Her husky French accent reminded Lancey of Celestra on a bad day. "Sounds like that Dow guy means business."

"What do you think, Sarge?" she added, turning to Lancey without warning as she popped the sausage into her mouth and gave him a subtle wink.

Lancey rolled his eyes and shook his head, hoping the act would somehow conceal the flush of his cheeks as he caught a glimpse of cleavage above Deleure's cooling vest. Tearing his eyes away to meet Driscoll's, he scoffed.

"Maybe," he muttered, "but remember that we're dealing with guys who declared a 'holy war' on the Word. Dow was probably just spewing rhetoric. The Voice likes to emphasize stuff like that, after all."

Driscoll looked annoyed and pointed his bacon at Lancey. "Hell, Sarge, of course it's propaganda, but you saw the vids of those reinforcements that came in a few weeks back. Black 'Mechs, guys who look like they just stepped out of a cyber-zombie vid? Where'd they come from?"

Lancey reached down as casually as he could and seized Deleure's hand before it traveled any farther north on his lap than it had

come already. With a lopsided smirk, he used his free hand to lift his mug, half-full of cooling coffee. "Who knows? The Sphere's always been screwed up, yet nobody other than the Word themselves managed to make a serious grab here. And they kept the fight to themselves."

Giving Deleure's hand a squeeze, Lancey took a sip of bitter coffee and briefly scanned the rest of the nearly deserted cafeteria before returning his eyes to Driscoll's. "No matter what Dow says," he added, "if the Commies really thought they could sweep aside the Word, they'd have done it back in '58, right? If I were you, Jerry, I'd be more worried about our gunnery review tomorrow."

Driscoll wasn't so easily dismissed. "Sarge," he said, "I don't think you're seeing the big picture here. Those reinforcements look like a pretty extreme set up. That's some heavy and expensive firepower to be shipped here if the Word isn't expecting trouble. And this training program we're in could well be the result of someone high up playing the long game."

"So what are you trying to say, Jerry?" Deleure asked, impatience marking her voice.

Driscoll hesitated, shook his head.

"I don't know," he finally admitted. "But part of me is screaming that this'll turn ugly right soon, and if the fur starts to fly here, we're gonna be in it... And if *that* happens, you two are going to have to start worrying about a little bit more than your personal boundary issues."

## Carentan (Northern Outskirts) 14 March 3068

The Grande-9 was a newer interstate highway, established by the Word in the early 3060s to accommodate heavy vehicle and 'Mech traffic. Sound barriers on both sides rose fifteen meters, backed with imported New Earth oak for better visual appeal. But just outside the city, it was an open stretch of pavement that made for the easiest rallying point Lancey could think of.

As he closed on the site, sensors blinded by ECM, he felt his heart sink. Cars were jamming up the freeway—more civilians who didn't heed the warnings to go to the designated shelters.

And they all had ringside seats to the carnage.

Driscoll's *Crab* bled smoke from several gaping rents in its armor, and was limping under the combined laser fire of at least three Com Guard 'Mechs. Three other invaders, including the *Beowulf* Lancey had chased earlier, were now dueling with his team's *Chevalier* near a hedgerow.

Just as Lancey got his own *Kintaro* clear of the battle-damaged houses at the city outskirts, he saw a squat *Raijin* thunder across the field, bearing straight down on the line of cars between him and the others.

"Mother of God," Lancey muttered as he watched one panicked driver in a white Macadam swerve away from the line, the vehicle fishtailing as it tried to turn around and race back toward the city.

The *Raijin* whirled about, weapons suddenly tracking the Macadam as if startled by its action.

Roget's words filtered into Lancey's mind, unbidden: "*The motto is 'To Serve and Protect', and BattleMechs don't do either ...*"

"*No!*" he screamed.

Twisting his *Kintaro* around hard, he drew a bead on the *Raijin* and pushed his machine into a run straight toward it. At eighty-six kilometers per hour, his BattleMech's legs punished the earth, crossing dozens of meters with each powerful stride.

Halfway to his target, he lit his jump jets, an action he hadn't tried since simulator training months ago. At the apex of his jump, Lancey felt the first shots of enemy fire as a *Champion* and the

*Beowulf* turned away from Driscoll's limping 'Mech to engage him. Autocannon shells from the *Champion* raked his *Kintaro*'s torso while emerald darts from the *Beowulf*'s large pulse laser scoured his leg. The combined fire punished Lancey's machine, but he kept his eyes focused on the *Raijin* below.

And that was when the missiles hit.

In the cacophony of fire, Lancey lost all sense of position and felt himself falling, the *Kintaro* thrown into a wild tumble. He squeezed his eyes shut for only a moment, but in that moment felt the jarring impact of more than fifty tons of metal slamming into something metal with the sound of an ear-splitting screech.



Dazed, Lancey fought his controls, propping his wounded *Kintaro* on its arms just in time to see Driscoll's *Crab* sag to the earth. So punished that its blue and white armor now looked like a nightmare camouflage of scorched grays and blacks, the BattleMech's cockpit module exploded outward, freeing its pilot moments before the machine slammed into the ground and died.

Lancey shook his head, spat out a gob of blood and a tooth. He blinked at the sight of four Com Guard BattleMechs converging on him. Two others—his target *Raijin* and a *Battle Hawk*—now hounded his remaining TerraSec Chevalier a short distance away.

Lancey blinked. The *Raijin* looked undamaged.

*I missed it?*

Lancey's eyes tracked left and found it again: the civilian car, smashed and forgotten amid the fiery battle.

*"Ah, Sweet Jesus, no ... "* he whispered.

He dialed up the magnification and saw a woman's body crumpled in her seat, awash with blood.

Another body, tiny, unmistakably female, lay beside the wreck, her body thrown from the vehicle when it tumbled.

*"The Word's planning you for the front line, and they're expecting that front line to come here ... and there's only one thing you can expect to happen when that comes to pass ... "*

**BATTLECORPS**

*"Bastards!" Lancey seethed.*

Pulling the BattleMech back to its feet—cautious of the wreckage only a few meters away—he turned his *Kintaro* toward the *Raijin* again. Ignoring the other Com Guards, he thumbed his triggers.

All of them.

The combined fire of two HoverTec SRM-6 racks, a flight of Holly LRM's and a pair of Magna lasers sliced across the distance to batter the Com Guard machine. A wall of eye-searing heat surged across him as his birdlike target shuddered, nearly falling.

*"Commie bastards!"* Lancey shouted this time, his voice echoing hollowly in the cockpit. Despite the heat and a fresh pain shooting up his leg, he lurched his *Kintaro* forward a step, snapping off another paired laser burst as soon as the Magnas came back on line.

Even as the beams hit, four of the Com Guard 'Mechs opened up in response, spearing his battered machine with laser, missile, and autocannon fire that seemed to go on forever.

Somewhere in the midst of the onslaught, Lancey felt the world-ending explosion as his BattleMech died, and his last fleeting thoughts were lost in a blinding white fire.