

CLASSIC

BATTLETECH



JIHAD CONSPIRACIES



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CREDITS

Writing***Found and Lost***

Jason Hardy

Introduction

Herbert A. Beas II

What If?

Herbert A. Beas II

The Hidden

Herbert A. Beas II

Uncle Chandy

David L. McCulloch

The Society

Ben Rome

The Brotherhood of Randis

Ken' Horner

Mysteries of the Void

Steve Mohan, Jr.

The Ancients

Mike Miller

Cult of the Saints Cameron

David L. McCulloch

The Saurimat

Andreas Zuber

Interconnectedness Unlimited

Andreas Zuber

Minor Groups***Devlin Stone***

Jason Hardy

Thuggees

Warner Doles

The Tanites

Christoffer "Bones" Trossen

Game Rules

Herbert A. Beas II

Ken' Horner

David L. McCulloch

Steve Mohan, Jr.

Mike Miller

Ben Rome

Christoffer "Bones" Trossen

Andreas Zuber

Product Development

Herbert A. Beas II

Assistant Development

Randall N. Bills

Product Editing

Diane Piron-Gelman

BattleTech Line Developer

Herbert A. Beas II

Production Staff***Art Direction***

Randall N. Bills

Cover Art

Slawomir Maniak

Cover Design

Adam Jury

Layout

Adam Jury

Matt Heerd

Illustrations

Robert Atkinson

Brad McDevitt

Florian Stitz

Special Thanks

To Randall for entertaining the notion of a second *Interstellar Players* book — now with 100 percent less *Genecaste!* Peter Smith, for bringing "Starling" to life (and being good enough to share him). Warner Doles for the original *Manei Domini* concept (which I continue to ruthlessly exploit). Our esteemed playtester and fact-checker apparatus. The five "Herblets": Tribble, Annie, Oscar, Merlin, and Meggie—now joined by the "Beckielet", Logan. And, as always, one Rebecca "Beckie" J Beas, who has grown ever more patient as I have grown ever more busy.

Playtesters/Fact-Checkers

Joel Agee, Brian "Whytewolf" Alter, Joel "Welshman" Bancroft-Connors, Ron "Steel Hawke" Barter, Rich Cencarik, Brent Dill, Dan Eastwood, John "Worktroll" Haward, Glenn Hopkins, John "Bluesman" Hudson, Michael "Konan" Koning, Alan Kreilick, Edward "TenakaFurey" Lafferty, Ed Lott, Darrell "FlailingDeath" Myers, Jason Paulley, Michael Pfister, Aaron Pollyea, Rick Raisley, Jim Rapkins, Jason Robinette, Eric Salzman, Christopher K. Searls, Jason Skidmore, Sam Snell, Rob Strathmann, Joel Steverson, Geoff Swift, Roland "Ruger" Thigpen, Chris "Chinless" Wheeler, Patrick "Roosterboy" Wynne.

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Published by Catalyst Game Labs,
an imprint of InMediaRes Productions, LLC
PMB 202 • 303 91st Ave NE • G701
Lake Stevens, WA 98258

FIND US ONLINE:

Precentor_martial@classicbattletech.com
(e-mail address for any *Classic BattleTech* questions)
<http://www.classicbattletech.com>
(official *Classic BattleTech* web pages)
<http://www.CatalystGameLabs.com>
(Catalyst Game Labs web pages)
<http://www.wizkidsgames.com/mechwarrior/>
(official *MechWarrior* web pages)
<http://www.wizkidsgames.com>
(*WizKids* web pages)
<http://www.battlecorps.com/catalog>
(online ordering)

FOUND AND LOST

This is the room. Right here. This is the Ogima room.

What do you mean, what's the Ogima room? Oh, right, right, you're new. Well, this is a story you need to know if you're going to work here. This room's a *legend*. It's too bad Rascombe isn't here to tell the story himself—I forget some of the details—but I'll do what I can.

Yeah, you probably haven't ever met Dr. Rascombe. Officially, he still works here, but he's not around much. He's ... he's not been well.

Anyway, this happened maybe two years ago, back when everything seemed like it was exploding at once and we found out Marik was actually not-Marik. It was a late night—full moon, of course. Have you worked a full moon yet? Oh, you're in for a real treat. Just you wait.

Rascombe had been on duty for about fifteen hours, and he was napping on one of the dressing-room cots. Someone shook him awake after he'd been down for about twenty minutes and told him he was on. So he stumbled up, got himself together and went to act professional.

He came to the door of the room and saw a nurse—I think it was Burton, a guy who left here about a year ago—standing by the door, looking nervous.

"What's going on?" Rascombe said.

Burton didn't answer right away; he was pretty twitchy. "The patient ..." he finally said. "The patient in there is a little worked up."

Then Rascombe heard it. Yelling coming from the other side of the door. There'd be a few words, then silence, then some more yelling. Alternating, on and off, constantly.

"He should be sedated," Rascombe said. And Burton says, "He *was* sedated. He's had enough tranqs to completely knock him out. And the horse he rode in on. And a few other horses besides."

The guy inside yelled some more.

"Is he ... secured?"

"Yeah," Burton said. "Manacled to the bed. Good luck with him. Call me if you need me."

"You're coming in with me." So Rascombe glances at his notepad to see if the patient info'd shown up yet. It was there, but it only gave a first name. Ogima.

So Rascombe went into the room—this room right here. The bed there is where Ogima was chained. Under here you can see the gouges he made by pulling on his manacles.

Of course it's the same bed. We don't buy much new stuff.

When Rascombe walked in, he saw—well, you should ask him about it some time, if you ever meet him. He saw a sight. The guy, he said, was practically levitating on the bed, he was pulling so hard against his manacles. He had bald patches where he'd pulled hair out, and his face was crumpled like paper. On one wrist, he'd pulled so much that the metal had cut him practically to the bone. He might have bled out if Rascombe had waited any longer to get in there.

So there's blood spraying everywhere, hitting Rascombe and Burton as soon as they walk in. Rascombe runs forward, trying

to stop the bleeding, but the guy's thrashing everywhere, even though he's restrained, even though he's sedated. Rascombe knows that anything he puts on the wrist is going to get ripped off pretty quick. Nothing good's going to happen until he puts the guy out.

And of course, the whole time the guy's yelling. Most of it's gibberish, but Rascombe and Burton said sometimes they could understand a word or two. Of course, they both heard different things, so you don't know if it's what this Ogima guy actually said or if they just *heard* it that way. Like a Rorschach test, but with sound.

Burton, he said the guy yelled "the flesh, the flesh," a lot, and then he said "so many, too many." Rascombe heard him say "run, run, run, run," and "the heart, right out," and he said what Burton heard as "so many, too many," was actually "may I, do I."

But they cared more about subduing the guy and stopping the bleeding than listening to him rave. Rascombe looks at the chart, sees how many tranqs have been pumped into the guy, and he flips out. The guy should've been asleep for a week, not thrashing himself to death. So Rascombe makes the call—twenty micrograms of astoril. Yeah, that's right, *twenty*. And still the guy doesn't go out right away. He spends a little more time throwing blood around the room—check some of the corners, you might find a spot the cleaning crew missed in the past few years.

OK, I'm kidding. Kind of.

But finally, finally, the guy goes down, and Rascombe patches up his wrist. But the guy's not entirely out. His eyelids kept snapping open with only the whites showing underneath. Rascombe said the eyes were pulsing, bulging—he worried they were going to pop out of their sockets, but then they'd close. And even then, when the patient was totally sedated, he had this presence—well, he was just *creepy*, Rascombe said.

But at least the guy's quiet and still and there's no more bleeding, so Rascombe figures he can get to work on the real problem. He looks at the chart. Then he looks at the patient. Then the chart again. He does a cursory visual inspection. Hooks up a computer to the guy to see if it can find anything. Looks for Burton, but Burton took off as soon as the patient went under. He walks out into the hall, looks around, then yells to anyone who can hear him.

"Does anyone know what the hell is supposed to be this guy's problem?"

No one answers. In fact, Rascombe told me it seemed like everyone was doing their best to keep their distance. He saw one nurse walk into the hall, make eye contact with him, then dash right back into the same room she'd just walked out of.

So he figured he'd go to admissions, see who took the guy's info in the first place. He just wants to find out what the problem is, fix it and get the guy out of there. He takes two steps, then hears a noise. Behind him. From the room. This room here.

He runs into the room and the guy is sitting up. Sitting up! Just a few minutes after twenty units of astoril! At least he's not thrashing. He's still, his eyes are closed, but he's sitting bolt upright.



FOUND AND LOST

Rascombe, of course, is pretty unnerved. He stares at the guy, waiting for something else bizarre to happen, and he's not disappointed. The guy starts to shake. Vibrate, Rascombe said. His body stays in its seated position, but it's trembling like an aspen leaf. Rascombe pokes his head out the door, asking for a little help, but no one shows. He says the shaking went on for maybe a minute, then stopped. And the guy's eyes snapped open, with the eyeballs now in their proper position.

Rascombe takes a step toward the guy, and there's no response from him, no recognition. Another step, same thing. He walks in front of the guy and waves a hand in front of his face. Nothing on the guy moves, not the slightest twitch of an eyeball. He does it again. Still nothing. He takes a step back.

Then the guy speaks. In a voice, Rascombe said, like you'd expect to come from a mummy.

"I see you," the guy says.

Rascombe looks around. There's no one else in the room. He looks at the guy.

"Me?" Rascombe says. "You see me?"

The guy doesn't respond immediately. Then he talks again. "I see you."

Then Rascombe gets it. Or he thinks he does. "No," he said. "You're not in the ICU. This is one of the emergency rooms."

The guy seems satisfied. His eyes stay open, and he doesn't thrash or shake. Rascombe figures it's time to get the guy diagnosed, treated and on the road. So he picks up his chart.

"Says here your name is Ogima. Is that right? Is that your name?"

"Ogima," the guy says.

"And that's your first name, right?"

"Ogima," the guy says again.

"It doesn't say what your complaint is," Rascombe said. "What brought you here tonight?"

"All, all, all wrong. All wrong."

Rascombe's not sure how to respond. "All ... ?" he says. "I ... I need you to be more specific."

"Ogima."

Rascombe sighs. He'd ordered a mental consult once the guy was sedated, but no one had showed yet. Of course.

So, good doctor that Rascombe was—is—he soldiered on.

"Okay, Ogima's your name. Where are you from?"

And then it happened. The answer. The big answer. The answer that turned this from a run-of-the-mill full-moon psycho story to a genuine hospital legend with a room named after it.

The guy answered. He didn't hesitate. He spoke clearly and calmly.

"Jardine," he said.

Rascombe dropped his noteputer.

"What?" he said.

"Jardine."

"You're from Jardine?"

"Jardine."

"No one's from Jardine!"

The guy spoke more clearly than ever. "I am."

Rascombe didn't know what to ask next. Of course, he mostly didn't believe the guy—I mean, he didn't seem too sane. But something about the guy's calm, his total self-possession as he kept saying the word "Jardine"—something about that weirded Rascombe out.

Finally, he came out with a question. "What ... what are you doing here?"

For the first time since Rascombe had come back into the room, the guy moved his head. He turned it until he was looking at Rascombe, though his eyes might not have been focused.

"Run," he said. "Run run run run run."

Then the door to the room flew open. Three men dressed in dark everything—suits, sunglasses, hats, *everything*—charged into the room. They didn't hold any visible weapons, but Rascombe said they gave the impression that they easily *could* be armed.

"We're taking him," one of the men said.

"Excuse me, who are you?" Rascombe asked.

"We're taking him *now*," the same man said. Another one shoved Rascombe aside.

The three of them surrounded the bed.

"Lie down," one of them said, but Ogima stayed bolt upright until one of the dark men sent him down with a firm push. The men then started taking the guy away on his gurney.

Rascombe tried to get to his feet. "You can't do that!" he said.

None of the men glanced at Rascombe. "We're doing it," one of them said. And they pushed the guy out.

Rascombe followed, throwing out a flurry of questions. "Who are you people? Where are you taking him? Do you—do you know where he says he's from?"

Two of them keep pushing the gurney forward, but the other one turns and looks at Rascombe with a gaze that chills him. Right through the sunglasses. "That's something you shouldn't know," the man says. Then he follows the other two.

Rascombe chased them, but they moved with an odd, liquid swiftness. He broke into a run before he knew it, but they stayed ahead of him, almost out of sight. They left the hospital, and Rascombe followed.

The gurney was sitting just outside the exit, empty. Rascombe looked around and couldn't see Ogima or the men anywhere. He walked a few meters this way, a few meters that way, but it was hopeless. They were gone.

He walked back here, into the Ogima room, and picked up the noteputer he'd dropped on the floor. He wasn't sure what kind of a note he was going to make, but he knew it had to be something. So he called up the file.

It wasn't there. Ogima's chart was gone. No sign it had ever existed.

FOUND AND LOST

Now Rascombe freaks out. Has he gone crazy? Is he still asleep and dreaming? He can't believe what's going on. But he talks to a few people, and they say they saw Ogima. Burton backs up the part of Rascombe's story that he saw. The people remembered him, but all other records of the guy were gone.

So this is the Ogima room, the home of the ghost from Jardine. But I haven't told you everything yet—there's one more part to the story. It happens a month later. An encounter so quick that Rascombe doubts his sanity. He's at the park a couple blocks from the hospital, eating a hot dog, and someone sits next to him. He doesn't pay any attention to the guy until he catches a glimpse of his wrists. They've got fresh scars on them, and the pattern looks pretty familiar. Rascombe jerks his head up and looks Ogima right in the face. And the guy looks calm as a lamb.

"I'm sorry," the guy says.

"Sorry?" Rascombe replies.

"Sorry I was in your hospital. Sorry you were called in. I'm sorry you got involved."

"Involved in what?"

The guy gets a kind of faraway look in his eyes, and Rascombe sees a hint of the crazies that had the guy in their thrall a month ago.

"You don't want to know. I don't want to know. But I do, I do, I do."

"Know what? What are you talking about?"

The guy waves his hand, brushing Rascombe's question away. He stands up.

"Nothing will get better. From here, it all gets worse."

Then he leaves. Rascombe never saw him again. And after that ... after that Rascombe was never quite right. I don't know how else to say it, but he wasn't *right*. I hope he comes back from this leave he's on, it would be good to see him again. I hope the crazy guy didn't know what the hell he was talking about.

INTRODUCTION

There are well over twenty-two hundred worlds in the *Classic BattleTech* universe, the affairs of which are largely directed by the government, military and intelligence agencies of five Great Houses, the various Clans and a host of Periphery states (to a greater or lesser degree). But with a population so large, and space so vast, there remains room for groups well beyond these mere political entities: groups who pull strings of their own, devoted to their own ideas and their own methods toward ultimate goals not as apparent to the casual observer.

Massive megacorporations, far-reaching and ancient societies, quasi-religious orders—many such groups lurk in the shadows (or even in plain view, behind a benign façade) in pursuit of their own agendas. Often, their efforts go unnoticed, or are written off as the actions of a more monolithic power. Some are recognized by the general public, but dismissed as harmless or simply misguided. Conspiracy theorists weave endless speculations about how these groups manipulate humankind's destiny or take an active role in shaping the history and governments of millions. Often written off as rumor and innuendo, these musings add to the mystique—and the power—surrounding these interstellar players.

But while so many conspiracy theories are just that, the events of the Jihad have proven that in some cases, the reality can be frighteningly, devastatingly real.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Jihad Conspiracies: Interstellar Players 2 is a sourcebook for *Classic BattleTech* players that continues where the first *Interstellar Players* left off, providing a look at some new potential power

brokers whose agendas and methods may forge the fate of billions across the stars. As with the first *Interstellar Players*, many of these groups and conspiracies have appeared in previous sourcebooks and novels, while others add entirely new aspects to the *Classic BattleTech* universe. Presented here from the point of view of a renegade publication of assembled reports, each "player" showcased in this volume is a source for any number of role-playing adventures and scenarios.

Each entry comes with a gamemaster's guide to place it in its context within the universe, as well as game rules for *Classic BattleTech (Total Warfare)* and *Classic BattleTech Role-Playing Game* adventures and scenarios, which appear in the back of this book. Together, the gamemaster's sections and the game rules provide a guide for introducing and using elements of each of these groups in *Classic BattleTech* and *CBT: RPG* settings.

Like the first *Interstellar Players*, not all is as it may seem in *Jihad Conspiracies: Interstellar Players 2*. Indeed, even though the gamemaster's guides and the rules provide "behind-the-scenes" details and a means to use these various organizations and power brokers in a *CBT* campaign, whether or not a given "interstellar player" actually pursues the agendas in this book—or even exists—is ultimately up to the gamemasters and players of such campaigns. In that respect (and unless otherwise stated in the gamemaster information), the power players, gamemaster briefings and rules presented in this book may all be considered optional elements for any *Classic BattleTech* game, an inspiration for potential adventures and scenarios off the beaten path of Successor State conflicts, Clan wars and mercenary operations.



FOUND AND LOST



WHAT IF?

It was a nice try, but the Powers-That-Be can't keep a good Truth bringer down. Yes, dear readers, Starling is back, and no government, church or secret cabal is going to prevent me from bringing you the truth. All possible truths. Who I really am doesn't matter. But what I tell you in these pages may someday save your life.

Imagine waking up one morning to discover that the world we live in—the life you know—is one gigantic illusion. Imagine discovering that the leaders on distant worlds and even those in your own backyards were involved in a vast lie, a cover-up of interstellar proportions. Imagine that those you have been told are your enemy, those who seem hell-bent on your destruction, really *are* your saviors. And imagine your surprise to see that the truth was there all along, right before your eyes, but dressed up in a dark and sinister cloak of secrets—a swath of lies spun by people who claim your fate for their own merely on the basis of the last election or an accident of their birth.

Dear reader, anyone who knows my work knows I'm the last person to be anyone's apologist, but I can't help noticing that we see precious little of the reasons why our leaders, our armies and our worlds are locked in a struggle against a band that most of us saw just half a decade ago as a harmless bunch of technophilic loons. Precious little, at least, that truly comes from the mouths of our "saviors."

I can hear you scoff, but read me out here. I promise you I have a point that may just open your eyes and provide some inkling as to what in the Nine Hells (or Five Worlds, ha ha!) may be going on that has normal folk like you and I watching the heavens every day in fear of a mushroom cloud of death or the agonizing, choking demise of the next Curse of Galedon.

What if—and note I *do* say "if" here—the Word of Blake really *did* come to save us all?

Again, I can hear the scoffs. But track this, if you can. I believe we, as thinking and rational human beings, need to be able to look our enemy hard in the face—no matter how alien he might seem to be (even if that term is practically truth)—and try to understand what's truly going on in his head. Do you honestly believe, for instance, that the rank and file WoBbie bows down to a toaster at night, or truly thinks the only way to guide our Inner Sphere to some enlightenment is through the fiery division of atoms?

Now, I'm not about to look too closely at the words of the Word for this preamble, so don't panic and start thinking, "Oh my God(s), Starling's become one of them!" Please give me a *little* more credit than that. This is about the facts—both widely known and secret—that have been uncovered to date.

Fact 1: The fanatics we know and love today as the Word of Blake were once the very same people to whom you still entrust most of your interstellar communications, our dear friends from ComStar. Strip away the pseudo-religious crap and you're back to the interstellar phone service that Jerry built back when Kerensky's goons were packing their bags and the "Great" Houses were loading their weapons for a three-century-long, five-way showdown.

Fact 2: The policies enacted by ComStar, in the shadows of the

Succession Wars, targeted just about anyone who could string a few innovative thoughts together while the mostly automated factories of the day were being nuked into oblivion. The effect was a general decline of technology—almost universally of the military or space travel variety—to the point where, given maybe another century or so, it would've been impossible to launch another Succession War with anything more potent than a collection of flintlocks. (Hey, a man can dream, can't he?)

Fact 3: The return of Kerensky's inbred descendants fouled up the entire plan.

Now, stop here and think. Imagine you're the great, big, monolithic corporation dressed up as a bunch of techno-wizards, to the point where you preserve operational codes and procedures in the form of a Gregorian Chant just so the dim-witted, unwashed masses will be convinced they can't do without you. Imagine you know all their dirty little secrets, and have tons more of your own—enough for an army that can kick any two of the Great Houses' asses at once because you ensured centuries before that *their* armies would remain small. Now, imagine you had the means to plan all this out and make it all happen with no one the wiser... and try to tell me how you'd miss the even bigger army that left at the same time your great conspiracy was born? Or that you didn't plan for their eventual return?

Fact 4: ComStar "conveniently" revealed a massive army capable of stopping the Clans *and* the means to move it in their pants pocket all this time.

At this point, everyone in the Inner Sphere should have screamed a collective, "We've been HAD!", realized they'd been duped probably from Day One, and started looking into how our ancestors communicated before Blake came along, because that *had* to be better than entrusting the interstellar communications grid to a bunch of two-faced liars and thieves (oh, funny that: all those older-tech FAX machines managed to go missing about the time the Star League ended, too. Huh. Wonder how *that* happened?).

Instead—because we were kind of desperate, with Kerensky's vat-born kiddies bringing down property values everywhere—we accepted ComStar's embarrassed shrug as an explanation and pinned our hopes on them stopping the Clans. Which they did, for about fifteen years—years they would spend raiding and basically spoiling for an early bell on Round Two.

Oh, and suddenly ComStar fractures. Three hundred years of solidarity, and they fracture because they came up with two different ways to try to stop the Clans?

Remember when I asked you to imagine you were ComStar, the Clans came back, and you suddenly (conveniently) had an army ready to stop them? Now, tell me something: Wouldn't you—with all your abilities, resources and demonstrated capacity for forethought centuries ahead of time—have come up with one or two backup plans?

Fact 5: Within less than two years, ComStar and Word of Blake fragment, and the Word of Blake is set up nice and cozy in the Free

WHAT IF?

Worlds League, complete with their own armed forces, chain of command, tax base, HPG deals—oh, and about ninety percent of the nastiest intelligence agency in the Inner Sphere. Meanwhile, ComStar—the guys with the professional soldiers and a lot less ingrained fanaticism—sat mostly on the Clan front, waiting for the axe to drop.

From the moment the Word of Blake broke off, a plan was set in motion—and it was likely a contingency plan they'd had in place all along. Before our very eyes, the heart and soul of the shifty, manipulative, hyper-secretive ComStar—the group who masterfully played us off each other ever since Kerensky ran away and took his boys and toys with him—simply fled the body. What remained behind was the pale shadow, claiming it was the real McCoy, a group whose only mandates were to offer us fair prices on HPG transmissions and keep an eye on those dastardly Clansmen. We should've seen the scam right there, because of...

Fact 6: Altruism is a myth.

Seriously, guys. Why do you think communism fails and dictatorships thrive? Why does the Lyran government still stand, based on its foundation of class strata and profit-mongering, while the pseudo-representative alliance of semi-independent states that made up the Free Worlds League fell apart in the face of a leadership crisis? People do not work for the common good because it's what they should do; they do so because someone has a gun to their head. (Or because they're just plain crazy, but we're discussing humankind at large, not me. Let's move on.)

So, new-and-secular ComStar says, "No worries, Inner Sphere, we got your backs!" and we all smile and nod, eating it up, and we try to get back to business as usual while cautiously eyeing those Clanner strangers. And everyone just disregards the "harmless nuts" who took the very essence of "old" ComStar with them and set themselves up with a neat little empire in the Free Worlds League. We then have the nerve to act surprised about five years later when they snatch Terra away like taking candy from a dead baby. Come on, ComStar, did you guys really even try to fight that one?

Fact 7: "Secular" ComStar refuses to acknowledge the inherent threat of having their supposedly mortal enemies holding the most important planet in the entire Inner Sphere. Instead, Focht and Mori inexplicably shrug their shoulders and say "No big deal; Terra's just a symbol."

Smell that rat yet?

The essence of "old ComStar" is once again back home, and the "secular" version seems content with waiting to die against the Clans. If I didn't know any better, I'd say it was almost like laundering money. Only in this case, we're laundering planets. A few people scratch their heads, I'm sure, but overall, the Inner Sphere fails to go into panic mode that the "harmless nuts" just took over the universe's most heavily industrialized and populated gems—and that they did it in less than four days!

WHERE IT ALL LEADS?

For the next ten years we all heard the whispers and nobody did a damned thing about them. Intelligence agencies across the

Inner Sphere—hell, even in the Deep Periphery—knew the Word was building a massive army and hiring mercs by the bushel. Something big was coming, but nobody knew what or they just assumed it was aimed at what remained of ComStar.

But given the Word's lightning-fast victory at Terra—both in '58 and in '68—I would guess otherwise. ComStar was the Word's paper tiger all along. Maybe not a sham army, but certainly one the Word never truly had to fear. And if they could brush aside their own, they could easily do the same to the rest of us...

But if they had *that* kind of power, why didn't they use it on us long ago?

Could it *possibly* be, as the Word Robes themselves claim, that they didn't intend to?

Before you start the lynch mobs and try to hunt me down, remember that I'm not the kind to claim anybody's innocent. The Word—or, more accurately, the shadowy powers behind them—clearly prepared for a war to end all wars, complete with the whole genocidal apparatus to do it. We've all seen the images of Blakist nukes incinerating entire cities on Outreach, Blakist nerve agents sending the high and mighty Knights of the Inner Sphere to a choking demise, and Blakist WarShips pounding the snail snot out of whole cities on Tharkad and Coventry. We've seen the footage of their cyborg monsters sweeping all resistance from Caph, Gibson and Hesperus. We've heard their own propagandists gloat how each atrocity came down upon those who deserved what they got...

Except for the ones that happened when this whole mess started. The "nuking" of Tharkad was vehemently denied, and the firefight over New Avalon that culminated in the annihilation of the NAIS was called a "great tragedy" by the Blakist commanders there (who have yet to lob any WMDs on the Davion capital, despite years of resistance). Just days later, though, the same Word of Blake would practically gloat over the radioactive corpses of the Outreach dead.

Why the dichotomy? Could it be that the Word truly meant for Tharkad and New Avalon to be "warning shots" and not full-scale invasions? Looking at the fleets they sent to those worlds—while large and stealthy, they certainly weren't set up for an invasion, not if they carried only a single division each. Not against Inner Sphere capitals! And the LCS *Invincible* was in Star League parade colors, not the LCAF scheme she vanished with, or the stark white of the Word. (I hear one of the ships at New Avalon sported a similar scheme, though the details are sketchy as to which one.)

Was it wise to sneak WarShips into a capital system, even ships intended to be given as gifts? Maybe not, but I hate to say the Word's actions in both cases points more to a naïve plan to do just what some have suggested: offer up their gifts to members of the Star League.

And then there's Outreach, home of the Dragoons, who fought the Word's efforts to bring stability to the Chaos March. Oh, sure, the Word established said "stability" as much through force and bribery as through honest negotiations—but when you look at how every other Successor State, Periphery realm and Clan conducts its affairs, you can't really call foul on the Word's approach,

WHAT IF?

and *they* were at least getting the trains running on time! Still, the Dragoons declared war on them and got a bunch more mercs to go along for the ride. What followed was an escalation that could only have ended in a showdown on Outreach, and lo and behold, it happened. The Word trumpeted its victory there, as horrible as it was—even as they still swore up and down that Tharkad and New Avalon were accidents.

So, okay, if the Word was ready to smack Outreach, but didn't want to go to war on Tharkad or New Avalon, why is that? And how does that relate to all the muscle they seemingly pulled out of thin air?

Once more, we face what many have whispered and what the Word's so-called Voice of Truth has been screaming for all this time (the stuff INN won't report because, hey, the enemy's crazy, right?): What if the Word of Blake really did intend to save us all?

From who? If you have to ask that, you're a Capellan, a Free Worlds Leaguer or someone from the Rimward Periphery. Or you really don't think the Clans are a threat.

But anyone on Terra (or between them and Terra) might. And if the Word (and ComStar before them) truly suspected the return of Kerensky all these centuries, well, having their fears vindicated since 3050 would likely have had them scrambling to the defense all along.

THE ORIGINAL PLAN?

What the Word truly had in mind is, of course, anyone's guess. And anyone who reads me knows I never presume that a major political power with demonstrated military and secret intelligence-gathering capabilities will ever tell us their intentions on the level. But what if the story the Word's been trying to say—the one drowned out now by reporters and government agencies across the Inner Sphere—is, at heart, the God's honest truth?

What if the Word's goals at the Star League conference truly were to unveil gifts to the gathered leaders of the Inner Sphere? And what if their gifts included military assets to boost the Sphere's common defense against the Clans? After all, isn't that the same kind of line Victor Steiner-Davion and Anastasius Focht expected us to believe when they sold us the notion of a second Star League back in 3058?

What if the people we now claim to be the splinter-group fanatics truly did raise their arsenal of WMDs to kill off the Clans and drive them to their homeworlds (and, if necessary, beyond)? What if they were truly raising forces and technologies to overpower the Clans' genetic edge and teach them what war really meant? After all, wasn't that the message ComStar promised to send at Tukayyid?

What if the Dragoons really did deserve what they got on Outreach? After all, weren't they the people who single-handedly transformed the mercenary profession into their own private conglomerate while simultaneously spying for the Clans' future invasion forces?

The Word's mouthpieces today don't say much about what the exact plan was, but they've given us plenty of hints amid their rants

and in their approach to this war. In a very Machiavellian way, much of it seems to be part of a long-running campaign to not only unify the Inner Sphere and end the Clan threat, but also to ensure that the future Sphere order will remain stable under their guidance.

Imagine a second Star League that didn't disband. Imagine the Word of Blake "parade fleets" delivering new WarShips to the Lyran Alliance, Federated Suns and Draconis Combine. Imagine the ratification of the Word of Blake Protectorate—now purged of instability for the first time in a decade—and the whole place opened to Inner Sphere merchants and travelers as a hub of commerce and cooperation. Imagine the appearance of Manei Domini super-soldiers among the forces arrayed against the Clans. And imagine the campaign to come, where armies of cybernetically enhanced super-soldiers smash through the Clan lines with state of the art Sphere-built machines, ready, willing and able to fight to their deaths not just to liberate a world, but to make sure the Clans know they can never come back? Armed with weapons and technologies developed over centuries of waiting for Kerensky's fateful return, imagine a Word of Blake and ComStar—reunited as the offensive and defensive forces of a new SLDF, respectively—pitched into heroic battles to drive the Clans home, and fearless enough to resort to the worst levels of brutality in order to guarantee a lasting victory rather than one a Khan can pretend "holds no sway" over his agenda.

If this scenario were true, we could very well be looking at a new order by today, an order where we once again thank the followers of Blake for daring to save us from ourselves. We could be singing praises to the people who gave us back Tamar, Rasalhague and Alshain, when our leaders could not. We would see Clan influence burned away from all Inner Sphere worlds, including the heart of the mercenary trade on Outreach. We would no longer fear the oppression of a warrior-driven "master race" who believe the only people worthy of leading are those born in vats, and whose only answer to all challenges is bloodshed.

Yeah, maybe we would then have to contend with our own shifty leaders again, and pay lip service to people who still recite prayers before starting up their holovids, but if you're one of the billions who feared the Clans when they rolled over entire empires, ask yourself which future *you* would prefer?

Remember that I am not suggesting the Word is innocent here, people. Even if the above was true, they clearly planned this war to be a genocide. They alone have brought out the WMDs and they alone came to the fight prepared to turn us against one another so they could snatch up the best factories. If they knew of the Clans before they came, these guys (and their ComStar breakaway partners) owe us a hell of an explanation for why they waited until 3050 to clue us all in.

No, the Word is far from innocent, but just because they seem crazy when they talk, and just because they now seek to kill us all, don't assume our leaders have it right either. And don't assume all the propaganda you hear lacks a semblance of truth.

Question *everything!*

THE HIDDEN



THE HIDDEN

THE HIDDEN

You folks may remember this one from the last time I put forth a book's worth of theories for you. Seems someone didn't like this particular topic and hit me with a crude but amusing binary bomb. This time, I've taken precautions. So without further ado, let's ask one more time about what happened to some missing worlds, and see if the "Shark" comes swimming for me again.

—Starling

FROM ATLANTIS TO JARDINE, ARE THE LOST REALLY "LOST"?

—Mirjam Torhansson, *The Truth Underground*, Renegade Press,
1 April 3066

The tales are as old as time. Lost places, forgotten societies, a promise of wonder that draws the adventurous or the greedy to great lengths, often to disappointing ends. From the mythical unspoiled lands of Eden (the Garden, not the Clan homeworld), to the lost Terran continent of Atlantis (said to have been home to a massive and hyper-advanced civilization), to the golden cities of Macchu Pichu or El Dorado that drove many an ancient Terran treasure hunter mad with lust and greed. The legends of lost civilizations did not end with the drive into space, however. If anything, it made the phenomenon thousands of times more pronounced.

And yet, what are legends without a grain of truth? Sure, we've since learned of the truth behind Eden, Atlantis, Macchu Pichu and El Dorado: lost lands and cities that as often as not turned out to be mere fables. But what of the lost worlds of the Inner Sphere? Worlds like the Marik planet of Jardine, known to have existed for its most famous export, the felineoid tabiranth, and yet missing from virtually every astronomical map and record, even going back to the days of the Star League?

Cities may be lost, but worlds? That's another matter.

Dear reader, what would you say if I told you that Jardine is not as lost as some may think, or that hidden among the thousands of stars where humankind walks are more worlds just like it—still alive, still thriving, and (perhaps most shocking) still a danger to us all?

How They Vanish: A Case Study

So what makes a world disappear? Does a magician wave a magic wand, mutter an incantation, and poof, all records are expunged throughout history? Or is it more of an elaborate shell game, involving a conspiracy of millions to pull off? Well, dear reader, the answer to that one is a bit more variable. In fact, the means to make a world vanish are probably as varied as there have been vanished worlds to start with. Some general possibilities, however, might follow a few basic themes:

Nuked/Poisoned Off the Map: The classic explanation of the first two Succession Wars (and the Age of War), worlds with fairly low or overly centralized populations suffered from over-zealous raiders armed with atomics or biological weapons meant to sterilize all human life. Oddly enough, this was a "hit or miss" approach, as some worlds "died" from these assaults or their aftermaths, but others somehow soldiered on. Of those that died, many were actually casualties of freak environmental events triggered by the final assault (example: Rocky, a Hegemony planet that went into a premature ice age). Some fell into a fatal tailspin from catastrophic loss of infrastructure and no small amount of neglect from the parent government (example: Hegel, which practically starved to extinction amidst a worldwide epidemic).

It is, however, harder to kill a populous world using a few nukes—even strategics—and/or poison gasses. Tailored biologicals may have better luck, as they can linger a bit longer and maybe even salt the local ecosystems, but you'd need a LOT to infect an entire planet. Therefore, the only reasons to take such worlds off the map are because they got wholly depopulated in the strikes *and* lost all industrial or strategic value in the bargain. Or if the world was barely self-sustaining to start with. For the former, it'd likely have to be a trade-dependent world with a population numbering no more than, say, ten million. For the latter, the world would need to have been marginal all along, which would likely create conditions identical to the former.

Yes, they're possible, but by necessity, such worlds tend to be small fry. Admittedly, a few really big worlds also went out this way, but only because some nation or other gathered up a DropShip or five worth of strategics and just pasted the living crap out of it—an act usually reserved for the most heavily industrialized and populated planets, where the attacker would rather sterilize the opposition than face an impregnable fortress. (Many worlds fitting that bill, however, managed to survive for decades afterward, and quite a few—like Sarna and Caph—remain on the map today.)

Emigration/Depopulation: This works better with cities than with planets, but then again, some planets were hellholes even when they were settled (the settlers who hung in there were just too stubborn to admit as much). In this case, whether from war damage or some other situation, the people simply leave (or get scooped away by others—hopefully others friendly toward them). This may have been common in the Star League era and Age of War, when ships were plentiful (heck, Terra itself suffered a humongous exodus right after the Liberation, with billions taking flight). But after the Succession Wars blasted anything big enough to have a KF drive, not so much. This type of action also tends to *add* planets to the map, rather than remove them—take the recently discovered Hanseatic League and Nueva Castile, for example. For that matter, how do you think we got the Clans (or the Inner Sphere to begin with)?

This one's definitely possible, at least as much as the nuking/gassing scenario.



THE HIDDEN

The Big Conspiracy of Doom: We all like this one, deep down. Name your conspirators, be they your own House government, some corporate execs, Amaris, Kerensky, ComStar, the Illuminati, a sentient and super-advanced alien race—just remember that your group must have been able to change maps throughout history to hide their worlds, to have picked worlds self-sufficient enough to see to their own needs and stay off the trade networks, and have the means to ensure that no passing JumpShip considers the world a viable jump route. Oh, and spend centuries ruthlessly keeping the secret from prying eyes...

This is the fun one, because our brains can see only a conspiracy

as having the muscle and the means to hide a world of greater importance than an outpost. These are usually separated from the worlds described in our other two categories by some indefinable weirdness, like the feeling you get when you look at an incomplete painting but don't have a copy of the finished work to compare it to. This is where our Atlantises and El Dorados come from.

And this, apparently, is where at least one Marik world named Jardine went...

PIECING IT TOGETHER

Torhansson's essay may not seem all that illuminating—especially as she failed to expound on it much more beyond debating how one might hide a whole world. She meant well, mind you, but the girl's just not got the heart for serious conspiracy-mongering. I do, of course, and in the time since our last publication on the subject, I actually came across a few more tidbits that shed interesting new light on the subject of hidden worlds (and Jardine in particular).

THE HIDDEN

THE BALLAD OF BROOKLYN STEVENS

A records search through The Usual Sources (filtered for our collective sanity, of course) reveals that the Word of Blake launched a funny little manhunt into Lyran and Free Worlds space mere weeks before the start of the Jihad. Their "mystery quarry," it seems, was one Doctor Brooklyn Marie Stevens, a Lyran-born mercenary and one-time employee of Interstellar Expeditions.

Stevens was one of those active academics you see mainly in holovid dramatizations—boasting doctorates in archaeology and Star League history from the University of Tharkad along with an unconventional, off-the-books sort of military training that made her equally capable of handling herself in a brawl or on a dig site. Following what could best be described as a "bad breakup" with IE, Doctor Stevens and her crew managed to abscond with an *Explorer*-class JumpShip, three long-range shuttles, about four IndustrialMechs and at least two "black box" units that apparently make up an undisclosed part of IE's own communications net. Why IE never followed up that kind of "resignation" with legal action (or lethal force) is a matter of a lot of fun speculation, but it proved convenient enough for them when they actually hired Stevens and her runaway crew for a mission: locate (and thereby prove the existence of) the planet Jardine.

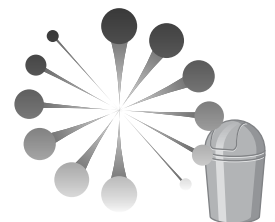
Astoundingly, within less than four months—armed with little more than a discredited and buried report by an equally

discredited and buried exo-biologist named Amanda Holyfield—Stevens not only returned with a report of her own, but also a *native* from Jardine. It was the crowning moment of her career.

It was also her death warrant.

The Word of Blake's manhunt targeted Stevens, her family and her crew. They tracked down her husband, Professor Tyler Stevens, at Tharkad U on Donegal. They blasted her venerable ship apart near Skye, and tracked her deep into Marik space before the fake Thomas Marik managed to whisk her away (if only for a short time).

But while Stevens' greatest triumph may have been her undoing, she left behind a legacy that would put half the intel masterminds in the Inner Sphere to shame (and, had it come sooner, could even have saved lives). Not only did she locate the long-lost world of Jardine, she left clues to its existence and that of a secret cabal who ran it and as many as four more such "Hidden Worlds." Considering the evidence, Stevens' discovery establishes an almost-certain link between these five worlds and the descendants of Stefan Amaris—a link that, if true, shows us that the Word of Blake works hand-in-glove with the heirs of history's most notorious villain.



THE HIDDEN

The Stevens Factor

Just before the Jihad erupted, the story goes, a very angry Doctor Brooklyn Stevens, commander of a small merc team that included at least one ex-black ops specialist and a host of former Interstellar Expeditions vets, arrived in the Loric system for a meeting with the (now late) Doctor Henry Croft (their IE employer). Stevens, her exec, and an unknown young woman of “distinctly Polynesian features” confronted Croft on what they perceived as a double-cross, and claimed they were being targeted by Word of Blake operatives. With a final warning that IE had reaped the proverbial whirlwind, Stevens, her crew and their unknown companion vanished, making a beeline for Tharkad.

Supposedly, while on the run, they found a way to leave a trail of breadcrumbs for any possible allies to find. (Some hints even turned up in the second printings of a couple of history texts written that very year!) Whether brilliant or simply desperate, this move succeeded in snagging the false Thomas Marik’s attention. Even as the Inner Sphere plunged into a new war, he dispatched some of his Knights on a “special errand” into Lyran space.

They never returned.

Sketchy reports gleaned from a hundred or so local news nets tell the rest: mysterious, black-clad men sporting exotic weapons hit Donegal during the Blakist attack there. An inexplicably superfluous fighter run flattened the University of Chekswa with an atomic weapon. Search engines across the Lyran Alliance lit up with keywords “Jardine,” “Gabriel,” “Stevens,” “IE,” and “Rim Worlds.”

Then came the White-Out, and all news stopped.

When the lights came back on, the searches had ended and Blakist APBs matching Stevens’ description were little more than a footnote. A few weeks later, rescue ships in the Nestor system came upon the remains of an *Explorer*-class JumpShip that had apparently been torn apart from the inside out.

Meanwhile, a series of random “accidents” and overt attacks plagued Interstellar Expeditions, culminating in the death of Doctor Henry James Croft, the IE division head who’d hired Stevens in the first place.

Of course, with fighting erupting on every border—and the League-Alliance front being one of the fiercest—nobody bothered to follow up on any of this.

The Rim Worlds Connection

We all know the official story: When Stefan the Usurper launched his war against the Camerons and brought down the Star League, he did so with an army that arose out of the blue. It was an army carefully poised to strike at the heart of the Terran Hegemony by a years-long campaign aimed at courting a naïve boy’s trust, and driving a wedge between the First Lord and his Protector.

What followed was said to be a lesson for the ages (the kind humans have to relearn every few centuries or so, when greedy

and powerful men make a play to “take it all”). Amaris’ army was smashed, and his ancestral domain—the Rim Worlds Republic—was wiped off the map by the SLDF (with maybe a little unasked-for help from the Lyrans, who came to the party only after all the real blood had been spilled). In the Republic’s fiery demise, Kerensky made sure everyone knew that Amaris and his family were dead. Examples were made of the likes of the Greenhaven Gestapo and the 33rd Amaris Dragoons. History would record Amaris’ name alongside Adolf Hitler and Jinjiro Kurita.

And somehow lost in the shuffle were *billions upon billions* of lives, the citizens of a realm shattered beyond all repair. The Elsie absorbed only half of the Republic’s worlds (the profitable half, of course, with the functioning factories). But in the anarchy that followed, the outer reaches of the Rim Worlds were simply left to rot, forgotten by the Steiners—history’s ever-wasteful, would-be predators.

In just a few decades (forget centuries!), dozens of “leftover” Republic worlds vanished from the star charts, many supposedly due to “extreme population decline” (a euphemism old navigators used to describe a world that wasn’t worth the fuel it cost to get there). Sure, a lot were dependent on their neighbors for vital resources—all now nixed by the utter demolition of their central government and interstellar infrastructure. But unless Aleks K. launched a few *million* nukes, bio-chem weapons, and such, the odds of almost a hundred worlds depopulating in less than a fifth as many years is pretty hard to swallow, don’t you think?

So, okay, if these worlds are being hidden somehow, who’s doing the hiding? And why?

The Steiners are an obvious candidate, given their opportunistic land grab, but as much as they crowed among themselves when they took the Republic’s heartlands, one would think swallowing *an entire realm whole* would make them downright orgasmic. Heck, the industrial/political clout would be immeasurable! But their apparent failure to accomplish this public coup makes the Lyrans look a bit unlikely.

The other Houses are more remote, largely due to geography, plus lack of resolve and resources. An outside chance exists that the Combine and the Free Worlds would’ve considered such moves to pincer their mutual enemy, but three centuries of failing to crush the Steiners would seem to take them out of the running as well.

ComStar, then? Well, the Rim was no friend to Jerome’s band, but the descendants of the SLCOMNET were still rebuilding an HPG network then, identifying worlds that were dying even as they went (kind of like an unofficial post-Star League census). But could they have lied or conveniently “erred” on their assessment of dozens of former RWR planets, taking them off their maps and posting advisories that those planets were no longer habitable? Certainly possible, but with little more than a Star League courier fleet and a smattering of ex-SLDF mercs at their disposal, it would’ve been pretty brassy of Blake to try to claim a swath of

worlds along a border still in the throes of an active assimilation effort. (Though, all things considered, marking struggling worlds “dead” would also be a neat way for Jerome to further punish the Rimmers by discouraging merchant travel to their worlds. Cruel, but neat.)

What if the Lyrans *did* get bold enough to advance again, after all? Some, according to old reports, actually did. Likely in the hopes of snagging a bit of overlooked resources, or merely trade partners among the former Republic territories, some ships went out there in the decades after the Star League fell. But very few of these expeditions returned with news of struggling ex-Rimmers eager to reconnect with the Sphere. Indeed, in the few cases where human life was found, it had reportedly regressed to wandering tribes or—at best—warring city states. These worlds would eventually be snapped up by the Bandit Kingdoms to come, but the Lyrans wrote them off as useless. The rest were barren wastes, home to dead, empty cities and crumbling, stripped-out factories. Within less than twenty years, an entire civilization had been written off and nearly forgotten—recognized only as a cautionary tale on the wages of betrayal and evil.

Back to ComStar. Though they are certainly front-runners in any scheme to hide worlds, they may still have been hard-pressed to do so on a scale that the remnant Rim Worlds represented. And it’s highly doubtful that they evacuated entire planets into the bargain. So who, then?

Why not the Rim Worlds itself?

I mean, who better? Their government was smashed. Their realm bore the taint of the villain who destroyed a golden age. Their neighbors were engaging in an orgy of nuclear warfare. Why not, rather than wait for the axe to fall, simply flee the carnage? If we follow this thread, interesting possibilities emerge, particularly if we try to imagine *where* they went. Did they flee deeper into space, forming the mysterious Deep Periphery realms like the Hanseatic League and the Umayyad Caliphates? Did some find new worlds to settle well off the beaten trade routes, effectively pulling a Kerensky? Or were some clever enough to hide in plain view, occupying worlds deep within the Inner Sphere and playing possum in our midst all this time?

But why? Well, if we follow the Rim hiding itself theory, the answers are brutally simple: survival...and possibly revenge. When the Rim Worlds died, a lot of people lost homes, careers, livelihoods, trade partners, allies and family. To save what remained—whether accomplished by the Lyrans, ComStar, or the Rimmers

RIM WORLDS OUTPOST #27

In 3055, soon after the rise of the so-called “reformed” ComStar, then-Primus Sharilar Mori and her Combine buddy, Theodore Kurita, announced the formation of the Explorer Corps (conveniently ignoring the fact that the organization formally existed as a branch of ComStar as far back as 2980). Billing the endeavors of this new (or newly outed) allied organization as a concerted effort to explore the Deep Periphery for new worlds (and hopefully the Clan homelands!), the Corps was a dream come true to some and a nightmare to others. Archaeologists far and wide lauded its scientific research benefits while Spheroid military leaders eagerly anticipated any info on the Clans’ origins. To the average merc, it was a new employment opportunity that fired the imagination and (hopefully) would bear few risks for excellent pay. But to the Clans and the Deep Periphery’s more reclusive realms, it posed a threat. And to the average lostech prospector or fringe groups like Interstellar Expeditions? It was competition.

Some of you may recall, however, that the first few star maps of the Deep Periphery, coreward of the Sphere, were quickly recalled by the Explorer Corps a mere month or two after they’d been posted for all to see. “Editorial reasons” were cited, and boy, they weren’t kidding! When the revised maps came back a month or so later, an entire realm had disappeared. This vanishing realm had been named simply “RWR Outpost #27.”

Queries to ComStar by parties within and outside their Explorer Corps either went unanswered or received a pat “we apologize for the error” reply that never explained what would conjure a vaguely defined area the size of the Circinus Federation and then—just as quickly—expel it from existence. Until one day, a frustrated acolyte on Pesht lost his patience with the question and—in what surely must have been the biggest Career-Limiting Move of his life—exploded in a five-minute rant about Word of Blake “monkey warfare.” According to the poor fellow, Blakist moles in ROM (or the EC itself) planted evidence in their cartography database about a nine-star “mini realm” not so cryptically dubbed “RWR Outpost #27.” The reasons for this “prank” were many and petty, though a large part focused on demonstrating how fallible ComStar’s info services could be, as well as undermining the trust between ComStar and its allies.

But what if it was all a front? Strangely enough, few known expeditions have ever been launched to check out the region described in this allegedly apocryphal map. Of the few wandering traders passing through that region, none ever checked out the local planets—though some odd reports over the past ten years claim that at least one system in the RWR Outpost 27 area possessed warning buoys that were “ancient in manufacture, yet still operational.” These quarantine sats (at least two SkyWard Model IXs were mentioned) powered up as the merchants came into range and announced that an unspecified “planet below” was unsafe for travelers in accordance with the “ComStar Safe Transit and Astrogration Project.”

Curiouser and curiouser, eh? So how does ComStar come to “discover” and then “lose” again a system they apparently marked “closed” centuries ago? Are these travelers seeing things in the dark depths of space, or have they really passed through a forgotten realm? If their accounts are accurate, why did ComStar quarantine these worlds, assign them a cluster name and then purge their records after revealing them?

Or did the Word of Blake somehow “steal” these worlds? Could the truth be even more sinister, even more intertwined?

—Starling

THE HIDDEN

themselves—hiding the survivors would be a viable option and would sidestep any unpleasantness that might arise from seeking asylum openly from factions embracing an eternal war.

But if the Rim Worlds' survivors fled into hiding for themselves? Well, now we have a people who not only shield themselves from prying eyes to avoid someone finishing the job that Kerensky started—but a people who likely hold a lasting grudge against the entire Inner Sphere.

The Five and the Word

So where does that leave us?

Well, for starters, the existence of hidden worlds in our Sphere is no longer a stretch, but a very likely possibility. Anyone who survived on a world bombed to dust could conceivably have eked out a living and spawned a new order while ComStar quietly wrote them off (either deliberately or due to incompetence).

For another, a vast number of these worlds could've included the flagging remains of the Rim Worlds Republic, the nation-state that overthrew the Star League and effectively unleashed centuries of warfare. They may not be the only people who would want to live on hidden worlds, but as the so-called destroyers of civilization, they'd certainly have a lot of motivation to stay in the shadows.

Finally, we have a secret kept so long and so well that people even today are willing to kill for it (just ask Doctor Holyfield, Croft and the Stevens family). And these people seem to include the Word of Blake.

But why the Word, and why now?

AMARIS AND COMSTAR?

The connection between the Rim Worlds and ComStar may look paper-thin, unless one digs deep enough into the events of early 3057 that many leaders would prefer to forget—specifically, a rash of unexplained raids aimed at almost every House and Clan. At first, these raids seemed wholly unfocused, save for the fact that all of them sported colors from other Houses and made a point of leaving witnesses behind to tell the tale. False flags, of course, are a common enough ploy in many trades, but the timing of these strikes—coupled with the gory suicides of the few raider warriors downed in these battles—swiftly demonstrated a common link that prompted the Free Worlds League (at the very least) to investigate.

According to the rumors, the investigation tracked the entire affair back to a man claiming to be—get this—Stefan Amaris VII. Working from a secret Periphery base (the rumor places this on New St. Andrews), "Amaris" managed to gather up close to a regiment of BattleMechs made up mostly of bandits and mercs who couldn't get honest work if their lives depended on it. How far he really stood a chance of succeeding is immaterial; in all likelihood, "Amaris" would've wound up another two-bit bandit king if the local Houses didn't destroy him on general principles.

But his story does have some interesting features that seem to link Amaris and ComStar. Consider:

- "Amaris" was actually born Richard Thurston-Moray on ComStar-occupied Terra. (The name Moray tracked back to a known mistress of the Usurper who went missing during the Liberation, though there seems to be a generation-long gap in the lineage.)
- At an early age (and with no small degree of prodding by local recruiters), Thurston-Moray entered the Order and would eventually work as an archivist—the perfect place to discover his buried lineage.
- New St. Andrews, at the time, was classified as a "recent" discovery by ComStar's Explorer Corps.
- At the time of his great discovery (which included either six other guys named Stefan Ukris Amaris who managed to somehow avoid being burned at the stake long enough to father kids, or six other direct ancestors he chose to retroactively grant the name to), Thurston-Moray also learned that ComStar had uncovered a secret Terran bank account funded by the original Amaris during his reign as "Emperor" there.
- This secret stash accounted for roughly 6 percent of the treasury of the Terran Hegemony before Kerensky showed up, siphoned straight from the Hegemony's taxpayers.

So, let's get this straight. ComStar just happens to get an heir to Amaris in its ranks? Said acolyte just happens to work in the archives? Where he just happens to stumble over data from two major recent discoveries ComStar just happened to come upon—discoveries that just happened to provide a key source for a base world and the resources to hire troops for a major campaign? That's an awful lot of things "just happening," isn't it?

The question is, did ComStar create this new Amaris, or was he some kind of Blakist plant, either directly or indirectly? Either way, a connection with the followers of Blake and the fallen House of Amaris seems incontrovertible. But what exactly is the connection, how far does it go, and who is in charge? More important than that, what are their plans?

Couple this with the on-again, off-again discovery of the so-called RWR Outpost #27, and the mysterious disappearance of millions of Rimmies after the fall of the Star League, and a very sinister picture takes shape. Lostech prospectors and other explorers have found no sign of the former Republic beyond the bandit kingdoms that rose in its wake, leaving whole planetary populations unaccounted for in the Near Periphery. These people went somewhere, and judging by the Stevens' discovery and its aftermath, one distinct possibility is "inward" rather than "outward."

HIDING PLANETS

So how *do* you hide a world if you don't think you have what it takes to lead a caravan of JumpShips over a year's travel into the unknown, to hide behind a nebula or two? Well, at this point, let me paraphrase Torhansson's rather long-winded seminar on the topic...



THE HIDDEN

Let's face it, folks: space is HUGE! And sensors only work so far with any kind of reliability. To begin even looking for a hidden world, one first has to know which one of those millions upon millions of stars out there one's quarry is orbiting. Mounting an expedition then becomes the next step, which is prohibitively expensive—especially in a day and age when only crazy or extremely confident JumpShip captains venture to systems where no spare parts are likely to be found should the drive core burn out. The good news is, a hidden world will be completely safe from casual observation or the idly curious.

But say the searching party is a bit more determined and resourceful. What do you need to do these days to hide from those prying eyes?

Step 1: Seal the borders. All off-world contact with your hidden world must be squelched. You can't have any HPGs or spaceports (at least none with standing control facilities, surface-to-orbit communications, active radar and ILS networks). Things like that are too easily spotted off-planet, and HPG signals from "nowhere" tend to be quite the giveaway.

Forget about trade. Even local commerce must be strictly regulated, and your communities need to be self-sufficient. A communal structure is necessary, as commercial competition breeds industry, which breeds waste, which breeds more chances to be detected from orbit.

Step 2: Radio silence. You also want no planet-bound wireless communications traffic, at least nothing that a passing ship can detect. This means no satellite network at all, and no high-capacity broadcast towers. ECM won't work, as it has its own electronic signature that gives away something afoot. Your people will need to stick to old-school fiber-optic lines, low-power relays or laser-LOS transeiving. Tin cans and string work too, in a pinch.

Step 3: Population control. This is the fun part. You see, you just can't hide a heavily populated planet. Big cities, sprawling over continents, with intricate highway and aerospace activity, are going to get noticed from orbit. Moving them underground (or underwater) may help, but that kind of thing stifles growth and, frankly, the waste of your population's activities will be noticeable.

Smaller cities—we're talking colonial-village scale—are more doable, but have to look like ruins from orbit, heavily overgrown with vegetation and the like. And you can't have many of them, or connect them with roads more sophisticated than a dirt path. This means communities have to stick close together, or it'll take days to coordinate a population when it's endangered. Underground mass transit could help, but if you're going that far, you may as well build everything and call it a day.

Any farmlands need to be disguised as random growth, looking sparse and untended at all times. Once more, underground is an option, but optimum produce is always best achieved the old-fashioned way.

Population control allows you to centralize government and whatever industry you must have into small areas, but you must

keep it controlled at all times. A good size Torhansson recommends is about, oh, ten thousand—all of whom must contribute to daily life, like an early Terran Exodus colony. But unlike the early colonies, which encouraged growth and reproduction, a hiding population can't allow itself to spread out on the surface. And extensive digging or manufacturing of submerged expansions may draw attention. So, be prepared to get draconian to maintain an almost zero-growth population.

Step 4: Get help on the outside. Even after all the trouble you've gone through, you still need to make sure the secret is kept way more proactively than simply hiding on your world with no radio or holovids to speak of. You need to make sure someone erases you from the maps, seeds your system with warning buoys (if it was once part of the Star League general census, anyway) and discourages all traffic from coming anywhere near your hidden planets. This kind of task takes a generation or more of diligent work, perhaps, followed by decades or centuries of casual observation.

The goal here is to erase your world from the collective consciousness and maybe even from every printed historical record out there. Naturally, this part takes the real conspiracy, and to hold the secret for so long, it would have to be the kind that has a life all its own—a secret society, like a cult or a brotherhood.

Know anyone who fits *that* bill?

THE BIG PICTURE

Aside from the restrictive population demands—which mainly apply only if the locals on the hidden planets enjoy a surface-dwelling lifestyle—the refugees of the Rim Worlds Republic could have done most of what Torhansson recommends for concealing worlds, so long as someone helped them disappear in the chaos of the early Succession Wars. Why anyone would assist them in such a fashion is fair game for speculation, though it could be that some of the falling Republic worlds might have been research centers or techno-warehouses.

At the time of the Republic's fall, the big culprits for helping to hide the Rimmers could only have been ComStar and House Steiner, or else the Republic had way more help from outside sources than we ever could have dreamed. Of these theories, only ComStar comes close to fitting the bill. But why?

One reason stands out: As of the Order's foundation, it claimed only one ace in the hole, one means to avoid a House Lord's invasion of Terra: the monopoly over HPGs. If a House dared such a venture, however, could HPG dominance truly have spared Terra from a full-scale invasion? In the post-Star League era, Terra was the ultimate prize, yet the House Lords knew that assaulting the planet would as likely undermine their claim to the First Lordship as validate it. So the odds were running fifty-fifty that Terra would eventually come under some House's crosshairs.

If you were ComStar, and you had only one planet to claim sovereignty over, and that planet was the biggest prize in the universe

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for a greedy House Lord, wouldn't *you* want a contingency plan? And here were the remnants of the Republic, desperate for salvation. What better way to ensure your survival than to gather these refugees, promise them that salvation, and set them up on a host of worlds at the heart of the Inner Sphere, where nobody would ever think to look for them?

Elaborate? Maybe. But if anyone in this universe of ours has been playing the long game here, it's ComStar.

...Or is it? Remember that the post-Schism ComStar has acted completely unaware of these worlds in the present day, and that the investigation into Jardine recently ended with the murder of its discoverers by operatives apparently from the Word of Blake. Could it be that ComStar, so intent on protecting their Rimmer

friends, formed a secret society around the concept that actually went over completely to the Word of Blake? Or could the Rimmers have come out of hiding among the Blakists' ranks by themselves, poisoning the breakaway "Order" from within?

Cogitate on that, dear readers, and remember that the monstrous behavior and terrible weapons of the Word must have come from *somewhere* that no Spheroid intel agency could find. Remember that, only months before this war, did we first hear the names of Gabriel and Jardine in the present tense rather than the past. Shortly before her death, Stevens released one last clue to these hidden worlds, a clue as succinct as it is dramatic:

There are at least five such worlds out there.

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GAMEMASTER'S SECTION

Long dismissed as casualties of the brutal Succession Wars, numerous worlds have dropped off the Inner Sphere's star maps over the centuries. Most fell prey to the depredations of war, and many more starved out as a consequence of neglect or trade disruption. Still others succumbed to natural disasters and were abandoned over decades of gradual decline. But some—a very few—may instead have been hidden from view, concealed by unknown masters behind a veil of secrecy and paranoia.

These hidden worlds, separated from the rest of the universe by extreme measures, may now be home to cultures alien to the Inner Sphere, from desperate refugees of the fallen Rim Worlds Republic and Terran Hegemony to a radical sect of ComStar that even now manipulates a war against all of humankind. Desperate to keep their secret, and possibly aided in this effort by a secret cabal that watches from the outside, the Hidden may be among the most xenophobic of the Inner Sphere's denizens, desperate to be forgotten and unknown to savage nations from which they have grown exiled.

Mystery surrounds the fate of many Inner Sphere worlds lost to the Succession Wars, though some—like Jardine—are more mysterious than others. The nature of the peoples of the Hidden Worlds (and what they have been doing in the shadows for centuries since they went missing) is wide open to the gamemaster. However, with the onset of the Jihad, Inner Sphere intelligence agencies—from Oriente's branch of SAFE and the remains of ComStar ROM to the Draconis Combine's Order of the Five Pillars and

the devastated shell of Wolf's Dragoons' WolfNet—have scrambled to learn all they can about several elusive hidden planets.

As of 3073, the combined intelligence of the Inner Sphere has learned several key facts about hidden worlds throughout the Inner Sphere (though no single agency knows *all* of these details to date). These facts, gleaned not only from formal intelligence sources, but also the efforts of ComStar's defunct Explorer Corps and the independent Interstellar Expeditions group, include the following:

"The Five": According to the account of Brooklyn Stevens and her crew (see *Brooklyn Stevens*, below), Word of Blake somehow maintains five hidden worlds in the Inner Sphere (one in each Successor State), which all dropped off the maps soon after the fall of the Star League. The nature, populations and activities of all of these worlds remain unknown, but all are presumed to be heavily defended yet sparsely populated. Two of "the Five" have been positively identified by name: Jardine and Gabriel.

Still unknown is how the Word came to inherit these worlds without ComStar's apparent knowledge of their existence.

The Ruins of Gabriel: The Ruins of Gabriel—a suspected shipyard or naval repair station linked by WolfNet to the Word of Blake's sudden surge of WarShip support—is now thought to be a location also known as Outpost Gabriel during the time of the Liberation, and is believed to be located in a Lyran system somewhere in the Protectorate of Donegal, between 200 and 250 light-years from Terra.

LIC analysts further believe that the recently recovered LCS *Invincible* was drawn and refit from these facilities, possibly after



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having been “abducted” during her last voyage from Hesperus II in 2853.

Jardine: Mere weeks before the outbreak of the Jihad, an autonomous computer virus hacked into an interstellar academic network maintained by Dobless Information Services and infected several historical archives, depositing coordinates for Jardine in Free Worlds League space. This “infection” was traced to several computer nodes, including one at the University of Chekswa on Donegal. Shortly after the start of the Jihad, a similar “infection” placed Jardine in the same location on some historical Free Worlds League maps as well.

Follow-up research tentatively confirmed the locations to be genuine, but a reconnaissance mission sent by the false Thomas Marik evidently found nothing of value on the world. The culprit behind the autonomous hacks was not identified, but the work bears a distinct similarity to some cyber-espionage techniques practiced by Loki.

Brooklyn Stevens/Renegade Knights: At or about the start of the Jihad, the Word of Blake launched a manhunt for Brooklyn Stevens, a mercenary explorer hired to locate Jardine by Interstellar Expeditions. Apparently successful, her discovery also piqued the interest of the false Thomas Marik, who dispatched several of his surviving Knights on a rescue mission. Reportedly, Manei Domini agents caught up with and killed Stevens and her would-be saviors in Free Worlds space, but not before she shared her discovery with the false Marik’s loyalists, including the existence of at least four more Hidden Worlds.

The hunt for Stevens and her family was apparently critical enough for the Word of Blake to dispatch Precentor Manei Domini Apollyon, whose presence was reported on Donegal some time shortly before Case White. Rumors suggest Apollyon hails from Jardine, and may have had a hand in the planet’s devastation.

RWR Outpost #27: The so-called RWR Outpost #27 that appeared briefly in Explorer Corps maps as a result of Blakist “monkey warfare” was, in fact, a satellite district of the Rim Worlds Republic where Stefan Amaris trained many of his secret forces. Comprised of eight habitable star systems in all, evidence suggests that at least two contained shipyards and many also hosted continent-sized training grounds filled with mocked-up cities resembling major sites across the old Terran Hegemony. Warehouses, many believed to have once housed entire companies of ‘Mechs, dot these worlds, as do the scars of intense nuclear and biochemical weapon bombardments.

ComStar cannot account for how the records of these worlds were lost sometime after the First Succession War, nor can they determine whether or not the worlds were used again in recent times, though evidence of numerous robotic defenses—most degraded to uselessness by age and the elements—has been reported by the few scouts ComStar could spare to investigate.

Mundo Nublar: A barren world of perpetual storms and clouds, Mundo Nublar—then tagged as EC3057-J83A—was a marginally

habitable rock a few jumps anti-spinward of the Chainlaine Isles. Acting on recent intelligence regarding an alleged Blakist super-weapon, the LIC found that the world was pockmarked with craters consistent with a massive asteroid shower, despite the absence of a major asteroid field in the system. Though the existence of this world as an alleged Word of Blake test site is a fairly recent surprise, Mundo Nublar is *not* believed to be one of the Five.

“Stefan Amaris VII”: ComStar still denies all knowledge of the self-described “Star Lord” who went by the name of Stefan Amaris VII and launched several raids against various Houses in 3055 in an effort to provoke a new round of war. Fragmentary documents unearthed recently by Alys Rousset-Marik’s resistance, however, found a link between “Amaris” and another alleged ex-ComStar acolyte named Alisendar Gyrn, who terrorized the people of Sirius and Procyon during his short reign over the so-called Sirian Holds in 3057-3058. (ComStar also disavows all knowledge of Gyrn, who has since been executed for his crimes.)

“The Deep Beyond”: Although hardly part of the Hidden, whispers of distant anti-spinward realms possibly linked to the long-fallen Rim World Republic have been largely confirmed by Inner Sphere intelligence agencies. First identified by Interstellar Expeditions (who remain tight-lipped about these—and possibly more—Deep Periphery realms), these small powers include the Society of St. Andreas, the Union of Samoyedic Colonies, and the Axumite Providence. All three realms are believed to be tiny states with a mere handful of worlds or more each, but are so far removed from the Inner Sphere—all three lie roughly as far distant as the Hanseatic League—with so many dead worlds between them, that they only routinely have contact with one another and remain largely unaware of Inner Sphere affairs to this date.

ComStar’s Secret Holdings: Sporadic references to other “hidden worlds” controlled by ComStar have turned up over the years, especially since the Schism and reformation that secularized much of the Order. Some—such as Ross 2458 and Luyten 68-28—are believed to be military bases, used for centuries to quietly reinforce ComStar’s military might and control over Terra while simultaneously keeping such assets hidden from the public. Others, like Alpha Hydri, Trentwash II, and Trisha—all located within eight to ten jumps of the Lyran-Combine border regions, according to all accounts, yet never placed on star charts anywhere—were evidently Explorer Corps discoveries rumored to have been inhabited by pirates and other refugees from the Inner Sphere.

Some of these, like Ross and Luyten, are believed to have been seized by the Word of Blake at some indeterminate point (even ComStar remains sketchy on exactly when and how these assets were lost). Meanwhile, others—like many of old Explorer Corps Periphery findings—are believed to be remote and/or abandoned worlds of little strategic value, home now only to wandering gypsies, random pirate bands, or empty ruins of questionable origins. Still others may actually be forgotten “penal colonies”, established

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as places to exile those deemed too dangerous to leave at large, yet too influential to simply kill off.

ENCOUNTERING THE HIDDEN

The implications of hidden worlds within (and beyond) the Inner Sphere may wildly with the circumstances of their disappearance and the goals of their leaders (if any). For centuries since the fall of the first Star League, when the first worlds began to vanish from star maps, they have been the playground of pirates, lostech prospectors, and explorer groups like ComStar's Explorer Corps and Interstellar Expeditions.

Joining the Hunt

Player characters will rarely encounter evidence of hidden worlds unless they are specifically assigned to organizations actively hunting for such worlds, or are brought to such locations by an accident of fate (such as an inexplicable misjump). During the Jihad, some agencies—such as Interstellar Expeditions and various intelligence agencies—have doubled their efforts to locate critical “hidden worlds” believed to be the source of Blakist “secret projects” or lostech caches that could help desperate war efforts. Even player-groups that serve a Great House or corporate interest could find themselves assigned to such a hunt, in risking the unknown behind the scenes of the Jihad.

What Dangers Await

Gamemasters interested in reflecting the inherent dangers of the lost worlds can create numerous scenarios for what might be defending a hidden world—particularly if the world is of immense significance to a major power who desperately wants to keep the secret.

Hazards a player group might face on a hidden world can range from the defense forces of the powers responsible for its secret (such as Word of Blake forces on Ross or Luyten), to the paranoid locals who might see the player characters as aliens and invaders. Forgotten Star League-era defenses, including “smart” robotic drones and automated static defenses—may even remain live, endlessly waiting for interlopers to attack. The nature of how the

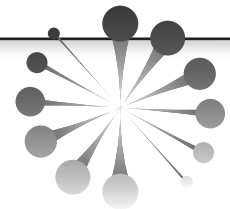
world “fell off the map” may even be a threat, as many such worlds were lost simply by virtue of the fact that horrendous weapons of mass destruction laid waste to their major population centers and life support systems. Even centuries later, lingering radiation effects, mutated and vicious fauna, or chemical contaminants could all be waiting to claim the lives of anyone foolish enough to trespass.

More curious, however, may well be what the hidden worlds lack (or seem to lack): Sprawling cities, major factories, HPGs and running spaceports—all obvious signs of industrialized and advanced technology civilization—may be invisible from orbit to landing. Radio signals and global communications networks would be close to non-existent, to minimize any chances of detection. Underground settlements, or cities disguised as ruins, may instead be more the norm, using older landline communications or even trained “messenger pigeons” to communicate between settlements, while concealed defenses pass themselves off as unassuming bits of terrain. For the unsuspecting traveler, a hidden world could look dead right up to the moment the locals emerge to attack.

Marked for Life

Even if the players should get away from a hidden world, any agency capable of keeping its secret may hunt down those who penetrated their secret—and if the secret-keepers hail from a particularly large or powerful organization like ComStar or Word of Blake, surviving the hidden world may be only the first of many challenges the players face as covert operatives and other military forces hound the players who “know too much”. Bounties could be levied against the players’ heads, and their families and friends could be threatened to force the players to surrender to the dogged pursuers.

Worse still, even attempting to expose the secret or seek out allies to defend against the secret keepers could backfire: After all, anyone clever enough to hide a planet from prying eyes may well have already bought off those that the nosy intruders would report it to.



"UNCLE CHANDY"



"UNCLE CHANDY"

Megacorporations. These Brobdingnagian organizations are no strangers to our files. Previously it was the Irian Corporation that received our attention, but now it appears the giant should be worried by an economic Kraken that has been lurking out of sight. While nobody was paying attention, one Chandrasekhar Kurita has been forging an economic empire that may now threaten even the mighty Irian.

Once again we have been fortunate to receive these copies of intercepted conversations (kindly donated by an anonymous source). It looks like we are indeed living in interesting times.

—Starling

"Good morning, Daniela. What do you have for me today?"

"Good morning, Director. I've got something interesting from the Draconis Combine."

"The Combine? Only thing I've ever found 'interesting' from there is a nice little plum wine."

"That's the point, sir. Nobody has really been paying any attention to what's been going on over there. Looks like that was a mistake."

"Fine, Daniela, fine. Let's see what you've got."

"A Kurita."

"A Kurita?"

STAGNATION

At the turn of the century, the Draconis Combine's economy was operating as a fully government-run concern. Best described as "controlled-market capitalism," corporations—while not outright owned by the state—operated only under strict government controls. Positions of prominence within a powerful corporation could be the social and political equivalent of being a member of the landed nobility. Indeed, many Combine CEOs employed noble titles and ran their companies as feudal fiefdoms, while their workers almost invariably descended from parents who were themselves employees of the company. Their lives revolved around the corporation, from birth in company-owned hospitals, to education in company schools. Combine workers lived in company housing often until their deaths (when they were cremated and entombed in company mausoleums). Purchasing everything needed from the company store (an emporium that generously provided credit against the next paycheck), many workers found themselves still paying for their first pair of shoes by the age of thirty.

With a government policy that emphasized military endeavors, and with conservative executives who did not wish to challenge the status quo, the Combine economy remained in poor shape for years upon years. Compared to the powerhouses of the Lyran Commonwealth and Free Worlds League, House Kurita's economy scarcely measured up to that of the smaller Capellan Confederation.

Meanwhile, the Combine's general xenophobia crippled its foreign trade. Merchants from other nations made a fine living

bringing luxury foodstuffs, advanced building materials and high-tech items into Combine ports. In contrast, arrogant Combine merchants found few markets abroad thanks to their questionable business ethics and the overpriced (and usually poor quality) goods they peddled. Only in the trafficking of illicit and semi-legal products did House Kurita come close to matching trade with the other Inner Sphere states, though this benefited few among the Combine citizenry.

"That sums up the Draconis Combine we all know and loathe. So where does your Kurita come in?"

"It all started just as the Third Succession War wound down."

HACHIMAN TARO ELECTRONICS

Strict government oversight in almost every aspect of the economy had a stifling effect. A new business could only be started after receiving full approval—a process that involved battling with a tangle of red tape. Once past this hurdle, a business still had to contend with the caprices of bureaucracy and endemic corruption. Thus, when the newly formed Hachiman Taro Electronics (HTE) set up a modest consumer electronics manufacturing plant in 3022, it was expected that the company would quickly fall afoul of the next inexplicable change in economic policies from Luthien—that, or be "invited" to join Tanadi Computers.

"Invited?"

"Yes sir. Hachiman is a bit of a rarity as planets go in the Draconis Combine. Plentiful natural resources and a very pleasant climate have attracted a large population. It's the perfect place for Tanadi Computers to site their headquarters and manufacturing plants. Traditionally, the planetary chairman has always been in Tanadi's top pocket. More than one rival has been...encouraged...to merge their business with Tanadi "in the interests of efficiency." Word is that Tanadi was often in tight with the local Yakuza as well."

...HTE not only survived, but by 3027 it was flourishing. Opening a new production center in the capital of Masamori, the young company now had sufficient manufacturing capacity to capture a major share of the domestic market. Predictably, the Combine's incumbent corporations did not take kindly to competition, and HTE was a target for vandalism, arson and intimidation. To their chagrin, HTE's competitors discovered that the company boasted a well-trained and equipped security force. Hachiman Taro Electronics weathered the first assaults, but faced a more serious challenge when Tanadi's chief executives began circling like hungry sharks.

Then, in June of 3027, HTE announced the appointment of a new CEO: Chandrasekhar Kurita. Kurita had been HTE's principal financier from the start, but until now his involvement had not been public knowledge. Though he did not play on his family name, the presence of a Kurita at the head of HTE gave the company's



"UNCLE CHA

enemies pause for thought. Centuries of custom had ingrained a sense of reverence—bordering on worship—for the Kurita name, so acting openly against any member of the Combine's ruling clan (no matter how far from the line of succession he might be) was unthinkable.

HTE's competitors consoled themselves, however, with Chandrasekhar Kurita's reputation, which depicted him as something of a fool. Perhaps no further action would be necessary, they thought. But if HTE's competitors believed "Uncle Chandy" (as Chandrasekhar was disparagingly known) would do their work for them and drive his company into the ground, they were sorely disappointed.

The disasters of the Fourth Succession War and the loss of the Rasalhague District left the Combine reeling. But it also forced Coordinator Takashi Kurita (at the behest of his son, Theodore) to introduce social reforms that fueled an upswing in demand for consumer goods across the Combine. HTE was perfectly positioned to take advantage of this growing domestic market.

"So how did HTE get the jump on the competition? The usual method? Blackmail, murder, kidnapping or even a good advertising campaign?"

"No. Something even more insidious than that; HTE produced products that were inexpensive and surprisingly high in quality."

"Is that ethical?"

ECONOMIC TENTACLES

New investment and the acquisition of several smaller companies fueled HTE's continuing growth over the next two decades. At the same time, Chandrasekhar Kurita began to clandestinely invest in Ilesaki Shipping, securing HTE's shipping routes and allowing him to establish an extensive network of contacts beyond the Combine's borders. Closer to home, he successfully lured Tanadi's best designers away with offers of better pay and working conditions. Marquis Redmond Hosoya of Tanadi was reportedly enraged by this "Lyran" tactic, and HTE security prevented several attempts by Yakuza *teppodama* to kill or kidnap the former Tanadi employees. There was even an attempt to assassinate Chandrasekhar, but after the assassin was killed in the act of penetrating the CEO's private quarters, an investigation identified her as a freelancer working for SAFE. None of these operations could be traced back to Tanadi, but little doubt existed about who had instigated them.

"Teppodama?"

"Low-ranking Yakuza. 'Teppodama' roughly translates as 'bullet'—they are considered expendable assets."

By the time the Clans attacked in 3050, HTE rivaled Tanadi in size and market share. The return of Kerensky's children, rather than a threat, presented Chandrasekhar Kurita with a golden

A VERY UNUSUAL KURITA

Nothing could be further from the stereotypical Kurita than Chandrasekhar Kurita. While it was traditional for males of his clan to embrace the Pillar of Steel and pursue martial glory, Chandrasekhar instead embraced the Pillar of Jade. At court, he earned the nickname "Uncle Chandy" for the familial role he played toward a younger Theodore Kurita (this despite actually being distant cousins, with Chandrasekhar only three years Theodore's senior). Considered a wastrel, he was ultimately exiled from court by Takashi Kurita, but this punishment did nothing to abate his hedonistic lifestyle. A fat and jolly character, many considered Chandy a lightweight, but appearances can be deceiving. While his peers fought amongst themselves for scraps of power and influence, Chandrasekhar Kurita quietly built a sprawling business empire and became one of the richest men in the Draconis Combine.

Uncle Chandy's achievements are all the more remarkable because he never traded on his Kurita name. Instead, he worked through a series of proxies and dummy corporations, concentrated on the Combine's commercial markets to provide quality goods at a fair price, and dealt honorably with trading partners beyond the Combine's borders. But his success in these efforts has earned Uncle Chandy many enemies. The sheer wealth and influence he amassed naturally engendered jealousy, but his blatant disregard for tradition infuriated the Combine's conservative elements (especially members of the reactionary Black Dragon Society). When he learned that Chandrasekhar Kurita had reduced his workers' hours from the traditional eighteen-hour a day to only ten, Marquis Redmond Hosoya (CEO of Tanadi Computers) was reported to be nearly apoplectic.

Just what Chandrasekhar Kurita intends to do with his wealth and power is a subject of much speculation. Though he is distant from the line of succession, it would not be unheard-of for a supposedly minor scion of one of the Inner Sphere's most notorious families to make a bid for the throne. To date, however, Uncle Chandy has demonstrated nothing but loyalty to the Combine and its Coordinator, and he apparently likes to indulge his interests in Combine history, funding several archeological and exploratory projects over the past decade.

The Draconis Combine's economy has benefited considerably from the stimulation HTE has provided under Chandy's leadership. In the long run, this may prove a reform as important as any of those championed by Coordinator Theodore Kurita.

"UNCLE CHANDY"

opportunity to branch out. In the face of the Clans' overwhelming technological advantage, the DCMS scrambled to get prototypes of recovered Star League tech into mass production. But their efforts were hampered by the loss of key component manufacturers that had been in the path of the Clan juggernaut. Unlike many long-established companies such as Tanadi, HTE's factories were new, and thus not dependent on poorly understood and maintained Star League-era manufacturing equipment. Consequently, HTE could rapidly retool and begin production of military electronics, leaving their competition in the dust. By late 3051, HTE was manufacturing targeting systems for a new generation of DCMS BattleMechs and vehicles. Technicians from HTE were also instrumental in the development of the Combine's new C³ computer systems.

In 3056, Combine media was swept by rumors that HTE was on the verge of making a breakthrough in interstellar communications. This astonishing news triggered an inevitable and violent response from the Word of Blake. Bent on maintaining their monopoly over FTL communications, the Blakists launched several attacks against HTE. The first, a commando raid on the main office compound, was repulsed with ease, but a second assault by a sizable 'Mech force required the combined strength of the Ninth Ghost Regiment and the mercenary Seventeenth Recon Regiment to repulse. Stung by these failures, the Word launched one final raid in December of 3056. Though Hachiman's Planetary Chairman, Earl Percival Fillington, was killed in the fighting, the Blakists missed their intended target: Chandrasekhar Kurita.

"FTL communications! Any word on how close HTE got?"

"Sorry, boss. All my research suggests that the whole thing was a hoax, possibly started by Tanadi. Anybody would know the Robes would go ape at the idea of someone else being able to build HPGs. Given the media coverage the story got, somebody with a lot of influence must have been behind it."

"I'm surprised the ISF didn't nip this in the bud."

"Maybe the toaster-worshippers caught the dreaded ISF napping this time."

...Marquis Redmond Hosoya's tragic death in 3056 presented Chandrasekhar Kurita with another unexpected opportunity to put an end to the bad blood between the two corporations. Tanadi's CEO had no immediate heir, and a third cousin, Malcolm Hosoya, inherited his controlling interest in the company. A career soldier in the DCMS, Malcolm had no interest in the operations of an interstellar corporation. However, the *Chu-i* was very interested in the fortune in K-bills that Chandrasekhar's agent offered for his Tanadi shares.

Now armed with a controlling interest in both companies, Chandrasekhar began to expand his holdings beyond the confines of the Draconis Combine. Through proxies, he bought up mining, logging and shipping concerns on the Davion worlds of Towne, Goderich and Hahoni. In the Capellan Confederation, he

acquired three major vineyards on Palos. Through Isesaki Shipping, he already had contacts with Lyran and Free Worlds League shipping lines, but in the wake of the formation of the second Star League the HTE-Tanadi combine seized an opportunity to forge links with the multi-national StarCorp Industries. The relationship gave StarCorp access to sophisticated military electronics (StarCorp installed HTE-manufactured C³ equipment in their new *WHM-8D Warhammer*) while providing HTE-Tanadi a secure route to foreign markets.

The reformation of the Star League allowed the Inner Sphere to finally face the Clans in a united fashion. The Smoke Jaguars were rapidly ejected from the Inner Sphere, and the Nova Cats elected to join the new Star League. These events allowed Chandrasekhar Kurita to reclaim Tanadi assets on Irece, Jeronimo and Luzerne. The brief conflict between Clan Ghost Bear and the Draconis Combine threatened these holdings, but the Tanadi sites were able to call upon HTE-employed mercenaries to help protect them.

"Well, well. Uncle Chandy has been a busy little boy. Just how much trouble is this going to cause us?"

"Director, the most immediate issue for us is his interstellar shipping interests. If push comes to shove and we end up competing for access to trade routes, we have to face the fact that Kurita has a mighty big bankroll to back him up."

"What's your read on his intentions? Is he going to keep pushing out into other markets? Having to deal with Irian Technologies is bad enough. The Free Worlds League is going to be a real small pond if we have to share it with a couple of killer whales."

IRIAN TECHNOLOGIES

As his economic empire extended its tentacles into the Free Worlds League, Chandrasekhar Kurita's activities set alarm bells ringing in the boardrooms of Irian Technologies. The growing alliance between HTE and StarCorp was especially worrisome for Sigmund Hughes, CEO of the mighty conglomerate. What had started as healthy competition between Irian and StarCorp had degenerated into something on the order of a covert war over the last decade. Irian used its position as the League's key armaments manufacturer shamelessly, and began lobbying Parliament to place restrictions on its "Capellan-owned" rival. Simultaneously, Irian prosecuted a program of espionage and sabotage against StarCorp. Intent on protecting his own corporate interests, Chandrasekhar Kurita threw his considerable resources behind StarCorp.

"I certainly don't mind if Irian gets a bloody nose. Anything that keeps them out of my hair is fine by me. Any sign who's getting the upper hand, Daniela?"

"I wouldn't say so, though Irian has been a bit more aggressive than StarCorp, especially now that they have WoB backing. Most of what HTE and StarCorp have done has just been retaliation, but Irian is pushing it."

"UNCLE CHANDY"**MERCENARIES IN THE COMBINE**

During the Succession Wars, serving the Draconis Combine was traditionally viewed as a poor choice for a soldier of fortune out to make a living. The xenophobic attitude was heavily ingrained in Combine society, and the DCMS hardly boasted a reputation as a sterling and forthright employer. A history of using the infamous "company store" scheme had undone many a mercenary command and alienated others. But the low point of House Kurita's relations with mercenaries came when Coordinator Takashi Kurita issued his fateful "Death to Mercenaries" order during the Fourth Succession War. The ill-conceived directive not only ensured that mercenaries facing Combine troops would fight all the harder (now having nothing to lose), but also cut off the weakened nation from an important source of troops that it would need in the decades ahead.

In the twenty years between the end of the Fourth Succession War and the Clan invasion, the DCMS (under Theodore Kurita's direction) turned a blind eye to businesses and nobles hiring mercenaries. The practice freed up vital troops, but House Kurita itself would still have nothing to do with the despised "money soldiers."

Then came the fateful battle on Luthien at the beginning of 3052, which at last changed the Dragon's attitude toward mercenaries. With his capital saved from the Nova Cats and Smoke Jaguars by instrumental help from the Kell Hounds and Wolf's Dragoons, Takashi Kurita was forced to save face and acknowledge the honor in some mercenary commands. As such sudden about-faces in government policy are part and parcel of life in the Draconis Combine, citizens (those who wish to keep their heads, at least) have learned to make no issue of them. Theodore Kurita's ascension to the post of Coordinator in 3055 completed the normalization of relations with mercenaries, and several small commands were hired to work alongside ComStar's Explorer Corps in their hunt for the Clan homeworlds.

In recent years, Hachiman Taro Electronics and Tanadi Computers have become the largest commercial employers of mercenaries in Kurita space, with several commands of battalion and even regimental size finding work with these companies. However, today's mercenaries are still advised to remain cautious when dealing with the Draconis Combine. While the DCMS has become much safer and more reasonable to deal with, centuries of distrust ensure that foreigners—*gaijin*—can still expect a mixed reception from the general population.

—From "A Mercenary Life," MercNet Publications, 3065

"Oh?"

"Yes, sir. Especially the last couple of years. Usually there's a kind of rhythm to this sort of affair; the pace of operations gets scaled back every now and again to allow both sides to breathe. But this time, we're not seeing that from Irian. They've been steadily escalating things, piling on the pressure. If they keep this up, the governments aren't going to be able to keep turning a blind eye to what's going on."

"Never known Irian to be so clumsy."

"Exactly! Of course, our Kurita may be about to take some direct action of his own..."

...The conflict has continued to escalate. In 3066 a chemical transporter "accidentally" crashed through the perimeter of StarCorp's Ivanograd plant on Emris IV. Only the quick actions of the mercenary security force present there prevented a chemical leak that would have shut down the plant for months. StarCorp's response was restrained. Operatives, likely working for HTE, infiltrated the studios of Irian Media Interstellar and inserted random material (some of it rather explicit) into the programming that IMI distributed across the Inner Sphere. IMI survived the scandal, but the incident was highly embarrassing for its broadcaster. In a similar manner, the crash of the StarCorp-chartered *Cloud Dancer* (a *Mule*-class DropShip) on Son Hoa in 3070 was followed by the discovery that a month's worth of IMB Systems military communications equipment contained a delayed-action computer virus that spread to other systems within the affected BattleMech or vehicle.

THE JIHAD

With the collapse of the second Star League, New Avalon, Tharkad and Luthien felt the full weight of the Word of Blake's wrath. But the Blakists had not forgotten Hachiman Taro or Chandrasekhar Kurita. In May of 3070, Masamori was raided once again. The three Level IIs of 'Mechs and battle armor faced only light resistance, as the DCMS forces previously stationed there had been drawn away by the fighting on Luthien and around Dieron. The Blakists broke into HTE's riverside compound and razed the company headquarters to the ground. However, their primary target once again escaped as loyal bodyguards spirited their charge from Masamori. Lacking forces sufficient to hold Hachiman while they hunted down Chandy Kurita, the raiders withdrew.

Apparently, this close call prompted Chandrasekhar to step up security for all of his holdings. He has since been very active in hiring mercenaries, and best estimates place his private forces at somewhere between three and four combined-arms regiments.

"Sounds like Uncle Chandy has got himself quite a lot of firepower. Sure he's not thinking of taking a run at making himself Coordinator? Especially now that his 'nephew' is gone?"

"Sir, all the data we have suggests that Chandrasekhar is just as loyal to Hohiro as he was to Theodore. I don't think the new

"UNCLE CHANDY"

Coordinator has anything to worry about. Well, anything more to worry about, I should say."

...As the Inner Sphere continues to be rocked by conflicts old and new, the grim specter of economic recession hangs over everything. The damage to the Sphere-wide industrial base and interstellar trade is on a scale not seen since the dawn of the Succession Wars. With the Draconis Combine teetering on the brink, can Chandrasekhar Kurita's business acumen save his nation?

"A shade over-dramatic at the end there, Daniela. So! Tell me what conclusions you've come to."

"The safe move would be not to get involved with this Kurita. If he's going to go around picking fights with Irian, we certainly don't want to get caught in the crossfire."

"That's the safe move. What's the most profitable one?"

"High risk, high return? See if we can buy into a piece of the action and hope HTE/StarCorp takes the Irian dinosaur down."

"Tempting. Very tempting..."

[Voiceover speaker-phone cuts in]

"Director, that gentleman from Irian Technologies is back. Do you want to speak with him?"

[Silence. The sound of fists striking a desktop.]

"No. Send him in, Marlies..."

GAMEMASTER'S SECTION

Hachiman Taro Electronics is only the most visible part of a sprawling industrial and financial empire that Chandrasekhar Kurita has built over the past half-century. "Uncle Chandy" can command wealth and influence on a scale that rivals the Successor Lords and the Khans of Kerensky's Clans. He is unquestionably a major player on the interstellar stage.

CHANDRASEKHAR KURITA

Position: CEO, Hachiman Taro Electronics

Rank/Titles: None

Age: 78 (in 3072)

Born on Luthien near the end of the thirtieth century, Chandrasekhar Kurita grew up surrounded by plots and intrigue. The court of Coordinator Takashi Kurita could be a dangerous place, as fourteen-year-old Chandrasekhar learned when his parents were murdered amid the convoluted intrigue of court life. Understanding that his own survival would hinge on persuading the powerful and ambitious that he was no threat, the young Kurita strove to appear stupid and harmless. Growing to manhood, Chandrasekhar artfully constructed a caricature personality, which the Draconis Combine came to know as the fat and foolish "Uncle Chandy." Chandrasekhar's antics scandalized the court, and Takashi Kurita finally banished him from Luthien in 3020. Free to now act without arousing suspicion, he used his inheritance to found an economic

empire and—working behind the scenes—masterminded the creation of Hachiman Taro Electronics.

Members of the Kurita clan have always been ruled by two seemingly conflicting passions: desire for power, and loyalty to the Draconis Combine. In Chandrasekhar's place, any other Kurita might not hesitate to use his wealth and influence to pursue the absolute power of the throne. But Chandy has denied himself this last, and instead has used his economic empire in the service of the Combine. Free of the xenophobia that permeates his native realm, Chandrasekhar has closely studied the other Great Houses and is not afraid to borrow ideas and apply them with great success in domestic markets.

Aside from overseeing his far-flung business concerns, Chandrasekhar Kurita's only interest (in addition to maintaining the scandalous lifestyle that exiled him from court) has been in the activities of a group known as Interstellar Expeditions. This interest appears to be personal, as one of his mother's ancestors helped form a part of the explorers' organization, and Chandrasekhar's family maintained close links with the group through the years. With his mother's death, Chandrasekhar inherited this association, and has funded an increasing number of projects using HTE profits.

Behind the comical persona he shows to the universe lurks a quick and cunning mind that has repeatedly gotten the better of some of the most powerful people in the Inner Sphere. Anyone who has had personal dealings with him quickly discovers that for all his apparent foolishness, Uncle Chandy is still a Kurita—as ruthless and determined as any who have borne the name.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

Aside from the obvious goal of making money, Chandrasekhar Kurita has a number of specific aims toward which he has labored for the past half-century:

Economic Reform

Since before the fall of the first Star League, the Combine's Coordinators have placed more emphasis on military campaigns than anything else. Even Theodore Kurita's reformist thinking was tainted by his military background. This policy left the Combine resource-poor and economically retarded by centuries of neglect. Chandrasekhar Kurita, however, perceived clearly that a military could only be as strong as the economy that supported it. Identifying the untapped potential of domestic markets for consumer goods, he used a policy of fair prices for quality to undermine traditionalist companies, forcing his competitors to adapt or perish.

Though the Draconis Combine's economy remains far weaker than that of its neighbors, just prior to the Jihad it began to enjoy steady growth for the first time since the twenty-eighth century. Chandrasekhar Kurita continues to nurture this growth, but his activities have brought him into conflict with the Combine's most conservative elements, including the Black Dragon Society.

"UNCLE CHANDY"

The Clans

Of all the Successor States, the Draconis Combine was the only one that had to face the Clans alone. The Lyran half of the Federated Commonwealth could call upon the might of the Davions to shore up their defenses, while the Free Worlds League and Capellan Confederation were hundreds of light-years behind the front lines. The Clans cut deeply into Combine space before their defeat at Tukayyid in 3052. But while the Inner Sphere's leaders soon became distracted by their old feuds, Chandrasekhar Kurita focused on the constant threat hanging over the Combine.

Where military might failed to destroy the Clans, Chandrasekhar has targeted what he sees as a blind spot in Clan society. Rather than focus on the warrior caste, he has reached out to the Clans' merchant castes, making covert contact with representatives from the Jade Falcons to the Diamond Sharks. Starting with seemingly innocuous items such as silks, spices, coffee, confections, toys and consumer electronics, Chandy hopes to alter the Clans' economic base in a way not unlike what he has done for the Draconis Combine, and weaken the warriors' power base in the bargain.

The plan is not without its dangers. While the Clan warrior castes would certainly view anything that threatened their position as something to be destroyed, the idea of treating with the enemy in any way, shape or form is equally repugnant to the xenophobic citizens of the Draconis Combine. Rumors of the operation supposedly reached the late Subhash Indrarhar's ears, who had the ISF move to eliminate Chandrasekhar Kurita "as a precaution." But Chandrasekhar anticipated such an eventuality, and his contingency plan neatly implicated Redmond Hosoya, CEO of Tanadi.

The Jihad

Chandrasekhar Kurita first came into conflict with the Word of Blake in 3056 when ISF-sponsored rumors claimed that Hachiman Taro was close to a breakthrough in interstellar communications research. In truth, HTE was never involved in FTL communications, but the rumor was enough to prompt an attack by the Word's ultra-reactionary Toyama sect. The ISF "failed to detect" the Toyama fanatics as they entered the Combine and traveled to Hachiman. During the attack, ISF operatives entered the HTE compound to assassinate Chandrasekhar, but both the Blakists and the ISF were foiled by mercenaries guarding HTE's headquarters. The Blakists, embarrassed after being used as an ISF cat's-paw, nonetheless remain unconvinced that HTE has performed no research into FTL communications, which has led to further attacks against HTE assets.

Even before the Jihad, Chandrasekhar Kurita was working against the Word of Blake. When his agents uncovered signs of collusion between the Blakists and Irian Technologies against StarCorp Industries, he offered StarCorp support. After the

Word of Blake started attacking targets across the Inner Sphere, Chandrasekhar used his influence to rally support for Coordinator Hohiro Kurita and dissuade executives in other Combine corporations from having any dealings with the Word of Blake.

Interstellar Expeditions

Inheriting his mother's contacts with this group of legend-hunters, Chandrasekhar Kurita has funded a number of expeditions to investigate subjects ranging from the truth behind the Minnesota Tribe to lost Combine worlds. Over the past decade, he has also used his contacts in Interstellar Expeditions to pursue rumors of several lost SLDF bases located somewhere in the Draconis Combine.

HOLDINGS

From humble beginnings, Chandrasekhar Kurita has built himself an impressive commercial empire, which now stretches across the Inner Sphere. The following profiles represent a cross-section of Uncle Chandy's business interests.

HACHIMAN TARO ELECTRONICS

Main Headquarters:

Garden, New Samarkand

CEO: Chandrasekhar

Kurita

Main Products:

Consumer electronics,
military fire-control systems,
C³ computer systems

Profile: Starting on a modest scale, HTE owes its rapid growth in equal parts to strong financial backing from Chandrasekhar Kurita, and to a business approach that borrowed heavily from Lyran and Marik models.

Focusing initially on servicing the growing domestic demand for consumer electronics, HTE's early years were marked by fierce competition with Tanadi Computers. Since then, the company has expanded its operations and now also produces advanced electronics for the DCMS.

Formerly headquartered on the west bank of the Yamato River in Masamori, the corporate headquarters were temporarily moved to New Samarkand in the wake of the Word of Blake raid in 3070.



"UNCLE CHANDY"

TANADI COMPUTERS

Main Headquarters: Masamori, Hachiman

CEO: *Mirza* Peter Abdulsattah

Main Products: Home, office and government computers; military communications systems

Profile: Producer of computers for office, government and home use, Tanadi also designs and installs military communications systems.

The bitter rivalry between Tanadi and upstart Hachiman Taro Electronics ended finally in 3056 with the death of Marquis Redmond Hosoya. Redmond's heir had little interest in business, opening the door of opportunity for Chandrasekhar Kurita to buy out the new marquis. Having secured a controlling interest in the company, Chandrasekhar installed his aide, *Mirza* Peter Abdulsattah, as CEO to oversee operations.

The liberation of Combine worlds from the Smoke Jaguars allowed Tanadi to reclaim important assets on Irece, Jeronimo and Luzerne.



METALS OF THE EARTH

Main Headquarters: Jassen, Nox

CEO: Marquis Unno Kitabake

Main Products: Ores, refined metals, mining equipment, chemicals and synthetics

Profile: Dating back to the Star League era, this mining company has expanded into the production of chemicals and synthetics. One of the original founding partners was a Kurita, and the company has always enjoyed close ties with the Kurita family. At least one Kurita has always served on the Board of Directors, which currently includes Chandrasekhar Kurita.

A well-preserved 104, the venerable Unno Kitabake shows no signs of stepping down. A brilliant man, he has earned renown across the Inner Sphere for his innovations in mining and processing.

As the Combine's largest manufacturer of myomers, Metals of the Earth was given the task of reverse-engineering the Federated Commonwealth's triple-strength myomers by the DCMS.



ISESAKI SHIPPING

Main Headquarters: Ukonsoi, Isesaki

CEO: Viscount Ernest Machida

Main Products: Interstellar Shipping

Profile: With a history dating back almost six hundred years, Isesaki Shipping has been fortunate enough to hold a royal patent to trade anywhere in the Inner Sphere. Turbulent relations between the Combine and its neighbors have sometimes made these operations difficult, but Isesaki's agents and extensive contacts with "independent" traders have always allowed the company to find a way to its goals.



"UNCLE CHANDY"**TURANIAN TRANSPORT COMPANY**

Main Headquarters: Port Howard, Towne

CEO: Ignatius Brown

Main Products: Planetary freight and passenger shipping

Profile: Established during the Second Succession War, TTC is the largest freight service on Towne. Using cargo airships to traverse the rugged terrain of the Eigophian and Gunderland mountains, the company transports copper ore and timber to Port Howard for processing and offworld export. The beautiful and durable hardwood from the Eigophian mountain bloodwood is prized throughout the Draconis March.

Chandrasekhar Kurita bought this company in 3057, using his acquisition as an excuse to deploy mercenaries on Towne to foil a plot by the Black Dragon Society. The Society had recruited *Tai-sho* Jeffery Kusunoki, and together they had formulated a plot to grab Towne, in order to rekindle war between Kurita and Davion at a time when the Combine could ill afford to be distracted from the Clan threat.

**TOWNE MINING, INCORPORATED**

Main Headquarters: Port Howard, Towne

CEO: Bernadette Knox

Main Products: Copper Mining

Profile: The operators of the Copper Queen Mine, a spectacularly rich copper mine located deep in the Eigophian Mountains, TMI has expanded operations into Western Hyboria where the company discovered new veins of high-grade copper ore. For the sake of economy, the company operates its own processing plants at the mine head. TMI currently has an exclusive contract with the Turanian Transport Company to ship the refined copper to Port Howard.

Towne Mining was among the companies Chandrasekhar Kurita purchased in 3057. Company employees—skilled explosives experts to a man—worked alongside Chandrasekhar's mercenaries to defeat *Tai-sho* Jeffery Kusunoki and his Dieron Regulars.

**JOYOUS SPRINGS WINES****Joyous Springs Wines**

Main Headquarters: Xer, Palos

CEO: Elizabeth Roshenco

Main Products: Wine production

Profile: A blanket company encompassing three of the biggest vineyards on Palos, Joyous Spring Wines enjoyed more than twenty years of booming business after the world fell to House Davion toward the end of the Fourth Succession War. Fine Palos wines found a place on the tables of the rich and powerful throughout the Federated Commonwealth. That all changed when the Capellan Confederation seized control of the world again in 3057. Cut off from its most profitable market, Elizabeth Roshenco's company was in dire straits financially and Capellan businessmen were pressuring the CEO to sell the company for a tenth of what it was worth. They were sorely disappointed when Chandrasekhar Kurita's agents arrived to offer Roshenco a generous financial rescue package and access to Kurita's extensive shipping interests.

Once again able to reach lucrative markets in Lyran and Federated territory, Joyous Springs Wines has rebounded from financial ruin and is in negotiation with several other vineyards that have expressed an interest in joining the company.



"UNCLE CHANDY"

SECURITY

For day-to-day security, the businesses of Chandrasekhar Kurita's sprawling empire deploy their own personnel. Led by combat veterans, these security detachments are well trained and highly motivated. These troops can be considered equivalent to Regular or even Veteran rifle infantry. For more sensitive assignments, Chandrasekhar hires well-armed mercenaries.

MERCENARIES

Pursuing his own private agendas intended to ensure the survival of the Draconis Combine, Chandrasekhar Kurita often has to retain the services of mercenaries. These troops perform a wide range of duties: guarding their employer's extensive commercial holdings, gathering intelligence on his enemies or occasionally performing "wet work."

The following is a sample of the more notable mercenary commands currently answering (directly or indirectly) to Uncle Chandy:

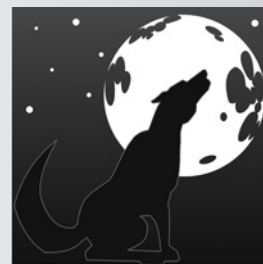
"UNCLE CHANDY'S" HIRED GUNS

21st Centauri Lancers: Though suffering from grievous losses on Tukayyid when the Word of Blake attacked in 3067, the Lancers have reformed as a reinforced combined-arms battalion. Knowing of the feud between Chandrasekhar Kurita and the Blakists, Colonel James LeMonds was eager to accept a contract that promised a chance of fighting their common enemy.

The Lancers are currently stationed on Hachiman to secure Masamori and protect the site of the Yamato River facility while reconstruction efforts are underway.



Seventeenth Recon Regiment: Hailing from the Free Worlds League, the Seventeenth (informally known as Camacho's Caballeros) has just returned to employment with Chandrasekhar Kurita. Commanded by Colonel Gavilán Camacho, this BattleMech regiment has been positioned on Chaffee in the Lyran Alliance. Operating from that world, the Seventeenth is sweeping the surrounding systems for bandits, who have been raiding systems between the Word of Blake Protectorate and the Jade Falcon Occupation Zone.



Devil's Brigade: A new mercenary command, formed around a core of personnel formerly affiliated with Interstellar Expeditions, the Devil's Brigade, like the Periphery Star Guard, has been loaned out to protect StarCorp Industries' production facilities. Best known as one of the commands to have encountered the enigmatic Green Ghosts (and survived), the battalion is now stationed on Son Hoa.



Star Seeds: A recently formed marine infantry command specializing in zero-g operations, the Star Seeds have been retained to provide increased security on JumpShips and DropShips chartered by Chandrasekhar Kurita.



Periphery Star Guard: Created from several smaller mercenary commands formerly employed by ComStar's Explorer Corps, this battalion-sized command is another unit that has encountered the mysterious Green Ghosts on the Periphery frontier.

The Guard has been loaned to StarCorp Industries to reinforce their defenses around the Loburg production plants.



The Bounty Hunter: Though he refuses to accept a full-time contract from HTE's CEO, the infamous Bounty Hunter has been employed to undertake a number of commissions for Chandrasekhar Kurita. Whenever Chandrasekhar wants something (or someone) found that has eluded his other agents, the Hunter can expect a call.





THE SOCIETY



THE SOCIETY

NOTES

This one's interesting, so I'm not going to spoil it with any kind of running commentary. The intercepted communications from the usual sources who sent them to me paint an interesting enough picture without it. But if there truly is a Scientists' Cabal out there, the big question is, what are they doing, and would we want to see them succeed?

—Starling

To: Khan Marthe Pryde
Fr: Office of the Watch
Re: Mutual Concerns

My apologies for being obtuse, my Khan. Discretion is essential. Scientist Peri is missing.

I know she was carrying out a mission for you. Not much escapes me these days, numbered as they are. Therefore, I know the attached files will be of interest to you. I have taken the liberty of reviewing them and am disgusted by the picture they present. I know I once told you "better to know what part of the garden the snake lies in" as a method of containment, but if the implications I see here are even half true, this thing has spread beyond the bounds of the Falcon.

It seems our backworld friend has a much larger web than we first suspected. Scientist Peri appears to have stumbled upon some particularly nasty strands; hence her disappearance. While the lives and deaths of the lower castes are not of our concern, I believe in this case we should take it as a warning sign.

With the turmoil currently swirling around Ironhold and the Grand Council, it is best to be even more vigilant. Therefore, I ask my Khan's permission to form a Cluster of troops to conduct some investigations along the Jade Route, to follow up some other hunches I have. Command of this Cluster should go to a trusted warrior under my authority; with your acceptance, I will hold Trials immediately. I have no doubt Star Colonel Pryde will do well with this opportunity.

It is the least I can do for the person I consider as our next Loremaster.

With respect,

Loremaster Kael Pershaw
/att

THE SOCIETY

My Khan, forgive my informality. I am in haste and cannot take the time to record this with the decorum befitting the Falcons' greatest leader since our Founder.

I have uncovered many things lately that shock, abhor and sicken me. I have collected as much as I can, though I regret being unable to understand it all. I have included what notes I could.

I believe Balzac—I mean, Scientist Etienne—is part of something much, much larger than a personal power empire. The implications are so staggering, if improperly uprooted, this thing could shake the very foundations of our society. I am astounded that so much has gone on without notice by the warrior caste, and this grave oversight may well spell the death of the Great Father's way.

Then again, perhaps I am just delusional in my old age.

I suspect they have become aware of my activities. Nothing I can pinpoint, but my warrior's instinct has not fully atrophied. It is as if I can *feel* someone watching me, even in a closed and secured room. I am fairly certain they will act soon. I do not, however, believe they are aware of my infrequent communications with you. Which of course, gives you the upper hand.

My Khan, please know I have served my Clan to the best of my abilities. I am honored to know you and my greatest regret is being unable to fight by your side, as true sibkin should.

May Kerensky and Hazen guide your actions, my Khan. Or we shall surely fail.

—Peri



THE SOCIETY

THE SOCIETY

SIGNS OF CONSPIRACY

—Last modified 10/30/70

I'm at a loss where to begin here. What I've found over the past five years simply staggers the imagination and challenges the very nature of the Great Father's society. I wish it to not be true, yet there's just too much out there to prove otherwise. You have to look for it, but it's there.

Dear Kerensky, it's there.

Ok, so I'll start with the top, then.

This conspiracy—I'm calling it "the Society" from this point out—seems to reside mostly within the scientist caste. But not just the caste of *one* Clan, as originally thought. No, it covers nearly all of them.

From what I can piece together (and keep in mind, this is my analysis and conjecture, connecting several seemingly innocuous bits of data), the Society casts aside normal Clan conventions. It's ruled by a select few; exactly who, I don't know, but I have my suspicions. From what I can gather, top scientists in Clan Coyote may be calling the shots; so much of my data seems to indicate directives, challenges, instructions and methods flow from Tamaron and the Coyote labs. Also, given the Coyote Clan Council's predilection for "going with the flow" of scientist suggestions, this seems a solid assumption.

Key leaders, however, appear to hail from several other Clans as well.

Before I dissect this any further, it is worth noting that by and large, the scientist caste *as a whole* is not involved with the Society. Most lower-echelon Clan scientists, from what I have seen, still follow the wills and ways of their particular Clan. Nevertheless, what appears abnormal is the large number of upper-level scientists who either seem to answer to a "higher calling" or are named/mentioned in the various data my associates and I have accumulated. If this Society wields the majority of the caste's power, then indeed they are more dangerous than the warrior caste realizes.

Some key information I've gathered indicates that the Society holds to a vision of the Great Father's Way that is different from—and in many ways contrary to—the Way of the Warrior. It's almost as if they think Kerensky's vision was incomplete, and it is their job to interpret and resolve it.

Just as the true Clan warrior follows and adheres religiously to Kerensky's ideals, the scientists of the Society follow and adhere to the key principles of science and the scientific method. Most dangerous is their apparent assumption that science is the key to civilization—that without their science, there is nothing.

It is ironic, that the "might makes right" mentality of our "honored" warriors has truly failed to bring to fruition the glorious promises of Nicholas and his father. Though the ideals of law by combat and absolute rule are lofty, they cannot exist without assistance from other sources. It is a shame that consequence never seems to appeal to our hot-blooded genetic subjects—to them, existence is simply a matter of who can beat up who, with what arms tied behind them, for some nebulous sense of honor; such acts only exist as bits and bytes in a chip, stored to record their deeds, triumphs and failures—all simply so that the forced "evolution" we practice in the labs can bring changes.

Changes that never come, of course.

Thanks to us.

Do the warriors not realize that the weapons they beat themselves with, the BattleMechs that make up their fearsome commands, the WarShips that transport them to distant worlds—all of these are products of science? Our slavish adherence to the immutable laws of the universe has produced countless benefits to humanity. And to the Clans. Where would the Elementals be without our refinement of HarJel? Better yet, they wouldn't exist without our tinkering with baseline genetic codes! Every time I see one of these hulking soldiers, I cannot help but smile at the thought that our initial testing for this phenotype was intended to create a sub-race of the laborer caste, to do *our* grunt work while we pursue loftier goals. Damn those Clan Wolf geneticists—those short-sighted fools—who instead turned the warriors' eyes toward the battlefield possibilities.

Science rules this universe. War does not. War cannot last; it is the destruction of mutable matter, nothing more. Claiming one world for one flag does not constitute power. Molding the genetic code, eliminating entire disease strains, even genetic adaptation for hostile environments—THAT is true power. Taking what the universe has given us and exerting our control—THAT is the vision Nicholas should've come to understand.

Too bad they killed him.

—GeneLeader Jarkuta Crick

[I found this entry in a junked database outside Tamaron City last year. It was simply coded—though most of the rest of the data was corrupted. I think whoever was supposed to clear these ended up using a simple command line to wipe them out and not a full-bore scouring virus. I found some other data on here, but this was the most intact. —P 7/29/68]



THE SOCIETY

SOCIETY STRUCTURE

Interestingly enough, even the Society contains subdivisions and an archaic rank structure. As our warriors base their rank and honor on their exploits and activities through the codex, Society members seem to base theirs on what classification of discipline they work in, followed by a “classification list” that keeps records of their successful experiments and other formulae. Genetics, apparently, is the highest of the ranks, followed by Armaments, Humanities, Space and Conventional. Militaristic-sounding titles are observed (Scientist-General, Control Commander, Lab Captain, and so on), and deference is given to the older members of the caste. I suspect other levels exist in the chain, as some data indicates a certain closeness to the Dark Caste that hints at a degree of control.

The Society, however, largely ignores Clan nomenclature. While some Clan scientists identify themselves with their Clan’s totem—the Steel Vipers and the now-extinct Jaguars being rigid examples of this—most Society scientists are more comfortable identifying themselves by what discipline they practice. Though this ideology tends to surface across the caste as a whole, it is blatantly obvious within the Society ranks; most of the reports I’ve come across barely mention typical Clan identifiers. This level of

communication and familiarity makes it difficult to pinpoint which Clan these caste members hail from.

PLAYING GODS?

The Genetics discipline contains by far the largest percentage of Society members. Because of our intense focus on genetic legacies and Bloodhouses, the elevation of this discipline borders on the spiritual. Some Clans take this genetic worship too seriously, which has in turn given these scientists near carte blanche in their own projects with little warrior interference.

While the discovery of unreported crossbreeding and experimentation with various Bloodhouses was shocking—and dealt with quickly by my Khan—the subsequent banishment of Etienne seems only to have fueled the fires of conspiracy. I have found some evidence that illegal crossbreeding continues, often mixing blood legacies of Clans in arrangements that would probably gall most warriors into apoplectic fits. I suspect these illegal sibkos are being raised in hidden camps much like the ones I discovered on Ironhold. However, based on this evidence, I also strongly suspect that additional genetic testing and experimentation is occurring, beyond the selective breeding with which most warriors are familiar.

For years now, rumors of a new phenotype have circulated among the genetic community, of which I am a member. Of course, these “rumors” were based on fact. The Jaguars’ Proto-Mech project, when finally exposed (ironically by an Inner Sphere invasion), seemed to prove such rumors true, as the Jaguars had begun a special phenotyping program to breed their ProtoMech pilots using failed or “flat” genetic lines (mostly from aerospace Bloodnames). Once the project was disseminated among the rest of the Clans after the Great Refusal, the rumors should have faded.

They did not.

Per my Khan’s request, I continued to pay attention to things and discovered that there may be as many as three—and possibly more—other secret phenotyping programs undergoing development. What these phenotypes are for, I do not know, nor can I begin to surmise. I hope they are merely improvements on current protocols; one Elemental protocol seems to be exactly that. But I cannot connect the other two projects with anything currently known—and that concerns me as much as it thrills me.

Sudden thought: what if they are developing phenotypes that cannot be used by the warrior caste?

Founder’s Name, that thought alone scares me.

THE SOCIETY

To: Ursula Tesla, Tamaron, Armaments
Fr: Richard Edison, New Kent, Armaments
Timestamp: 8-12-64

Ursula, I am shamed that all of the work we put into the ATM project has been shortchanged by Scientist-General Remer’s decision to “release” it to the warrior caste. The weapon has far more potential than the warriors could possibly see.

I do understand the decision, however. Khan Koga’s continued interference with the project pretty much forced our hands. If we hadn’t given it up so quickly, I’m sure it would’ve brought more scrutiny into our labs, which is dangerous at such a critical juncture.

I suggest we discuss with General Remer the possibilities of getting this weapon into the hands of other Clans—starting with our Clan’s allies, of course. Such an “appearance” of layered acceptance will definitely keep the warriors’ focus on Warden/Crusader ranting, allowing us to continue further research without interference.

—Edison

[One of my assistants discovered this amid the ruins of the lab explosion on Tamaron in late ‘67. It was on typis paper, a material with which the Loremaster is surely familiar. Took us a bit to find the right chemical key, but as you can see from my scan... —P 1/14/68]



THE SOCIETY

[Voice 1]: *[filtered]* "ject 53A experi%nced severe headaches again, though functionality was still eig%y percent of n*rms."

[Voice 2]: "That's e#couraging. And the rest %# the gr%up?"

[Voice 1]: *[filtered]* "Operating at ac#eptable levels. The Hazen-Kuf%el group seems to have exhibited h#gth traits in vision and cognitive reaction. #*%@ising."

[Voice 2]: "As exp#cted. What of the Kufael-Andr%ws mix?"

[Voice 1]: *[filtered]* "Subpar. Two have suc@%mbed to Yamki Syndr#me. I su#%est this line be scrapped, as this is the third c&#@rol group with high failure rate. It seems the matches with our Tier l%#es are more con#*%tent. ...*[corruption]*. . . exceptional blood typing and motor. . .*[corruption]**[file ends]*

[It seems the unauthorized testing of Bloodnames is more widespread among the Clans than initially understood. I looked up Yamki Syndrome. It appears to be a genetic disease recently discovered by Coyote scientists, in regard to various incompatibilities among certain genomes. It is fatal, with no known cure. —P 9/13/63]

Less well developed—but still potentially dangerous—is an apparently thriving market between certain genetic laboratories and the Dark Caste. While tissue, blood and organ traffic is not unknown to human experience, the idea of such prominent scientists with abundant resources trafficking warrior body parts with known bandit-caste surats is as disgusting as it is baffling. The imagination can concoct many extreme theories as to why, but regardless, this practice seems to be thriving between certain parties.

I am certain now that part of the Burrock shame we uncovered not so long ago has to do with these abhorrent dealings. The problem I see is that while the Adders absorbed Clan Burrock, their failure to eradicate the Burrock identity from the rest of the castes seems only to have complicated matters. I have personally been involved in a couple of projects with former Burrock scientists. These scientists, incredibly, continued to refer to their Clan in the present tense, as though it still exists—despite admonitions from me and other Falcon scientists. I wonder if the Adders know they may have a larger problem than they realize.

SOCIETY

SOCIETY OPERATIONS

As I have tried to understand this complex web of the Society, it has become more and more apparent that not every Clan is tainted by this conspiracy. Rigidly adherent Clans—such as the Vipers and Blood Spirits—show little or no evidence of collusion. Either these castes are just as rigid-thinking as their Clan edicts indicate, or they're so deeply involved that no evidence can be found of their perfidy. I tend to think the former; Viper scientists are notorious for their constant issuances of Trials of Refusal regarding lab results and the insane chain of command for reporting conclusions.

Other Clans, such as the Scorpions and Hellions, seem indifferent. Either their castes—just as lax in some areas as our own—are ignorant of the Society, or they were not deemed "important" enough for Society inclusion. As each Clan's caste has a primary focus in its disciplines (Coyote in weapons, Falcons and Adders in genetics, Wolves in conventional sciences and so forth), maybe these other Clans are considered as recruiting pools. Or worse, as test subjects.

And now I think my paranoia is getting the better of me.

Better I change direction and run down the list of rumored and hinted experiments going on under the warrior caste's collective nose (or with its possible tacit approval).

Armaments is focused solely on the development of weapons. Because I lack the necessary skills to understand such engineering, I cannot follow some of the data, nor can I make conclusive assumptions. I will include the information I've discovered, if only to have someone more qualified than I make better educated guesses. I do know there has been a buzz recently regarding the "disappearance" of the *Ancestral Home* at Tamaron. Most Coyotes insist it's on a standard training regimen to the farther reaches of the system, but darker stories—told only after several dozen quaffs of fusionnaires—speak of grievous injuries to crew members, shifting systems and some type of "ghost" inhabiting the

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[31990] Levels are still too high at this point.

[42991] So I'm not sure I'm following. Do you want to execute a transfer or no?

[31990] We do, yes. After the recent battles on Lum, we have an exceptional overage of tissue and blood for your dissemination.

[42991] Ok, then. Standard rates, though we're going to need to augment our initial order.

[31990] I told you, we have to be careful moving those particular items to your neighborhood.

[42991] Then use your mercies to slide it by the Adders. Not like it's that difficult, quiaff?

[31990] Aff. Of course, they are Burrocks at heart, so I suppose they can be reasoned with, if things go sour.

[42991] They'll cooperate more than you know. Some of them are still very much a part of us.

[31990] That's not what we're worried about. They're still warriors, and thus worthy of respect—and suspicion.

[42991] Granted. All right, we'll hold back on the items. But you owe us.

[31990] Owe you? Hardly. You're getting your tissue, and at a bargain, to boot. Keep pushing us and see just how long in the dark you last. We burned the Burrocks once, we can easily burn them again—and remember,

this time, it'll take down another Clan.

[42991] Point taken. See you in two weeks. But you and me? We have more personal issues to discuss.

[Discovered this buried in a Chatterweb server. I had some of my friends—I can't call them agents, it smacks so much of the Watch—do some inquiries for me. I can't be certain, but I think some of the remains collected for vat mixing went missing. It's horrifying to consider, and completely out of character for a Clansman, but the doubt remains. The numbers just don't even out. Or maybe I'm getting paranoid. —P 3/6/68]

THE SOCIETY

battle computer. When drunk, some Coyote warriors sneer about the forays with the Falcons, claiming their commanders “wisely” removed the ship from the system’s defense bid due to “malfunctions.” As near as I can tell, this was technically true, but the official reports don’t necessarily match up.

THE SOCIETY

[Ok, so after some paranoid thoughts, I ran across this in a labor caste newsnet article on Circe. –P]

Seems our warriors like playing jokes on each other, to keep themselves sharp. According to the Loremaster’s office, a recent Watch report included some bizarre sightings in the deep jungles outside of Dehra Dun. Our intrepid warriors—unblooded and out of their sibko training schools—ran across two large, unidentified creatures. Hairy, about eight feet tall, and mandrill-like in appearance, the “intruders” were discovered in a clearing lounging in the sun. Now, as every good Circian knows, there are no fire mandrills or other monkey-like creatures inhabiting in our jungles.

According to the report, the two warriors were so startled that by the time they reacted, the two monkeymen had “leaped up with surprising grace into the branches of a nearby tree, and swung away from the area. One of the intruders was heard to swear in a very Clanlike manner.” The two Raven watchmen searched the area for an hour and found no trace of the intruders.

While the Loremaster’s office did issue an alert, several sources within the Watch command indicated that the encounter may well have involved some of the Fire Mandrill Elementals visiting on Clan business. “Every Raven knows the Mandrills have issues with hygiene—who would not want to run naked through our beautiful jungles?”

Mandrill officials have made no comment, though someone did issue a Trial of Grievance for the slanderous comments. That Trial will take place tomorrow at Circe Recreational Field, number four.

In the meantime, castemen, keep your eyes peeled for our resident monkeymen. Holographic evidence will be rewarded with extra credit allotments.

[Is it within the realm of possibility that...? No. It is unfathomable. This has to be the delusions of two wetnurse sibkids. Or does it? –P 8/20/68]

WHEELS WITHIN WHEELS

Which reminds me about the official records regarding Huntress and the ProtoMech projects.

On a whim, I examined what I could of the data taken by the various Clans. Long analysis shortened, it seems that while ProtoMechs are a staple to some Clans, most have by now discarded the program as more wasteful than useful. I know Clan Jade Falcon came to that conclusion.

Yet... some evidence points to a continuation of the program, despite official Clan policy.

I believe—for the Falcons—that certain scientists think that if the warrior caste has deemed the project a failure, they are free to continue developing it anyway. This seems to stem from the attitude that the Clan Council no longer requires updates, status reports, testing observations and the like, and thus, it is cast from the collective Council’s mind. But if resources remain available to continue the program...then it can go on, right under the Council’s nose.

I suspect this may be the case here. While the project is indeed “dead”—for our Clan’s purposes, anyway—selected raw materials, components and the like are still being accepted and transferred. The numbers are small (accounting errors, possibly), but they are there.

Which means that if Etienne is continuing the program, then why? For what purpose? More important, if Etienne is part of this Society, how many other Clans with “failed” ProtoMech projects are still involved? And again, this begs the question. *Why?*

The ProtoMech project wasn’t necessarily a failure, when considered throughout the whole of the Clans. Indeed, some Clans field them in large quantity. However, I’ve also seen reports of new weaponry surfacing for these units—some produced by Clans that have deemed those projects unnecessary, or as a backup to augment second-line forces in place of vehicles. If that is the case, how are these Clans producing such innovations for an admitted evolution to their primary weapon of choice? Is the Society progressing in other research and development akin to the crossbreeding of genetic legacies? And if so, why?

Damn, there’s my paranoia again.

OK, moving on. Other somewhat-substantiated rumors involve new terraforming techniques being tested in the Tanite worlds by the Adders. A “smart armor” rumor—revolving around theories regarding our smart building construction technologies—emanates from Tokasha, though the Horses are more absent than present there lately. And of course, the constant speculation about discovery of a new colony world or two, despite the fact



THE SOCIETY

THE SOCIETY

[An assistant managed to catch part of this conversation in a recreational center's refresher area. Not an exact transcript; it's mostly from his memory. Take it for what you will. -P]

"Techie #1 was discussing something about the game these two apparently had completed, and made some joking comment regarding deceiving his opponent. What caught my attention was the mention of the Jaguars—something on all our minds, after their recent string of defeats at the hands of the barbarians. Something to the effect of 'suckered you like we did those poor Jaguar lobbies with the LAAM system.'"

"As an aside, I'd worked with Colin on

adapting the Laser Anti-Air Missile system for the *Night Gyrs*. What a crock that was, by the way.

"Techie #2 then laughed, and said, 'yeah, what suckers they were. I knew we had them when that trial we rigged for the prototype went just as we planned. I mean, come on. Those Jaguars do not know surat shit about defense systems.'

"Techie #1 agreed, mentioning something crude about how that showed, regarding their belly-up performance on *Huntress*. 'Their arrogance and closed-minded processes only prove they are not fit for inclusion with the rest of the Progressive Clans.'

"Techie #2 mumbled something in response, then changed the subject.

"The reason I brought this up to you, Scientist Watson, is that it seems to confirm my group's suspicions that some scientists are developing inferior technology simply to sate warrior-caste anxiousness. I know the LAAM is an old—and, thankfully, now dead—system, but this set off alarms in my head.

"If indeed some Clan scientists are developing inferior weapons and 'presenting' them to the warriors—then either these scientists are idiots, and the Falcons have nothing to fear, or their energy and attention is elsewhere and apparently needs to be hidden from the warriors. The question then becomes, why?"

—Scientist Steven Ford

that no Clans have claimed new worlds in their Councils or have any known shipments traveling to new destinations. Interestingly enough, few Shark vessels have been seen lately among the Pentagon worlds, and their normal merchant fleet in the area has dropped by more than half. Many Shark crews have reportedly begun to pull triple tours and longer shift hours. I tend to discard such information, as it is merchant- rather than scientist-oriented, but it is curious nonetheless. If it's the Society, though, why would they need new worlds when our own homeworlds are easily large enough to hide most facilities? Witness the camps on *Ironhold*.

I am rambling now.

Forgive me. My nervousness is getting the better of me. I swear I am being observed nearly all the time, even in "secured" rooms. Though I have little evidence to prove it, I suspect the large collection of data I've amassed has been noticed by now. And if this Society is even half as competent as I fear they are, I am truly frightened.

Fear—probably another reason I washed out of warrior training. Even now, I cannot shake it.

Though I do not fear for my life. What I fear most now is that if the Society succeeds at whatever their goal is (something I've not entirely discovered, but only suspect), then the Clans as whole will change, and drastically. Great Father, I hope not.

THE SOCIETY

...<garble>...esting has compl...<garble>...ase stage four. Cycle continues as predicted, with dissipation of kinetic ener...<garble>...ile little damage is noted to targeted impact area. As the theory predicted, less than a nan...<garble>...ar-instantaneous deflection of the projecti...<garble>...oderate power requirement. Amplification of cycle should increase area of protection on a scale of magnitude equal to the amplitu...<garble>... ext step is installation of system test on the Anc...<garble>...

[Another piece of data salvaged from that discarded database on Tamaron. I've no idea what the hell this is—my specialty is genetics, not physics, or whatever this might be—but I have included it for completeness. -P]



THE SOCIETY

GAMEMASTER'S SECTION

That most members of the Clan scientist caste have a superiority complex when it comes to their own importance is a given. They are the Keepers of every Clan's bloodlines, the developers and engineers of new weapon technologies, and they believe they are most responsible for the Clans' continued survival, beyond even victories in battle. Some take this attitude even further, plotting for the day when they can openly take power from the warriors and rule according to Kerensky's "true" vision: the laws of science.

The Scientist Cabal is made up of those with this most extreme viewpoint. In their vision, Clan identity is more often ignored than emphasized. Such a society would need to operate under extreme secrecy and remain compartmentalized, with only a select few sitting on a virtual ruling council, directing the overall ebb and flow of Clan research and development through secret channels. Though privately eschewing Clan loyalties, the cabalists of some Clans would be more representative in such a conspiracy than others, depending on how rigid, controlling or simply demanding their warrior castes are. In Clans with a more liberal interpretation of Kerensky's Way, cabal members may find themselves with even more freedom to conspire against the warrior elite.

So desperate is the need for secrecy across these cabals that most members would rarely know more than a few others within the conspiracy—and even then, such contacts will likely be only those within their own discipline or area of expertise. Scientist cabal members would also need to be masters of misdirection,

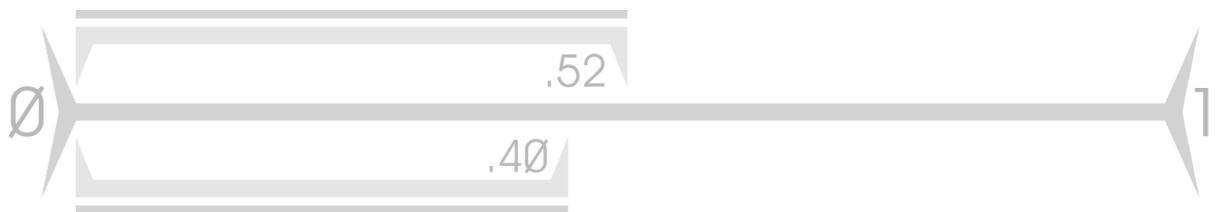
for they enjoy a wide range of freedom to execute their own plans only so long as the warriors focus their energies elsewhere. Cabal members therefore keep contact with fellow members to a minimum, exchanging communications only in code, and holding face-to-face meetings under such tight security that even Inner Sphere intelligence organizations would have a hard time cracking them.

Because scientists are often involved in cutting-edge technological production and study, it is not unusual for cabal members to carry or use prototype weapons and equipment. Trueborn scientists can be the most dangerous, as their warrior training serves them well in the rare conflict that arises. Depending on how involved a cabal cell is within the Society, their intelligence and security networks can rival or even exceed the power of the Watch, thus keeping the scientists one step ahead of the warrior caste's intel arm.

A secret cabal is the antithesis of Clan society; if discovered, the warrior caste would waste little time in eradicating such resistance. Some Khans and other high-ranking warriors may be aware of extraneous scientist activity, however, and permit such activity for reasons only they can explain.

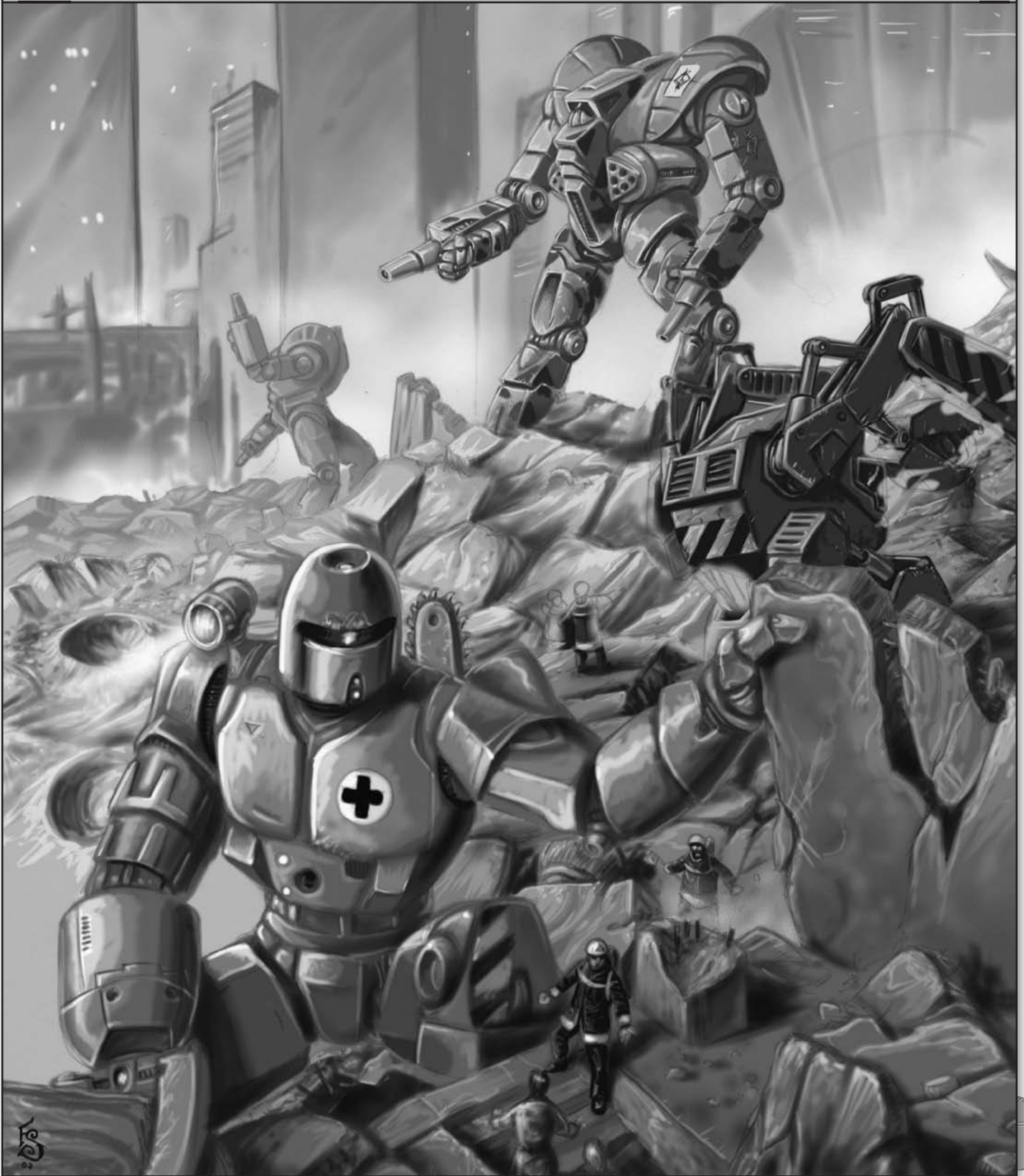
Ultimately, the scientist cabal's activities should be portrayed as mysterious and complex. At any given time, it may be unclear how far their plans have progressed, and what form such plans might take in the scheme of their ultimate revolution. As the people entrusted with the lifeblood of Clan society, the means open to the Clan Scientist Cabal can be devastating.

KIRI-J(F) SYSTEM SECURITY SCANNER (12.3.89 BUILD 505)



SECURITY LEVEL QUARTZ

THE BROTHERHOOD OF RANDIS 



DARK PERIPHERY

ROME, TERRA
APRIL 7, 2768

Hauptmann Ueli Marrer tugged on the hood of his plastic poncho, trying to keep the crest of it far enough over his face so that the cold drizzle from the gray skies would stop dripping on his hawk-shaped nose. He succeeded for a few moments until the hood settled again. Exasperated, he sighed, suffering the cold precipitation as he watched large men load up the small DropShip with pressboard crates. His sharp malachite eyes caught movement to his left as his aide, *Wachtmeister* Marti Sporri, came running toward him. While Sporri was by no means a small man at 180 centimeters, Marrer towered over him.

"*Hauptmann*, the Gestapo is here!" he yelled. His gloved hand pointed toward the nearest building, Concourse E of the Julius Caesar Spaceport. Three mercenaries, all clad in green fatigues and hefting laser carbines, braved the rain to stand before him, secure in the shelter provided by the brims of their black caps.

Ueli's mood darkened and his mouth went dry, but he kept the worst to himself. "Get them to hurry up," he growled to his subordinate, then turned toward his visitors.

As he strode toward them, he watched their rifles carefully, and fingered the heavy-caliber pistol concealed beneath his slate-gray poncho. The Gestapo approached as well, meeting him on the tarmac, just to the right of an ankle-deep depression already filled by the spring rain.

"What can I do for you, gentlemen?" Ueli asked, shouting a bit over the storm's incessant pounding.

The middle mercenary, a man in his thirties with poor dental hygiene, responded. "We're here for a piece of your action," he said with a wink. "You know,

a tithe to keep in the holy emperor's good graces."

Ueli scowled, then bowed his head in a nod. He pulled his right arm from underneath the poncho, revealing a sheaf of Star League Dollars.

The black-eyed woman to his right snatched the money and fanned through the stack, ensuring they were all the same denomination. "Is this fifteen percent?" she demanded. She would have been attractive, but a lifetime of sneers and frowns had wrinkled her face prematurely, while her tone radiated contempt.

He shrugged. "I'd normally give you twenty, like those North Americans give the waiters, but I just used my best judgment today."

The leader of the trio reached out and grabbed the lapels of the *Hauptmann's* poncho, trying to pull him down to his own level. But Ueli's large frame was too much for the Gestapo man's strength and he only succeeded in pulling himself up on his toes to glare at Ueli's strong jaw. Undaunted, he expelled his noxious breath into Ueli's face. "Judgment?" he seethed. "You better not be pulling anything, or we'll have to check all of these to make sure of the value."

"Be my guest," Ueli responded, waving his right arm at the last few crates being loaded into the aerodyne craft behind him. The Gestapo released his hold on Ueli's poncho and turned his head to look at the loaders. "I just didn't want you to spend the night looking at dead bodies in the rain."

The man stepped back from Ueli and turned to face him. "Bodies, eh?"

Ueli nodded. "The members of that uprising you killed three days ago. The off-worlders?"

The man stroked his jaw. "I didn't know there were so many." He looked at his companions as the third member of their party,

small and weaselly, sneezed as if on cue.

After a moment, he shrugged and turned to the woman. "Let's go," he said, snatching the money from her before leading them back to the welcoming shelter of Concourse E.

Ueli took his left hand off of his pistol and trudged back toward the DropShip, intending to join its cargo to its final destination. He smiled, wondering if the thugs who had just left would ever know they took ten thousand Star League Dollars to let the Vatican's most precious artifacts sneak out from under their noses.

He hoped not.

HOPE IV
JULY 18, 2770

A bespectacled man led Ueli to the balcony, where the majestic Istyn Valley filled his sight. A sapphire river snaked through the luscious greenery of the tropical forest. In the distance, the granite walls of mountains thrust upward against the clean blue sky, like the snow-covered teeth of a gigantic beast. How very different from the seven hills, Ueli marveled, unused to seeing nature so pure.

His reverie was interrupted by the engineer at his side, a short man who spoke with an Outworlders Spanish accent. "Everything is done to your specifications, sir," he said proudly. "Once more I must say that never have I had such an elaborate project as this. The monastery is magnificent in its own right, but the vaults and secrecy you requested were something beyond the ordinary. The home office isn't going to believe what we managed out here, my friend, but I'm sure they'll appreciate the second half of the payment."

Ueli nodded solemnly. "Then it's homeward bound for you, *ja?*"



THE BROTHERHOOD OF RANDIS

DARK PERIPHERY

The man smiled, more nervously this time, and adjusted his glasses, looking for all the world like a child asking for a cookie. "Well, yes," he said with a chuckle. "As soon as you provide us with the coordinates back to Ramora."

Ueli leaned his forearms on the railing of the balcony and rested his large frame on them, taking in the sweeping view again. Just as the engineer began to awkwardly clear his throat, he cut off whatever the man was about to say with words of his own.

"Do you believe in God?" he asked.

Confused, the man adjusted his glasses again. "No. I'm a man of science. What does this have to do with anything?"

Ueli shook his head sadly. "Well," he sighed, "He believes in you..."

"What?" The smaller man spun around at the sound of a scream and a sudden crack in the hallway behind him. He never saw Ueli's hands thrust out to catch him under his shoulders. Nor did he find any more understanding during the

500-meter fall that followed.

A fall that ended on the shores of the clear blue river, now tainted by a thin ribbon of red from his broken body.

Up on the balcony, Ueli crossed himself and looked up to the sky, "Forgive me, Heavenly Father, for I have sinned to protect the relics you have entrusted to us," he said in reverent tones. "And forgive my men, for they were only following the orders of His Holiness. And bless the workers who have died here this day, that they may not have died in vain..."

Masterson: "That was the opening to Clyde Cutler's latest novel in the Drake Penn series, *Dark Periphery*. In this story, our hero encounters the Brotherhood of Randis, an order of warriors whose real-life mystery still entralls those who have heard of their exploits.

"The Brotherhood of Randis—an elusive but effective group of modern knights. They have been active in the Periphery for almost a century now, yet have never turned to piracy or raiding to profit. These mysterious men and women have reportedly managed to turn their world from a small garrison to a reasonably functioning example for today's Periphery. And yet, even more mysterious than their shrouded origins, they have used their scant resources to go traipsing around the coreward edge of known space to fight evil. Who are these mysterious do-gooders, and where did they come from? What are their goals, immediate and long term? Are they really heroes, or does a dark mission hide behind their Templar-like façade?

"Here to discuss the Brotherhood today is the Drake Penn author himself, Mister Clyde Cutler! Welcome to *Universal Truth*, ladies and gentlemen! I am your host, Rupert Masterson!"

[Applause]

Masterson: "Mr. Cutler, it's good to have you with us today."

Cutler: "Thanks, Rupert. Please, call me Clyde."

Masterson: "Okay...Clyde." [audience laughter] "So, we've all read your opening. Where did you come up with this background for the Brotherhood? I mean, surely the secret sect of the Catholic Church, guarding the Holy Grail or some other, has been done to death?"

Cutler: [chuckling] "Well, it has, Rupert, but that's for hack writers, I'm only half hack..." [laughter] "No, the events in the opening, like all the openings to my novels, are based on plausible occurrences from the past. Sure, I take liberties, but I fill in with my imagination what fits the facts. I don't make the facts fit my story line."

Masterson: "So you're saying all this happened, and was recorded somewhere?"

Cutler: "Well, the massacre at John Paul II Square was real, as are the Greenhaven Gestapo and the Swiss Guard. They aren't some sect or order, just the military arm of the Vatican that protects the pope and the Church. I combed through records on Terra, as well as shipping manifests and reports about the Brotherhood. There were holes, to be sure. After all, the Usurper's forces weren't as good at keeping records as some of the other despotic régimes of history."

Masterson: "So what basis do you have for this fantastic story about the Brotherhood of Randis?"

Cutler: "Hauptman Marrer was a real member of the Swiss Guard, who was decorated and known for getting things done, no matter how. He was a 'big picture guy,' serving his pope, and I guess his God, for the long-term betterment of humankind and the Catholic Church. Comrades had mentioned he'd sacrifice his immortal soul to do God's will.

"Also, there was a shipment of bodies recorded as being taken off-world three days after the Massacre."

Masterson: "Well, if bodies were shipped out, how does that fit your assertion that the relics were smuggled out in their place?"

Cutler: "The John Paul II Square Massacre was the slaughter of six hundred Pauline Fathers protesting the treatment of the Vatican by the Usurper's forces. What the Gestapo didn't know was that the Paulines were hermits who hadn't been allowed off Terra by their order. So there were no members from the Federated Suns."

Masterson: "Well, that certainly is an intriguing possibility, but what about the next part? On Randis IV? Surely there are no records of that available."

Cutler: "No—well, maybe. The Brotherhood would not share any records or diaries with me. But Sandro Manufacturing, based in the Outworlds Alliance, sent out a building crew to an unknown

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location in 2769. They were paid in a mixture of Star League Dollars and gold bullion. The crew, their equipment and their DropShip never returned. Still, the advance Sandro *did* get covered all the benefits the company later paid out to the survivors of those workers."

Masterson: "So that's the kindness mixed with ruthlessness we'd expect of *Hauptmann* Marrer?"

Cutler: "Yes."

Masterson: "And what of the actions of the Brotherhood since their formation? I assume more recent reports back up your story?"

Cutler: "To an extent. It *is* fiction, after all." [chuckles] "But based on fact. Members of the Brotherhood's inner circle never retire fully, you know; they remain on Randis. They never leak anything out, and for the most part the citizens of Randis IV are very happy with them. Still, the fact that they attack pirates and brigands—not just defend against them—while living in the Periphery says a lot. These guys aren't taking the easy way out, but rather working hard to bring Randis into the thirty-first century. And protecting that world and their headquarters at all costs is their ultimate priority. It would probably take a crack RCT at least to defeat the Brotherhood on Randis IV."

Masterson: "And their counterparts in your book? When Penn has to break into their monastery fortress, don't we find out some other interesting things?"

Cutler: [smiling] "They'll just have to buy the book and find out."

Masterson: "*Dark Periphery*, by Clyde Cutler! Available at your local bookstore or Mississippi Book Network. Thanks for being here, Clyde."

Cutler: "Thanks for having me, Rupert."

[Cut to: Commercial break]

Masterson: "And, welcome back to *Universal Truth*. Next up, we have two more experts who can tell us about the recent history of the Randis Brotherhood and Randis IV: Dr. David Pratcher from the University of Robinson and Takahiro Naguchi, consultant for the Outworlds Alliance Military.

"Gentlemen, thanks for appearing with us tonight."

Naguchi: "You're welcome."

Pratcher: "Thank you."

Masterson: "Now, gents, what can you tell us about Randis IV?"

Pratcher: "Well, history records that it was originally charted as Hope in the late 27th century, but there are no records of organized colonization until almost a hundred years later. Resource-wise, the planet doesn't have much in the way of desirable minerals that we know of, and its single continent is dominated by a massive rain forest. Strangely, Randis IV is actually the *second* planet in its system—not the fourth. Most people think the idea was to give it one of those misleading names, like Iceland and Greenland on

Terra, or perhaps the explorers there counted from the outermost planets inward, rather than in the traditional inward-to-outward progression."

Naguchi: "Randis is in both a good and a bad location. There's nothing around it, so for trading it has a near monopoly on local stopovers—but not a lot of trade goes through that way, so the locals have to be a bit more self-sufficient than most."

Masterson: "I see...and what can you tell us about the Brotherhood of Randis?"

Naguchi: "Well, we know Erdelmaine Randis formed them and renamed the system just before the start of this century. They were all superbly skilled individuals who could pilot a 'Mech and were physically superior to most everyone—kind of like the Clans. But they also demanded a solid moral code, and a demonstrated, deep-rooted Christian faith."

Pratcher: "Of course, the group Randis started out with had a lot to learn about the latter two. I'm not sure where Christianity entered into it during his wanderings before he arrived on Hope, but he was never seen as particularly religious before then. Philosophical, yes, but not religious."

Naguchi: "They focused on defending Randis at first, then worked at trying to bring order and justice to the rimward Periphery. Unfortunately, they weren't so good at fighting as a unit, nor against the underhanded types that reside in their locale."

Pratcher: "Right, but all that changed when Galahad Frews replaced Randis. He was an expatriate from the Federated Suns who spent a couple of years teaching at the Kilbourne Military Academy before joining the Brotherhood. He immediately got rid of the excessive physical rituals they required, and worked on creating a unit that could work as a team."

Naguchi: "And that's the point where we saw them start to make a difference beyond Randis. Their big headline came when they hit Antallos, of course. How they knew exactly where a Star League cache was located on a world regularly scoured by pirates and loners, nobody knows, but the remarkable thing was how they handled Fuchida's Fusiliers. The Fusiliers saw them hit the ground and came to assert their dominance over this 'new blood,' only to be held at bay by a smaller force who cleared out a cache nobody even knew was there."

Masterson: "So now they all drive Star League 'Mechs?"

Pratcher: "Not really. What they pulled out of that cache included some Star League-era machines, but many were reportedly Rim Worlds 'Mechs that got upgraded when Amaris held the Terran Hegemony. There were even some mothballed machines left over from the Age of War. But there weren't enough for the entire Brotherhood."

Naguchi: "Exactly. Only the best warriors would've received those machines. The good press they got in the 3050s attracted newer, better candidates—including a pair of former Smoke Jaguars with their machines, I hear. One, in fact, turned out to



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be Lucas Beckett, who was raised in the Josian Cloister, a Clan religious group with many of the same ideals and traditions that the Brotherhood held. Between that and his combat prowess, he probably rose quickly."

Pratcher: "I've heard of him, too. I think he was also unusually adept at politicking—especially for a Clanner. He somehow managed to get the Council to vote him Grand Knight after dismissing Frews."

Naguchi: "Ah, yes. I think even Frews knew they needed to keep shaking things up."

Pratcher: "Not sure there. Frews has gone on record saying he'd still like to lead the Brotherhood, but he'd never tear them apart to do so."

Naguchi: "Either way. But I think we can agree there's some internal conflict over 'Clan influence.'"

Pratcher: "Oh, certainly, but they have more important things to deal with."

Masterson: "Such as?"

Pratcher: "Well, recently pirate attacks on Randis have increased. That doesn't make sense."

Masterson: "Why's that? It is the Periphery..."

Naguchi: "Except that Randis has been well defended and the Brotherhood has only gotten better. Attacking them on their home ground is a bad idea, even for pirates. No, I think something is motivating them."

Masterson: "You mean paying them?"

Pratcher: "Or supplying them. Likely, the Word of Blake. The Blakists and the Brotherhood were never on good terms to begin with, but the addition of a former Coyote, Brother Nyleith, exacerbated the enmity. Nyleith personally cut a swath of death through Blakist ranks during a raid and increased the Brotherhood's opposition to the Word."

Naguchi: "It could be the Marians, worried about the Brotherhood's moral code."

WORD ON THE STREETS

Here's a collection of short vignettes people have told *Universal Truth* about the Brotherhood of Randis:

"Brotherhood? Bah! Damn bunch of glorified frat boys. They drop down and start blasting whoever *they* decide is *bad*. Never mind the destruction they bring to all the bystanders. No better than the rest, I say."

—Rusty Carwell, *New Haiti*

"My lord, they came to our rescue! Johnson's Jackals were worse than locusts! They demanded food, money, even my daughter! What could we do about it with just twenty families? The Brotherhood of Randis hit those Jackals before they had a chance to react. Unlike previous 'saviors,' they didn't take more from us. Hell, for the price of a few sandwiches they hit the Jackals and took off. Even left us one of the Jackals' *Locusts* as a memento."

—Tasha Purrelle, *Oscar*

"I tell you, they know stuff. I was there when they hit Antallos. After they smashed the Fusiliers, they headed straight for Hart Valley, near where I live. I

mean, right to the old rubble we thought was a rock fall. They waltz out of there with a few truckloads of parts and four 'Mechs. I'd never seen 'em before, but I showed pictures to Old Man Withers and he told me they were *Rampages*, an old Rim Worlds design. I tell you, those guys know secrets."

—Maynard Dawson, *Antallos*

"They're not as high and mighty as you think. I spent a few years as a Knight-Candidate. I had to help maintain the 'Mechs and defend Randis when they were off saving the universe. And you know what we got to pilot? Stuff that made the *Striker* look high tech! Man, so goody-goody and they have all sorts of rituals and tests. They worry about willingness to die for their mysterious cause when I've got supreme moves?"

—Martin "Blazer" Madden, *Solaris VII*

"They've totally revitalized the Periphery! When I got here, Randis IV was like the other worlds I'd visited. Now it's almost like a Successor State world. They're really looking to the future."

—Taylor Gill, *Randis IV*

"The Brotherhood of Randis? Their hearts are in the right place, but sometimes they get a bit caught up in flashy one-on-one fighting. Like those Clan fellows. Pride goeth before a fall and all."

—Dillard Royce, *Malarn*

"They've brought the word of God to us! Without them I'd still be lost. They are great men doing even greater work. They are angels, sent from above. I thank heaven for them every day."

—Ethel Bennett, *Valasha*

"Damn, they're good. Lately they've got technology, but they're still good. I tangled with them about a decade ago. Now, I've seen plenty of good gunners. Hell, everyone thinks a good gunner is all you need. But when you tangle with good pilots, I mean well-rounded guys, you'll know it. They'll come on at you and show you how to fight close in. Or they'll let you chase them through tricky spots. You fall down a time or three and you'd be surprised how much that turns the tide. Don't even get me started on their teamwork. This is the Periphery; no one is used to *that*."

—Shark, *Astrokaszy*

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Masterson: "It wouldn't be the first time Romans picked on Christians!" *[audience laughter]*

Pratcher: "Or even the Outworlds Alliance—" *[Naguchi scoffs]* "—though that's less likely, I admit. I'm sure the Alliance leadership has never been happy that the Brotherhood keeps stepping in to help out their people. It makes the Outworlds leaders look bad."

Naguchi: "Neither the Marians nor the Alliance have the cash and hardware to spare like Word of Blake does. If the Word plans to get the Taurians under their thumb, the Brotherhood would be

a constant thorn in their side."

Masterson: "So are they really threatened by pirate attacks?"

Naguchi: "Right now? No. But they don't have the resources to sustain that sort of attrition for long. The reports I have say they can make their own ammunition, but no components."

Masterson: "Interesting. Well, thank you gentlemen. It looks like the Brotherhood has a tough fight on their hands. Will they survive? The way things are going these days, no one knows, but if so, they've set themselves up well for the future..."

THE BROTHERHOOD OF RANDIS

GAMEMASTER'S SECTION

The Brotherhood of Randis is a tight-knit group of warriors, very experienced and dedicated. Though they are no longer the all-around warriors that they were decades ago, they have progressed as a cohesive fighting unit, demonstrating teamwork and fighting skill not seen in the Periphery outside the elite forces of the major states. But the Brotherhood is much more than a fighting force. They seem to have some long-range plan, but one known only to the group's innermost members. Apparently benevolent, the Brotherhood often seeks alliances with those who espouse similar ideas, but aren't afraid to make examples of anyone they deem "immoral."

ORGANIZATION

The Brotherhood of Randis can be broken down into three different groups: Knights, Knight-Candidates and Squires. Members of the Brotherhood refer to themselves as Brother (Sister, if female) or by the title that indicates their place in the organization.

Squires: Squires in the Brotherhood are referred to simply by that title, regardless of rank or seniority. These people are drawn mainly from the inhabitants of Randis IV, but also can be among those rescued from imperiled situations on other planets. Some have even come from other worlds voluntarily, seeking to contribute to the Brotherhood's cause. The Squires provide technical and labor support for the Brotherhood, and can be found in almost all non-combat roles, including technicians, cooks and transportation. They are paid well (but not extravagantly) for this work and provided with shelter and food. Some of the more dedicated Squires have been known to work for room and board alone, donating their salaries to the Brotherhood's coffers, but no prejudice is shown toward those who accept their pay. Becoming a Squire requires a background check and a security interview, followed by an initiation rite.

Knight-Candidates: The Knight-Candidates are mostly offworlders seeking to join the Brotherhood, though a few native Randites have been inducted in this fashion as well. The

Brotherhood offers no initial instruction in how to operate a BattleMech (or, more recently, an aerospace fighter), so Knight-Candidates must pick up their skills elsewhere (or learn from a Knight who personally takes on the candidate's training—a rare occurrence). Like Squires, Knight-Candidates receive one title, regardless of rank or seniority. They often act as supervisors for Squires, but are also expected to assist with the maintenance of Brotherhood machines. They must undergo security and background checks, plus a technical proficiency exam to make sure they have the requisite skills to carry out their duties.

Knight-Candidates are reimbursed with a small salary, but all their basic needs are seen to by the Brotherhood. When the Brotherhood is off-planet, the Knight-Candidates are expected to form the defensive core for Randis IV alongside the conventional planetary militia. While a major crisis has yet to require such a defense force, increased pirate activity makes it increasingly likely in the near future.

Knights of Randis: The Knights themselves are the fighting force of the Brotherhood, and represent Knight-Candidates who have proven themselves to the Grand Knight and his closest advisors. Not only must a Knight-Candidate excel at combat to be a Knight, he or she must also demonstrate extensive knowledge in religion and philosophy. The tests for Knighthood vary from aspirant to aspirant, though some sort of 'Mech or fighter dueling against a seasoned Brother is required. In the past, such tests included physical and endurance challenges, but these are rarely required by the current leadership. Upon passing their test, Knights undergo an elaborate initiation ceremony and reception. All Knights are referred to as Knight until they receive a promotion to a higher rank (such as Knight-Errant or Lord/Lady Knight).

Knights who command lances are titled Knight-Errant, while company commanders are called Lord (or Lady) Knights. The Brotherhood has no permanent battalion commanders, but a temporary title of Paladin may be awarded if such a formation is required or established for a Knight to lead. The leader of the Brotherhood of Randis is called the Grand Knight; the current Grand Knight is Lucas



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Beckett. The Grand Knight leads a council made up of all the Lord and Lady Knights (including those who have retired from active service), who in turn elect the Grand Knight as necessary (usually upon the death or dismissal of the previous one). The Grand Knight is free to ignore the council's advice, but the council may vote for a new Grand Knight at any time with a two-thirds majority "no confidence" vote. This council knows the Brotherhood's deepest secrets, of the past and the future.

GOALS

The Brotherhood has several goals, of which the most important is the protection of Randis IV. Though the planet began as a home for the Brotherhood's Fortress Monastery, that role has changed over the years. The Brotherhood today limits itself to mere defensive actions on-planet, spending considerable time seeking other downtrodden peoples in the coreward Periphery. Brotherhood envoys have even landed on some Taurian and Outworlds planets to drive off predatory groups, while the Knights have grown ever more proactive in searching out and assailing pirates and brigands throughout the region.

The Brotherhood has also worked to improve Randis IV's industrial and commercial base. At present, these efforts focus on updating Randis' on-planet transportation system and attracting new interstellar trading partners to boost the economy. While the Brotherhood's source of wealth has long been a mystery, it seems they are now self-sufficient thanks to the small taxes they collect from the local people. Meanwhile, Randis IV's day-to-day operations are administered by a democratically elected civilian government whose members defer to the Brotherhood only in military decisions or major crises.

Finally, the Brotherhood sponsors missions to many worlds to boost education and awareness. These missions offer a mixture of literacy and religious teachings, similar to the missionary work of many major faiths. While the missionaries don't force their beliefs on the unwilling, their lay education always includes spiritual training. Despite this "string" attached to the opportunity, people from various denominations flock to the Brotherhood's missionaries,

and some planets eagerly welcome them. Viewing missionaries as sacrosanct, the Brotherhood often makes protection of these volunteer teachers a top priority, and Knights have been known to ruthlessly hunt down anyone who harms or kills a Brotherhood missionary.

THE BROTHERHOOD AND ROLEPLAYING

Given the Brotherhood's active role in the coreward Periphery, players have plenty of opportunities to come across them. The most obvious is visiting Randis IV. The Brotherhood requires all visitors to announce their identity and intentions. Their limited aerospace assets will oppose any military landing, and military vehicles are not allowed to leave their transports unless accompanied by an aspiring Knight. The Knights occasionally hire mercenaries to continue bringing virtue and stability to the Periphery, and frequently use such units to gather intelligence in the region.

Alternatively, the players could be on a planet that the Brotherhood is visiting, perhaps even battling them (if they seek the same objectives or find their roles opposed). Brotherhood warriors readily but warily accept assistance in attaining their goals; even allies who have worked with them before are kept at arm's length. The Knights fight hard and use every advantage at their disposal unless they deem an enemy an honorable foe (at which point their combat philosophy is more akin to Clan dueling protocols). Once an enemy has been defeated, the Brotherhood typically treats them with mercy, though some may find themselves headed back to Randis IV to face trial for their crimes.

Finally, the Brotherhood may seek out the players, to hire them or to join their order. While the Brotherhood has many applicants, they always keep an eye out for talented warriors who also possess a strong sense of ethics and spirituality. Usually, retired Knights contact promising talent, though a missionary might contact someone he or she feels may add to the Brotherhood in other ways. Randis IV, after all, seeks not only military units to perform tasks for the Brotherhood, but also groups who can help improve the planet's infrastructure.





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MYSTERIES OF THE VOID



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MYSTERIES OF

**THE MARINER'S TALE:
IN THE DARKNESS BETWEEN**

All right, I'm not going to tell you my name. I think when I'm done you'll understand why not. You can just call me the Mariner, on account of I've been shipping out for a lot of years. Did a hitch in the FedCom navy and four decades in the merchant marine.

I've been from one end of the old Federated Commonwealth to the other, delivered medicine to the Confederation and machine tools to the Combine. Even did a little business with the Hansa—and maybe a Diamond Shark or two.

So when I talk about hyperspace, listen up; I know more than you. I can say that, and I don't even know who you are. I've seen about every damn backwater world in the Inner Sphere and half of 'em in the Periphery. I've spilled more whiskey in hole-in-the-wall joints than you've drunk. I'm known among merchants and navy types—and pirates.

So, listen up. I'm gonna tell you something important, because I know. Because *I've seen it*.

Something lives in the darkness between.

And once you really understand that, let's see if you ever sleep again.

SKIPJACK

I used to know a captain named Peter Welton, Skipjack to his business associates. He and his crew made their bones hijacking JumpShips in out-of-the-way Periphery systems. They'd lie in wait and fight their way on while the vessel's crew was still recovering from the jump. Then they'd space the crew.

It was good business. Back in those days, there wasn't anyone around to stop them.

I knew Skipjack, because after a bad run-in with an Alliance

NOTES

As fun as it is to lay the blame for everything on Blakist plots (what aren't those guys responsible for, anyway?), I think centuries of missing JumpShips are hardly a phenomenon we can lay at their feet alone. While I don't think anyone would deny that the Master's Hands may have grabbed a JumpShip here and there, some folks believe that something even darker is at work out in the empty reaches of space.

Here's an account from a man who calls himself "The Mariner." I know, I know, when you first dip into his tale you may think he's some kind of crackpot, but keep reading and I guarantee you'll feel a shiver wriggle down your spine.

And if you're honest with yourself, you might just admit the disquiet you feel is a symptom of truth.

—Starling

aerospace squadron he moved out of the ruthless business of hijacking and into the considerably more profitable business of protection.

Did I pay him?

You bet. This wasn't the Inner Sphere; if you wanted to do business in the Deep Periphery, you had to be prepared to color outside the lines.

How'd Skipjack get into the business? He got his crew like most pirates do—he killed his boss. Her name was Tammy Chen, but everyone called her Angles, because she always had all the angles covered. She was smart and cool and dangerous.

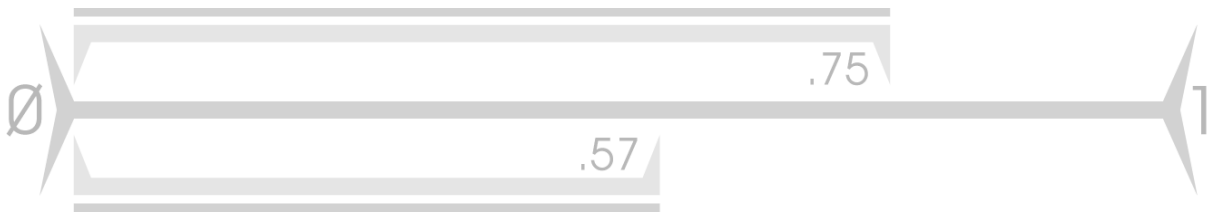
I never thought she'd go down.

But she did.

And then...

Well. Therein lies the tale. But don't take it from me. Let's get it straight from the horse's mouth...

KIRI-J(F) SYSTEM SECURITY SCANNER (12.3.89 BUILD 505)



SECURITY LEVEL GRANITE



MYSTERIES OF THE DEEP

[The camera centers on a small, battered table, painted pale green. The room isn't much bigger than the table and the lights are low. The image looks washed-out and because the video is low quality one might believe the fault lies with the recording equipment. In reality, this is just the kind of room that will not abide color.]

[A man, tall and thin, sits at the table. His cheekbones are high and angular, his eye sockets sunken. His face is the color of chalk, all of it combining to give more an impression of a skull than a human face. He sits there chain smoking, bringing cigarettes up to his lips one after the other with shaking hands.]

[Interrogator, off-camera]: "State your name for the record."

[The man closes his eyes and sighs deeply.]

[Welton]: "For the last time: Skipjack."

[Interrogator]: "Your full, legal name."

[Skipjack Welton explodes, rage twisting his features. He throws the cigarettes at someone off-camera.]

[Welton]: "Who bloody cares? Do you want to hear this or not?"

[Interrogator]: "All right. All right."

[Skipjack's rage subsides. He settles back into his chair, rubbing his eyes with the heels of his hands.]

[Welton]: "My crew did the Queen of the Void job." *[Laughs bitterly.]* "Course, they weren't my crew back then, were they? They belonged to Angles."

[Interrogator]: "The Queen of the Void?" *[Scoffs.]* "Someone has delusions of grandeur."

[Welton]: *[Irritated]* "I can tell my story to you, mate, or I can tell my barrister. Your choice, friend."

[Interrogator]: *[Grunts.]* "Go ahead."

[Welton]: "Angles had everything figured. If you're going to load and drop cargo, everyone knows where you're going, there's just no keeping a secret like that. The Queen avoided standard shipping lanes to dodge pirates, so we staked out uninhabited systems. On her fourth run, we

got lucky. She jumped to the zenith point of a B-class sun. We were there, waiting. Our DropShips were on top of them before they knew it."

[Interrogator]: "What happened to the crew?"

[The man rolls his eyes, but says nothing.]

[Interrogator]: "You've already admitted to being part of a conspiracy to commit piracy. That's a capital offense, Welton, so why not tell us about the crew?"

[Welton]: "I told you—the name's Skipjack."

[Interrogator]: *[Sighs.]* "All right. Skipjack."

[Welton]: "Angles left me on Raider and she took command of the Queen."

[He shakes his head and his eyes wander, losing focus. He's not seeing anything in the room now.]

[Welton]: "She was a real beauty. A Star Lord, all six docking collars full, loaded down with Mules and Mammoths. The pride of any far Periphery merchant fleet. So Angles figures, if she takes the Queen, I won't try anything. The Raider was just a Merchant carrying two Leopard CVs."

[Interrogator]: "She didn't trust you?"

[Welton]: "She didn't trust anyone, mate. That's what made her so bloody brilliant."

[Interrogator]: "Wasn't she right? Why take out the Queen?"

[Welton]: *[Snorts.]* "You think just like a straight. I was just as smart as Angles. Smarter. What she had was the Raider and the crew. With both, I could have ten Queens of the Void."

[Interrogator]: "You just had to get rid of Angles."

[Welton]: "Bingo."

[Interrogator]: "So?"

[Welton]: "It seems some bright bloke had time to insert a Trojan in the Queen's navigational core. Designed to crash the computer in mid-jump."

[A noise from off-camera, possibly a gasp.]

[Welton]: "And that was that." *[The man rubs his hands together like he's brushing dirt off them.]*

[Interrogator]: "Then why are you talking to us?"

[Skipjack swallows hard and a hunted expression comes into his eyes.]

[Welton]: "We were jumping for...our base system. Needless to say, the Queen didn't make it. That was six years ago. And times were good ever since. I was smarter than Angles. And I told everyone in my crew just what had happened to her."

[Interrogator]: "So they knew exactly what kind of bad-ass they were dealing with."

[Welton]: "Yeah, something like that."

[Interrogator]: "So what happened?"

[Welton swallows again, combs his fingers through thinning hair the color of pale straw. The similarity to a skull is striking.]

[Welton]: "Eighteen days before, we were holding at our system's zenith after making our insurance collections. Then we detected a pulse..." *[He licks his lips.]* "A Star Lord jumped in, fully loaded. I launched my Leopards. Figured, hey, if flies are gonna wander into the web, what's a spider to do? As the droppers were burning for the ship, my navigator got a nice picture of her through our main telescope. I took one look at it and decided to jump out."

[Interrogator]: *[Laughs derisively]* "You're not very brave for a pirate, are you?"

[Welton]: "Think so, mate? Take a look at this."

[The man slaps something down on the table. For a second it's a blurry rectangle and then the camera refocuses to reveal a photograph. The camera zooms in, showing the rounded bridge of a Star Lord-class JumpShip. Clearly marked on the vessel's hull is a fragment of a legend, cut off at the edges by the borders of the telescopic image: "UEEN OF THE VO"]

—Excerpt of an Alliance interrogation of subject "Captain" Peter "Skipjack" Welton, dated 8 July 3065, Alpheratz. Subject later died "under mysterious circumstances" before he could be brought to trial.



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There's a couple points the ol' Mariner would like to make about this little video. First off, no one has actually seen the *Queen* since her disappearance all those years ago. And, 'course, no one from Skipjack's crew has come forward to vouch for his story.

But then, no one can explain how a man on 24-hour suicide watch managed to hang himself in the middle of the night.

The Alliance studied that picture plenty careful. Near as they could tell, it wasn't doctored. Careful optical analysis of the stars behind the jumper revealed a genuine star pattern that allowed them to pinpoint a real system, one that had the freshly abandoned remains of a pirate base on the fourth planet.

And one more thing: A couple years ago someone took down a Kurita JumpShip named *Kokpekty Maru*. The fighting tore that ship up pretty bad; the crew even spiked her jump drive before they were spaced. The raiders tore every piece of cargo and usable equipment off the *Maru*, leaving her a floating hulk dead in space. But they missed something.

A security camera.

That camera recorded a three-second snatch of tape, an image of a woman with shoulder-length raven hair, bright blue eyes and cruelly beautiful face.

The image is grainy, but there's no doubt in my mind.

It was Tammy Chen.

I don't rightly know what killed ol' Skipjack, but I'll tell you this. I think he 'd rather have died before he faced the ghost of Angles.

She was scary enough when she was alive.

GHOSTS, OR GHOST PARTICLES?

There's plenty I've seen in the universe that can't be explained, but that doesn't mean some fool won't come along and try to explain it anyway. Here's an article from a man I met on New Avalon. You can tell from reading it that he never spent a day in the black, but at least he knows his numbers.

So, for those of you not favorably inclined toward the mysteries of the universe, here's a plausible scientific explanation to describe the strange disappearance and *reappearance* of JumpShips in different places and *times*.

Sure.

But however you want to explain it, there's always the infinitesimal chance that something strange will appear right in front of you. And you'd better be ready.

WINNING THE LOTTERY

One of the things this all means is that anyone could stumble across a lost vessel at any time. And because these ships have been frozen in some kind of weird jump stasis, it's possible that decades or even *centuries* after various JumpShips were lost, they still might be recovered, potentially with the cargo—and even the crew—intact.

It's the kind of prize that would dwarf the value of the wrecked Star League JumpShip *Andromeda*.

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Nowadays, the average person takes the reality of interstellar travel for granted, but the Kearny-Fuchida drive that makes it all possible is actually an outgrowth of an exotic branch of physics that is capable of producing some startling results.

The average layman is well aware that a misjump generally leads to a JumpShip materializing at the wrong spatial coordinates, many times to the point of being lost in the void. But few laymen may also understand that the same kind of disaster is possible with *time* as well as space.

Space-time is a four-dimensional construct, comprised of three spatial dimensions and one time dimension. Just as a vessel with a Kearny-Fuchida (K-F) drive can traverse the normal spatial dimensions of space-time, it can also—theoretically—traverse *time*.

It's critical to understand that virtually all K-F field equations are time independent. In other words, the relative *time* of the vessel's emergence into real space (as noted by an inertial observer) is not fixed by the equations, but is a variable. This variable is governed by the energy input of the jump and the precise shape of the Kearny-Fuchida field.

Furthermore, since the K-F field equations are coupled, non-linear, differential equations, their solution is heavily dependent on initial conditions. But as with any chaotic system, no outcome can be described beforehand with an arbitrary level of precision.

—Excerpt from the essays of Dr. Robinson Crousten, Ph.D.,
Astromechanics and Hyperspatial Technology, New Avalon
Institute of Science, 19 September 3058

Here's a partial list of some of the vessels that might be out there awaiting some lucky crew to stumble across them:

- In April of 2128, the FTL colony ship *Liberator* was lost with hundreds of settlers aboard.
- In 2363, the JumpShip carrying Capellan ambassador Fashir Tucas mysteriously disappeared, sparking a war between the Capellan Hegemony and the Federated Suns.
- During his Exodus to the Pentagon Worlds, there are hints that General Kerensky's fleet lost at least one JumpShip loaded with SLDF troops.
- During the FedCom Civil War years, several WarShips inexplicably went missing, including the LAS *Arthur Steiner-Davion* and the LAS *Yggdrasil*.
- In recent days, David Lear, the eldest son of Duke Kai Allard-Liao, was lost with the JumpShip *Capellan Star*.

Now, it may seem like the odds of finding one of these lost starships are so low that there's no point in even considering it, but think about this: when the *Queen of the Void* reappeared, she arrived in the very system that was her original destination. That

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may mean we know *where* these lost ships might reappear, just not *when*.

So if you want to go prospecting, all you have to do is pick a destination system.

And wait.

And maybe you'll get lucky.

EARLY ARRIVAL?

One way to avoid pirates in the Periphery is to jump into uninhabited systems en route to your destination. You can't be boarded if no one knows you're there. My vessel was hanging out at the nadir point of a brilliant B-class star the color of sapphire. We had our sail unfurled, filling up with stellar radiation, when we detected an electromagnetic pulse.

I went to battle stations, but there was little I could do. We were two days out from having our drive charged and all the droppers I was carrying were civvies. I was sweating hard; if these were pirates, we were in big trouble.

The other ship jumped in close, not fifty thousand kilometers from us. They hung there in silence for a few minutes, as if they were puzzled, and then they hailed us.

The woman who appeared on my screen was pretty in a distinguished way, light brown hair brushing her shoulders, clear skin, sharp green eyes, maybe mid-forties. No tattoos, no (obvious) piercings. And best of all, no opening threats. I started to feel hopeful.

Then she frowned and asked, "Captain, where is the nadir charging station?"

Now it was my turn to frown. "I'm sorry," I said.

She goes, "The Bluestar Approach Nadir Charging Station."

I shook my head and told her, "I'm sorry, Captain. This system's uninhabited. It's never *had* a charging system."

"Of course it has," she answered impatiently. "This sun's within thirty light years of Bremen and its luminosity cuts charging time by twenty hours. That's why the Hansa built a charging station in—"

She froze, then, turned to ice. Like she'd just thought of something. Then she says, *real* slowly, "This system doesn't have a charging station."

"Of course not," I snapped.

She nods and says back, "We obviously jumped into the wrong system. I'll have to have a serious talk with my navigator."

I shook my head and tried to be helpful. "There aren't any other systems with charging stations nearby," I told her. "Not until you hit the League, anyway. What was your destination?"

For a second she said nothing. And then she sighs and goes on about a damaged plasma injector, asking if we have a spare she can trade for.

"Okay," I said slowly, realizing she hadn't answered my question.

We agreed to have our engineers make all the arrangements,

and finally—just before closing the connection, and with a beleaguered smile on her face—she says to me, "May the peace of Blake be with you."

TIME'S ARROW

There's another strange possibility here, the way I see it. As that lubber Crousten said, the K-F equations are "time independent." What that means is that not only might JumpShips come from the past, but maybe they can come from the future, too.

Sound far-fetched? Well, I think it may already have happened.

Today, the Inner Sphere is torn apart by the cruel machinations of the Word of Blake. As we watch world after world fall to the Blakies, with millions trapped in reeducation camps, whole planets alight with nuclear fire or utterly silent in the aftermath of biological attacks, we wonder: "How could it have come to this?"

How could the Blakists have gathered to themselves the resources—the sheer military power—to declare war on the entire Inner Sphere?

Remember that much of ComStar's immense military power was spent in turning back the Clans and that Word of Blake only had access to a portion of what was left. Yet they've fielded enough BattleMechs, WarShips and WMDs to invade New Avalon, nuke Tharkad and Outreach, crush the Northwind Highlanders and Wolf's Dragoons, infiltrate the Free Worlds League, battle for Luthien, take over the Chaos March and drive off a massive force of more than twenty WarShips and ten divisions when ComStar came to call on Terra.

It seems impossible. And yet here we are.

But what if Word of Blake *didn't* develop all this military power in the years since the schism? What if they developed all this military power *in the future*? And then, somehow, managed to send it back in time, to use it when we were least prepared?

The idea has a certain plausibility, I figure. Imagine the Inner Sphere a century in the future. The Word looks around and realizes that the universe is not heading inevitably toward the Blessed Blake's vision after all. Instead, the Successor States stubbornly cling to their individuality, refusing the Word's "enlightened guidance." And as much military power as the Wobblers had been building up over the years, their prospective enemies have built up even more.

What's a poor fundamentalist theocracy to do?

Well, if their advanced research gave them a better understanding of the Kearny-Fuchida fields than anyone else, they might have learned how to send JumpShips—or WarShips—into the past.

And perhaps Word of Blake decided to attack at a better moment, a moment where their future military build-up would give them an advantage over the rest of the Inner Sphere *and* a time when their "Blessed Blake's" vision first started to go wrong: the time of the so-called "Third Transfer."

And if you still can't swallow all of this, then remember this little detail: the vessel used to attack Tharkad was the LCS *Invincible*.



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Right, the same *Invincible* that was lost in a jump accident back in 2853.

Now tell me, how does Word of Blake happen to come across an ancient WarShip lost to history for nearly two centuries, if they didn't have an understanding of all the bizarre consequences of travel through hyperspace and how to turn them to their advantage?

ON SECOND THOUGHT...

As if marauding Wobblers from the future weren't scary enough, here's another thought to keep you awake long into the wee hours of night. The Word always speaks of Blake's vision as if it were a stone cold certainty. Most people probably chalk this up to the rhetoric of religious fanaticism, but consider *this*: If the Blakists really *are* from the future, it may be that they *are* truly certain how Blake's vision turns out. *Because they've seen it.*

In one of those disturbing paradoxes that always seem to follow time travel theory around like a love-starved puppy, they may have launched the Jihad precisely because they already know how it will end.

Of course, if *that's* true, this means that no matter what we do, we cannot win.

A CHANGE OF HEART

The best friend I ever had was a man named Henry K.

Henry was my chief engineer, the best I'd ever crewed with. Give him a spanner wrench and a plasma cutter and he could fix a rainy day. There was more than one time he held my jumpers together with baling wire and crossed fingers.

I needed him.

One night we were sitting in my stateroom, getting loaded on the worst whiskey you can imagine, waiting for our sail to charge. I knew Henry better than anyone in my family, better than any woman I'd ever taken for a lover. We'd been shipping out together for a lot of years, always away from home, until the ship itself became our home, and her crew our family.

So Henry was like my brother.

Anyway, we were sitting there, getting juiced, and he's telling me about this clothing-optional cabaret on Canopus, and we're laughing so hard he can barely get the words out. I'm crying, I'm laughing so hard. And then the laughter slowly bubbled away, and we were quiet and it was one of those perfect, contented moments that happens sometimes and reminds you that you're blessed.

And then he looked over at me and said softly, "You know, _____, all I ever wanted to do was be an engineer on a ship. I think I'll stay here forever."

I swallowed past a lump in my throat. "As long as I'm captain, Henry, you'll always have a place."

It was one of the nicest moments of my life.

Except when we reached Taurus, he just jumped ship. No explanation, no discussion, just cold words: "_____, I don't want to ship out anymore. I'm retiring."

"Here?" I said, amazed. "Aren't you even going back to the Suns?"

"Here," he said firmly.

It was a disaster. We needed him to keep the ship going. We could have been marooned. But somehow we managed to hold it together until we found another engineer.

But I never did understand why Henry changed so suddenly; it was almost as if someone had flicked a switch in his mind.

WHAT LIVES BETWEEN

Ghost ships, appearing from the past to terrorize the living; or future warriors, visiting genocide upon the people of the present, are all horrifying enough. But there is another possibility, one so monstrous that it keeps me awake at night.

Just thinking about this makes me never want to make another jump again.

We have come to think of hyperspace as a conduit, a way from here to there. And *it is* that. But we've never stopped to consider what else it might be. Remember: hyperspace is another *universe*.

And it's entirely possible that someone—or *something*—actually lives there.

And if strange beings *do* inhabit this alternate universe, they have to be creatures born to a different physics, *creatures that dance to a different song*. And I can't help but wonder if they hate us—we, who rip holes in the fabric of their reality and send our ships streaking through them. How much damage might we be causing on the other side of the inter-dimensional rift?

It's impossible to know for certain what such beings might be capable of, but if monsters from another universe were invading *my* sphere of existence, I'd choose to fight.

But maybe they'd do something more subtle.

Consider:

The Archon-Prince of the Federated Commonwealth, Victor Steiner-Davion, bends all his power and resources to the task of overthrowing his sister Katherine. And then just when he succeeds, he yields control over the two halves of his realm, forever. Incidentally leaving the Federated Suns and the Lyran Alliance vulnerable when the Jihad begins.

Precentor Martial Anastasius Focht proves himself to be an able servant of the traditional ComStar, even negotiating with the invading Clans on Primus Myndo Waterly's behalf. And then, suddenly, he turns away from Blake's vision, spearheading reforms that ultimately cause the schism between ComStar and Word of Blake. Which, of course, leads us to the Jihad.

ComStar replaces Captain-General Thomas Marik and ultimately aids the Word of Blake's assimilation of the Free Worlds League. Until, one day, he decides he's had enough of that and emerges as an opponent of the Word and a champion for what's left of the League. Which, naturally, throws the League further into chaos and opens another front against Word of Blake.

Starting to see a pattern here?

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What do all these fateful about-face decisions have in common? Aside from the fact that they all played into the most destructive conflict humankind has ever seen, they all happened after the people involved had completed jumps through hyperspace.

And maybe they were *changed*.

Think about what this means. In the instant of translation, that barest scratch of time when a JumpShip is in their universe, a man sees all kinds of strange stuff. What if that's the time when *they* can reach inside a human mind and subtly twist it. The person comes out on the other side as the same individual, but his goals and beliefs are suddenly shifted, just enough to serve *their* purposes.

Maybe enough to lead to the destruction of us all.

We could be fighting a war here—one we don't even know about. One so big that, as bad as it is, the Jihad is only a single *battle*.

I shudder to think what comes next.

And because I divined their purpose, because I know their methods, could I be Public Enemy Number One? If I were to travel through hyperspace again, would they sense me? Would they reach out in that tiny nothingness between seconds and make me *not* me?

I just can't take that chance.

This is why I'm remaining here, safely hidden on a world whose name I don't think I'll mention, with *this* universe solidly beneath my feet. No more trips through the black for me. Something *lives* there, something that loves the darkness.

And hates us.

I don't want to be that thing's tool. Would you?

NOTES

Okay, so hyperspace is an infinite patch of strangeness, a universe twisted into impossible geometries. Few regard a journey outside time and space as pleasant. Even the briefest brush of weirdness has its consequences. Roughly ninety-three percent of travelers report mild discomfort. About eight percent suffer sickness. Half a percent experience occasional hallucinations.

And a tiny fraction go mad, if our Mariner was any indication...

But imagine what hyperspace would do to human beings over prolonged exposure.

Surely there exists no human agency so depraved, so cynical, that they would bend something as twisted and unnatural as hyperspace to their own profane uses.

Oh yeah, that's right. Forgot about Word of Blake.

This alternative account of the mystery that is hyperspace comes from the testimony of Precentor Christian Glick, an...uh...retired agent of ComStar's ROM. When one of my sources spoke with him, he was dressed entirely in the white garb favored by his Order.

Only these were the kind with sleeves that tie in the back.

Glick wasn't just off-balance. He was terrified. Broken. Insane. He was boots-don't-reach-all-the-way-to-the-jump-pedals CRAZY.

Doesn't make him wrong, though.

—Starling

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CHILDREN OF THE VOID:
A TOUCH OF WRONGNESS

[The screen starts out black and then a picture appears. Everything in the frame is white: the soft mat that covers the floor, the padded walls, even the man in the picture's center. He wears white pajama bottoms and a white straitjacket, arms tied behind his back. He wears no shoes or jewelry, of course, and sits sideways. He presses up against the wall, as if he wants to reassure himself that it's really there. His left eye is closed, and his right eye is concealed by a dark blue patch—the only color in the shot besides the pale pink of his skin and the brown arc of his receding hairline. The shot lingers on the patch for a moment, as if inviting the viewer to imagine how deranged a man would have to be to gouge out his own eye.]

[Glick]: "It's wrong. Wrong, wrong, and some more wrong. They just can't see. No, can't see. I. I can see. *I can...*" *[Snorts.]* "Like it does me any good. We'd all just rather close our eyes than see the truth." *[Glick never opens his eye or turns his head during his entire rant.]*

[Interviewer]: "You think they don't believe you, Precentor?" *[The voice is distorted. Forensic analysis shows the masking was added subsequent to the initial recording. This is not the voice Glick heard, but it's as much as you're going to hear.]*

[Glick]: "No, no. No. Problem isn't that they *don't* believe me. Problem is that they *do*. If you see my meaning."

[Interviewer]: "What did you see that scared them so badly, Precentor?"

[Glick opens his good eye. It is a gorgeous color somewhere between green and gold. The eye is so beautiful that the viewer cannot help but feel sorrow for its lost mate, sacrificed to the man's pain and madness. He shakes his head slowly at first, then vigorously.]

[Glick]: "I won't go back there."

[Interviewer]: "You have to."

[Glick]: "I won't. There's no looking back. No looking back, understand? No looking back. This is not a place for looking back. I've been in looking-back places before and this is not one."

[Interviewer]: "I know it's frightening, Precentor. But tell me what happened. Please."

[Glick]: "It's just that it's so wrong. Don't you see? There's just a touch of wrongness." *[Smacks his forehead against the padded wall.]* "Wrong. Ness."

[Interviewer]: "The truth has the power to heal."



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[Glick]: "Power to heal." [*Voice drips with contempt.*] "Yeah. I'll look into it."

[Interviewer]: "There was a time when you served humanity. Now the people of the Inner Sphere need you one more time. They need the truth. I have searched long and risked much to find you, Precentor. Won't you tell us what you've seen?"

[Glick]: "Look, if I scratch your back, you'll scratch mine, does that work for you? I'll tell you all of it, but then there's got to be some serious back-scratching going on, OK?"

[Interviewer]: "Sure."

[Glick]: "Sure, sure, sure."

[Interviewer]: "It started when you stowed away."

[*Glick closes his good eye. Laughs bitterly.*]

[Glick]: "Yes, so clever. Hid where none of them could find me. So clever, me. Smart and loyal and brave. *Moron.*" [*He spits the word out. Then he draws a deep, shuddery breath, like he's trying to gather himself.*] "Never saw it coming..."

shielded box, so no one can scan inside. One tamper-proof security system, so it will be obvious if the box is opened. An AI, wired to a transceiver that's (hopefully) tuned to the ship's navigation broadcast freq. And a deadly operative capable of killing a man a hundred ways with his bare hands.

And, oh yeah, about eighty micrograms of tetrodotoxin.

Ever try it? Oh no, you couldn't have. Otherwise you'd have the room next to mine.

"Good" ROM told me tetrodotoxin—or TTX—comes down to us all the way from ancient Terra where it had been used in certain bizarre religious practices on a backwater island called Haiti. The traditional users of TTX had another name for it.

They called it the Waking Death.

TTX suppresses autonomic functions, blocking the sodium ion channels that enable certain key electrical impulses. Breathing becomes extremely shallow, heart rate slows. The victim loses muscular control. You just lie there, staring up at a world you're no longer a part of. But it doesn't stop your senses. Or your *mind*. You know everything. *Feel* everything.

You just can't do anything about it.

"Good" ROM told me they gave me TTX so if the Fanatics opened the box all they would find was a dead man. You know, for my own protection. Sure. I couldn't help noticing that they didn't tell me until *after* they'd given it to me. It sure made the conversation shorter. And they didn't even have to explain to me what I could expect if I *was* discovered.

Sometimes I wonder whether they really are "Good" ROM.

Anyway, here's the best part. When *Faith* reached Epsilon Eridani, the people who'd contracted to have this mysterious and very valuable box delivered suddenly found that they didn't quite have sufficient funds to settle their bill. What do you think the Blakists did?

You guessed it: they held the box pending further payment.

Jumps two and three were to normal destinations.

I got "lucky" on jump four.

BECALMED ON THE COCYTUS

Jump klaxons sounded throughout *Unshakable Faith*. If I had possessed even the slightest control over my body, I would have screwed my eyes shut. But even that tiny comfort was denied me.

Then it happened.

For those who have never endured a jump, there's no way to describe it with words. Reality twists, bending itself along curves no human eye can see. Time and space tear, a wound so horrible that it's impossible to believe it can ever be healed. For an infinitesimal fraction of a moment, you are everywhere—and nowhere—all at once.

And then—if the nav computers have done their job right, and if there is no fault in the star drive, and if no object exists at the JumpShip's arrival point to distort the emergence bubble as it forms—*then* the business is successfully concluded and the vessel arrives safely at its destination.

NOTES

What follows, according to my source, is a composite transcript verified against certain secret briefing documents identified by Christian Glick. It has been summarized for clarity.

—Starling

STOWAWAY

So for months, "Good" ROM had been hearing whispers about something. A very special something called Manei Domini. The Master's Hands. We didn't know much, didn't hear anything but fragments, disjointed bits of rumor that didn't make any sense. But the rumors, they were *persistent*.

And "Good" ROM began to wonder if some of them might be true. Someone had to find out.

Guess who they picked?

...Her name was *Unshakable Faith*, a Merchant-class JumpShip out of Procyon. To all appearances, she was a typical freighter doing business in the March, but a careful search of recharging station records turned up something interesting.

About one out of every five jumps, she failed to visit a normal port of call. One second she would be above the pole of an inhabited system and the next she *wouldn't*, but she wouldn't be anywhere else, either.

After a while, "Good" ROM noticed. The first thought was: secret base.

So they stuffed me in an envelope, licked the stamp and mailed me "Care of Word of Blake Secret Base," COD. Wasn't that clever of them?

Here's the recipe in case you want to try this at home: One

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First, Do no harm

Minor reactions to hyperspace are as old as interstellar travel. The stress on the human body caused by a jump is real, but generally not harmful. The average patient will encounter a variety of symptoms including: headaches, mild disorientation, vertigo, nausea and diarrhea. In most cases no treatment is required. In a few rare cases it may be necessary to prescribe rest, hydration and a mild analgesic.

There have been documented cases of heart arrhythmia and even psychosis, but these are extremely rare. Studies have shown that 83 percent of those presenting with severe symptoms are psychosomatic.⁶

We are not advocating that the ship's surgeon ignore the possibility of an emergent condition, but it's critical that the small likelihood of such an occurrence be balanced against other demands on his or her time. No matter how stressful hyperspace is, no one is ever exposed to it for more than a fraction of a second.

— 6. Xu, Clark, et al, 3012

— C.L. Rodriguez and R. Goldfarb, *Handbook of Jump Medicine* (Eighth Ed.), New Avalon Institute of Science Press, 3027

Reality comes back to itself, and all is right with the world again.

Even the pain of a heaving gut and the sour taste of stomach acid is a relief after the "wrongness" of hyperspace. This is what I felt after the first three jumps aboard *Faith*.

But not after number four.

That time, space-time seemed to break apart and I found myself screaming in my head, screaming in a body that could not make a sound, not even something so small as a sigh. The fundamental "wrongness" of hyperspace dragged on for a second.

And then another.

And another.

Only a few seconds, but the iron hegemony of time had been broken in this unholy place, and three seconds might as well have been forever.

I felt a sharp prick in my left arm. The AI tied into the nav system was programmed to administer the TTX antidote when *Faith* jumped to a system not listed in its registry of inhabited stars.

The terrible implication sank in, even as the drug began to take effect. The AI had ID'ed a gravity well not on its list. Which meant we were no longer in transition.

We had arrived.

But we were *still in hyperspace*.

I felt the "wrongness" all around me, felt it *in me*. "Wrongness" bound up in the very way of things here. Suddenly I was reminded of the river Cocytus, the River of Wailing, a course of black water snaking its way through Hades, a place of lamentation and despair.

We were becalmed on the Cocytus.

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The antidote flushed the TTX out of my system and slowly my heart began to beat and my breath caught.

I used my newfound freedom to shudder.

THE NAMELESS ONE

Still, I was ROM, and I had a mission.

The box's lid popped open with the hiss of equalizing pressure. Then it slid away. My coffin was releasing me.

I reached over with a shaking hand and pressed a button on the black bubble of plastic strapped to my left bicep. The device ejected a wafer of silicon a centimeter square and a few millimeters thick. I carefully slipped it into a sleeve and dropped it into my pocket, then climbed out of my grave to go and find the Word of Blake.

I had three tactical objectives: First, reach the JumpShip proper and hide the chip with the base's location, so it could be recovered when *Faith* returned to normal space and was boarded. Second, gain any amplifying intel on the Zealots' base and operations there.

And third, stay alive.

Only problem was, it was nearly impossible to think of any of these things while I was sick as a dog. Motion sickness happens when the eye and the inner ear don't agree; imagine what it's like when the eye doesn't agree with the *mind*.

Hyperspace is a universe of higher dimensions. As with our universe, mass bends space and time, but not always in ways that we humans expect.

Floating in hyperspace was like being in a reality reflected through a funhouse mirror. Everything shaped wrong—squat and fat or long and thin. Only here, it wasn't an optical illusion. Here, the mirrors were *true*—it was the objects themselves that were distorted. The objects and the space they inhabited.

I stumbled over invisible obstacles that blocked a seemingly smooth, level deck. I placed my hand out to steady myself against a bulkhead and felt nothing but yawning emptiness. But if the ship had been twisted into a bizarre geometry, it was nothing compared to what had been done to me. My body felt bloated and huge, ready to burst, like a piece of rotting fruit. And then it felt squeezed and twisted, wrung out like a washrag.

Slowly, I made my way through a troubling land.

I drifted across an empty cargo deck a fraction the size it should have been. An emergency diagram on a bulkhead was labeled with the word, *Mule*. Had to get to *Faith* herself. Droppers could be detached, so if I left the chip here, ComStar might never find it.

I came to a space-tight hatch painted white, a distorted red cross in its center. My grip tightened on the flechette gun in my right hand while I pulled the rocker down. The hatch popped open.

I had expected to find myself in a small space with a single bed, adequate sickbay space for the twenty-man crew of a *Mule*.

Instead, I found the rest of the cargo deck. The cavernous space had been partitioned into cells, each four meters by three.



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The cells were separated by free-standing walls, fashioned from the same pale blue material that medical personnel often use for scrubs. A cart loaded down with medical equipment rested at the end of each cell.

And each space had its own operating table.

I realized the table nearest me was stained brick red with blood.

"What the hell?" I whispered.

That's when I heard the *clack* of mag boots, followed by voices. I remember them clearly.

A woman was saying, "*Supplication's* captain reports that he's nearly finished unloading the initiates—"

A low, deep voice cut her off. "They are not yet initiates, Captain," it said, unmistakable in its menace. "They shall not be until they pass the Rite of Ascension."

"Of course," the woman said hastily. "I meant no disrespect."

I anchored myself and raised my weapon.

"Such distinctions may see trivial to you, Captain," the deep voice continued, "but I assure you they are *not*."

And just then they stepped into the open.

There was a second. A second when I flashed on a woman in her late thirties, pretty, shoulder-length ash-blonde hair, fair and slim, dressed in navy blue coveralls.

Beside her was a monster. Two meters tall and at least 200 kilos—all of it muscle. His pink skull was shaved clean and marked with slate gray tattoos that curled into demonic shapes. The monster was dressed all in white.

In that second, there was just enough time for the woman's eyes to go wide. Just enough time for the monster's mouth to pull into a tight, predatory grin.

And then I pulled my trigger.

I was aiming at the woman's right knee. I wanted her to live, wanted her to *talk*, but I forgot where I was.

Shards of deadly plastic swooped *up* and cut right through her chest, walking a line of death across those navy coveralls and then drifting across the monster's chest. The gray blur of flechettes walked past the monster's body and, finding nothing to stop them, curled around in an impossible loop and *came back toward me*.

I dove for the deck and came back up, my weapon still in hand.

In a blur, I looked up in time to see the monster snatch my pistol away from me and crush it in his bare hand. Crimson roses bloomed in a neat row across his chest and all I could think was, *Why isn't he dead?*

I managed to get a knife up. He was strong, but I was faster. I stabbed low, below the ribs. The blade sliced through flesh and then *stopped* with what sounded to me like a dull *thunk*.

He just *laughed*. A moment later, he casually smashed me against a bulkhead. The world grayed out.

I looked up at his eyes, and he flashed me a cold, cruel grin. "So, ComStar has sent you to spy on us," he said. "Surely, you must have some questions."

THE FIRST CIRCLE OF HELL

"...It's gray, so gray. All gray and *wrong*. Wrong to look at, *evil*, the abyss looking back. But somehow we can't help ourselves, even as I feel the madness uncurl in the back of my mind. And then you see a black sphere, lights winking merrily on its surface. And that's the worst part. Because it means—" [Sobs.] "It means, *someone's down there!*" [Breaks into hysterical weeping.]

—ComStar Secret Archives. Interview with Demi-Precentor [Redacted] after viewing Image ζ-24, Codeword: MARIGOLD. All further access to ζ-24 forbidden due to high risk of irreparable psychological damage. Refer all inquiries to Precentor ROM.

I managed to choke out a strangled, "W-who?"

"I am without name," he intoned, as if he was prepared for this speech from the moment I showed up, "for when I was made there were none to give me a name. I was here when there was naught but void. There was no Lamashti, no Azrael, no Avitue, no Apollyon. *I* brought them forth! *I* named *them*."

His words sent a chill shivering down my spine. Those were demonic names. For a second I actually wondered if the Word had managed to call forth diabolical allies. "H-how?"

A broad smile stretched across the monster's face, and for the first time I realized his teeth had been replaced by fangs fashioned from stainless steel. "Come," he said. "I will show you."

MANEI DOMINI

I looked at the horrible operating tables stretched across the deck of the DropShip. "W-what...?" I stopped, not really wanting to know the answer. I drew a deep breath and tried again. "What's this for?"

"This place is not meant for humans." The monster's voice was soft. *Reverent*. "Only the re-engineered have a chance to survive."

I don't have words for the horror I felt as I understood what he was telling me. Hyperspace was broken and wrong, but *this* was worse.

"You experiment on them," I whispered.

"We *improve* them," he answered. "We supplement their muscles with strands of myomer. Add armor beneath their skin. Enhance their senses, so they can smell like a wolf, see like an eagle, hear like a deer. We bless them with the powers of godlings—and still that is not the limit of our gifts."

"What else?" I whispered, unable to imagine what could be worse.

"This realm is beautiful," he said softly, "but it is a beauty alien to your kind."

Your kind. Like he was no longer human.

INDETERMINATE GEOMETRY

[TSENG]: "The key to predicting behavior in an n -dimensional space where $n > 4$ is understanding that physical laws still apply in higher dimensions but their effects will be expressed through a geometry markedly more complex than our own. As with conventional space-time, mass will warp the fabric of reality, but not in any way that is intuitive to the human mind."

[ANDREWS]: "Have you modeled possible geometries for various n -spaces?"

[TSENG]: "No. Without a better understanding of the nature of higher-dimension universes, such an effort would have no practical application."

—Question and answer period following presentation: "Properties of Non-Compactified Higher Dimensional Constructs," Kimberly Tseng, Ph.D., Free Worlds Technical Institute, 12 December 3059

"The terrible randomness of the extra-dimensional universe drives the human mind into itself," he went on. "This place washes all doubt from its adherents. Those who survive the trial cannot be shaken from the blessed path."

Horror rose within me like a dark shadow. Just what the universe needed: cyborg supermen who had been tortured until all vestiges of humanity had been burned away, leaving only a core of utter fanaticism.

"Those who survive," he said, "win the highest honor: to serve as the Master's hands, the *Manei Domini*."

I sifted through all the self-serving propaganda until I found the one word he'd said that truly mattered. I looked up at him. "What trial?"

He flashed me a cold, stainless steel smile.

ASCENSION

It seems that for these "Manei Domini," going to Hell is not enough. Having your body violated is not enough. Bending your very mind to their purpose is not enough.

They wish one thing more: the Rite of Ascension.

If one is to be the very hands of the Master (whoever he is), one can be nothing else but the best. The nameless one provided the same means with which Word of Blake always resolves its disputes: violence and deception.

WITNESS TO MADNESS

He brought me to the *Faith's* bridge, but what I saw on the main holotable nearly crashed my mind.

A stone of onyx set adrift on the shimmering gray sea of insanity.

Somehow, I recognized it as a world.

THE VOID

I don't know how long I stood there, but it was sudden, brutal violence that jerked me awake. I don't remember the blow, but I awoke to its effects. My body smashed into the bulkhead; I spat out a broken tooth.

"Good morning, Sunshine," said the monster gleefully.

I glanced back at the thing staring at me from the holotank and almost lost myself all over again. *Would* have lost myself if my captor hadn't blanked the image.

"What is it?" I whispered.

"The echo of a star." He nodded at the now-inert holotank. "That one is Sirius. Even now you feel the disturbing touch of its gravity rippling through your body as we orbit."

I swallowed in a dry mouth. I had seen lights on the black world. I was sure of it. "But I saw—"

"Yes," he said. "We inhabit stars the way others inhabit planets. We are *Manei Domini*."

"Still," I said lamely. "Must be dangerous."

"We are prepared for all eventualities."

My gaze followed his to the helm station, a long console that controlled *Faith's* maneuvering thrusters, integrated nav data and sheltered the jump controls. A grim-faced woman with skin the color of cedar and close-cropped raven hair sat there, her hand hovering over a red button shielded by a spring-loaded plastic cover. They were at emergency jump stations.

We were the press of a button from normal space-time.

I looked up and realized the monster was watching me with glittering eyes. He flashed me a stainless steel smile. Tempting me. *Daring* me.

I drew a deep breath and anchored myself.

"You have a rare opportunity," he said coldly. "To witness the birth of *Manei Domini*."

A new image appeared on the screen. This time it was a group of men and women standing in a circle. They wore skin-hugging shorts and tees the color of blood. And something else: Gauntlets.

They all looked up at a sphere that hovered above them, their guide star on the journey into madness.

"The sphere can be moved by the electromagnets in their gauntlets," the monster explained. "Its terrible gravity wielded like a blade."

As I watched, a buzzer sounded and a woman, quicker than the rest, aimed her gauntlet at the sphere. Drawing it down.

And suddenly something was sweeping through the arena, like a fine crack in ferroglass, a seam in reality itself. This thread of strangeness cut right through one of the men. His body twisted and bent to accommodate it. *Reformed* around it.

Suddenly there were two of him. Or at least two complete *halves* of him.

The line had caught him high in the chest. Half of him was arms and head and the other half was torso and waist, legs still kicking. Yet *somehow* the bubble in reality had closed the wound.



MYSTERIES OF THE VOID

The dying man wasn't bleeding. His organs and bones weren't on display for everyone to see; the terrible wave had actually *remade* him. The point where'd he'd been bifurcated was covered with smooth, tanned skin.

And right then I knew what I had to do.

As the monster, lost in his moment, leaned toward the screen, I launched myself toward the helm station.

The nameless one was around in a second. The beam of his laser crackled as it passed just over my left ear. He missed by a millimeter, but only because I hadn't aimed for the emergency jump controls as he probably expected.

My target was the thrusters.

I hit the controls and suddenly *Faith* lurched forward, toward the black world and its terrible gravity. A transparent sphere grew on the bridge, like a child blowing up a soap bubble. It cut into the helmsman next to me, breaking her into a dozen different parts.

It barely kissed the monster, touching his hands. His face.

But it was enough.

His right hand floated off, smooth skin stretching across the stump where the wrist had been, orbiting him like a little moon. His left arm had been severed at the elbow. It reappeared, somehow growing out of his belly.

His face appeared normal—except for the smooth expanse of skin over the place where his mouth had been. His mouth reappeared below the new arm.

And I could hear it screaming.

It was only then that I reached up, flipped up the plastic cover and hit the red button. The last thing I remembered was the desperate wail of emergency jump klaxons.

AND SO, YOU SEE, IT'S ALL COME TO THIS

[Glick slumps forward. A dark vee marks the front of his white scrubs. His hair is stringy with sweat, his eyes are dark and sunken in a pale face. As if telling his tale has taken something out of him. Something vital.]

[Interviewer]: "It's a good story."

[Glick]: *[whispers]* "But?"

[Interviewer]: "I'm just not sure if I can believe you."

[Glick]: "You promised there would be some scratching of backs."

[Interviewer]: *[hesitates]* "What do you want?"

[Glick]: *[strains against the straitjacket]:* "It has been a year since I could use my hands. Half in darkness, half out. All of it in Hell."

[Interviewer says nothing.]

[Glick]: *[faces the camera straight on, back against the wall]* "You think I'll hurt myself, but you're wrong. Wrong, wrong, wrong!"

[Silence]

[Glick]: "You promised."

[The interviewer sighs. A pair of hands reaches forward and cuts the sleeves free. He quickly rips the jacket off, revealing a sunken chest. He draws a shuddery breath.]

[Interviewer]: "Just for a moment."

[Glick laughs. It is a strange and unsettling sound.]

[Glick]: "You have it all wrong, friend..."

[He reaches for the eye patch and pulls it away, revealing a smooth patch of skin where an empty socket should be. The interviewer gasps. Then Glick slowly turns, revealing a beautiful green-gold eye embedded in his back. The eye looks up into the camera... And then it blinks.]

SHIPWRECK

The vidclip is only a few seconds long, but it's set to loop, so you watch it over and over again. Not much to see, really. According to the legend at the bottom of the screen, the shot was taken more than 600 million kilometers from the system primary, which has shrunk to a yellow chip of light in the frame's upper right-hand corner. The object's barely illuminated by the distant sun and it's hard to tell what it is. Or rather, what it *was*. Because *now* all it is, is junk, twisted and broken.

And for a long moment you think that's going to be all you'll be able to say. Until it tumbles around and you see the distinctive rounded bridge of a JumpShip.

And you think maybe you can make some lettering out: "NSHAK"

But that's all.

—ComStar Secret Archives, Codeword: MARIGOLD. Refer all inquiries to Precentor ROM.



MYSTERIES OF THE VOID

GAMEMASTER'S SECTION

Despite being part of humankind's common knowledge since the early days of space travel, hyperspace remains one of the greatest mysteries in the *Classic BattleTech* universe. Since the first JumpShips flew to the present, thousands—perhaps even tens of thousands—of vessels, their passengers and their crews have vanished into the void of hyperspace, their fates unknown. And the profound effects of hyperspace travel on the human psyche—also known since the days of the first JumpShips—have led many to wonder about the nature of hyperspace, whether it is inhabited by intelligence alien to humans, or by the ghosts of misjumped crews. Could humanity truly survive the weirdness of hyperspace for extended periods, and what would such an environment be like? The *Mariner's Tale* and the *Void Children* are just two possibilities gamemasters and players may explore when dealing with these mysteries of hyperspace.

MISJUMPS

In normal *Classic BattleTech* game play, a misjumped ship is considered destroyed, having failed to emerge at its intended destination. In role-playing circumstances, this could mean the ship has simply arrived off-course, either at a wrong planet, far from the jump point in the intended system, or even deep in interstellar space. If the drive (and the ship!) has not been destroyed in the bargain and a second jump is possible, the ship and crew may reach its destination, only at a later time, none the worse for wear.

The *Mariner's Tale* opens up three additional possibilities, however, that players and gamemasters may attempt to employ in their own *BattleTech* campaigns:

Delayed Arrival: The first new misjump effect brings a ship from the past to its intended destination at some point in time far later than intended. Ships undergoing this kind of arrival may emerge anywhere from hours to centuries after they initiated their last jump, experiencing nothing more alarming to them than some strange "hyperspace turbulence" en route. In game play, the players' ship and crew may encounter a delayed-jump misjump at almost any time, and if the arriving ship is from a particularly distant period in the past (such as the time of the first Star League versus the Clan Invasion), the game could revolve around dealing with a crew lost in what to them is a frightening new future. (Of course, given the lost technologies of the past, Star League-era ships arriving in the present day would almost certainly become prizes to fight over.)

Future Shock: A second—and decidedly rare—new misjump possibility fetches a ship from some point in the future (again, within a range of hours to centuries) and hurls it back into the past. In the *Classic BattleTech* universe, no documented and verified evidence exists that such a misjump has ever occurred, however,

and most luminaries in the universe would likely laugh off claims to the contrary. Particularly daring gamemasters may still wish to explore the possibility of receiving a "visitor from the future," or—conversely—sending their Jihad-era characters back to the distant past, like the dawn of the Second Succession War.

Denizens of Hyperspace: The third potential new consequence of a misjump can be as subtle as it is terrifying; an alien intellect, native to the other-dimensional realms of hyperspace, may touch the minds of one or more crewmen on the misjumping vessel, altering the character's belief system or perhaps possessing his mind wholesale. The nature of such changes and possessions may range wildly, from a sudden new fear of jumping to a terrifying berserker frenzy aimed at destroying the ship and all hands aboard—including the victim. Affected crewmen may not even be aware of the change when it manifests itself, though their colleagues may quickly notice their unusual behavior.

Any (or all) of these new possibilities may be combined with more traditional results of a jump accident, such as material damage to the jumping vessel or death to a portion of the crew.

Gamemasters have many opportunities to use time-traveling JumpShips to set up intriguing historical juxtapositions. For example, what would happen if a lost SLDF JumpShip were to reappear in the midst of a naval battle between Clan Jade Falcon and the Lyran Alliance? Would the SLDF fight alongside their descendants, or would they side with one of the very Successor States whose irresponsibility drove them out of the Inner Sphere in the first place? How would Clan forces react if soldiers of the fabled Star League reacted with horror at news of their eugenics program? Would a lost JumpShip from the Davion navy appearing in the middle of the FedCom Civil War side with Victor or Katherine? Would forces from a bygone era of the Free Worlds League follow the false Thomas Marik? What would samurai from House Kurita's past make of the new, liberal Draconis Combine?

Only the enterprising gamemaster can say for sure.

In addition, misjumps are an opportunity to mix technology from different eras. How would Clan forces fare against SLDF regulars? How would BattleMechs equipped with MASC or gauss rifles or double heat sinks influence a key battle in one of the earlier Succession Wars? Perhaps key technology introduced at just the right moment would allow House Kurita to finally take Hesperus II, or allow Hanse Davion to rip apart the Combine in 3039.

Finally, characters may emerge from a jump with their abilities and skills intact—but their values and objectives subtly shifted. Imagine a mercenary commander whose right flank suddenly goes rogue in the middle of a battle, a member of House Davion who suddenly finds himself on the path of Blake, or a loyal DCMS officer who suddenly sees the wisdom of the Black Dragons.

A jump accident offers tremendous opportunity for gamemasters to throw a monkey wrench in the works, to insert a little randomness in a nice, orderly battle plan.

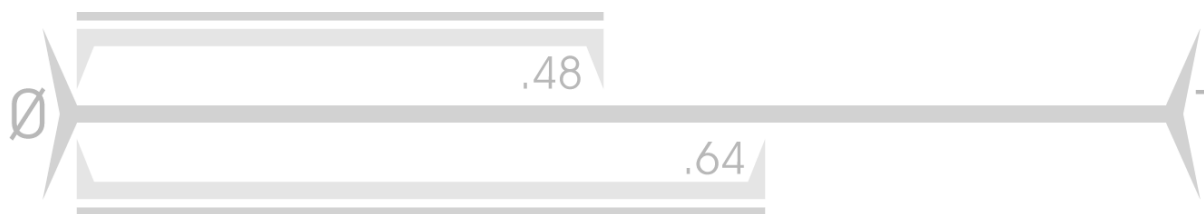
MYSTERIES OF THE VOID **THE "VOID CHILDREN"**

The nature of hyperspace is unknown to the denizens of the BattleTech universe, as no one ever experiences the realities of this alternate dimension for longer than the seconds it takes to transit through a jump. Thus, actually "living" in hyperspace—assuming it is even possible—is unknown. Indeed, the laws of time, space and physics may not apply as we know them within the void of hyperspace. Players and gamemasters interested in exploring this ultimate frontier can conceive of almost any kind of adventure, where wholly different rules may apply as determined by the gamemaster.

That the Word of Blake is building an army of fanatical supermen called the *Manei Domini* is widely known today, but where these creatures came from and the reasons for their extensive modifications are a source for much debate. The "Void Children" theory presented here suggests that the Word has tapped into the dangerous and unpredictable nature of hyperspace, not only as a place to hide its darkest secrets, but also as a means to hone the Master's Hands in an environment so hostile, so alien, that the only way to survive it is to transform oneself into a hybrid of technology and humanity.

In a game that incorporates the Void Children, only the cybernetics-enhanced *Manei Domini* have the modifications necessary to survive in hyperspace for extended periods of time. These modifications enable them to go so far as to inhabit the hyperspatial counterparts of the stars themselves (which underscores the sheer counter-intuitiveness of hyperspace reality). How they accomplish the act of entering *and staying* in hyperspace is just one of the mysteries gamemasters may wish to explore. Meanwhile, non-modified humans exposed to this realm for more than a few seconds may gradually go mad by simply trying to make sense of the twisting layers of surrealism that surround them. Almost nothing may be what it seems in hyperspace, but only the *Manei Domini* Void Children know for sure.

Player characters may find themselves exposed to the Void Children in any situation where they encounter the Master's Hands, and may be pulled into their mind-shattering non-reality (or pursue their quarry into it) at any time. Once there, however, death at the hands of the fanatical *Manei Domini* may not be the worst fate of all.

KIRI-J(F) SYSTEM SECURITY SCANNER (12.3.89 BUILD 505) SECURITY LEVEL GRANITE (SCANNING SIGMA) 



connection/JIHAD CONSPIRACIES/section09: THE ANCIENTS

THE ANCIENTS





THE ANCIENTS

From: Potts, D. Jennette [LT, D93]
Sent: Monday, August 10, 3068 8:27 AM
To: Sharma, K. [CDR, D93]
Subject: FW: Re: Ancients Kidnapped My Brother

Mr. K,

Im fwding mail from a nutter who might have something. I think he's found some readymade allies sitting in the Terran System. These Belters didnt like Comstar and probbly really dislike WoB plus they dont seem closely watched by the Branch of Terran Affairs. Ignore his babbling about gen-engineered immortals who kidnapped his brother. The meat is the FWL *Stellar Geographic* file. I couldnt get an original copy because of the HPG craziness so Im fwding this to you.

Jenny

> **From:** kagamepa.belladonnmail.srv
 > **Sent:** Friday, July 31, 3068 11:27 PM
 > **To:** Potts, D. Jennette
 > **Subject:** Re: Ancients Kidnapped My Brother
 >
 > Agent Potts,
 >
 > I think we have a misunderstanding. My brother Pierre and I are not FWL citizens. We are naturalized subjects of the Federated Suns. Pierre did have a job with the FWL publication *Stellar Geographic*, but is a loyal son of the Suns.
 >
 > I'm contacting you because he stumbled onto something in the Terran system. *Stellar Geographic* sent him as a writer when Focht opened the system. Pierre did this last report on the inhabitants of Terra's asteroids and said he was onto something big, some medical miracles the "Belters" had. He disappeared a week before that report was due. I have his correspondence. He told me he received intimidating messages to drop his investigations into Belter medicine, but was doing one more interview with one Belter doctor supposedly more than two hundred years old.
 >
 > My family put together the money to send me to Terra when Pierre was reported missing. The Belter police and BOTA seemed helpful, but some conspiracy (yes, I said the "c" word) was blocking the police. Security vids went missing,

NOTES

For those of you overwhelmed by tales of lost worlds, survivors of Amaris' Republic and creatures living in hyperspace, how about something closer to home? Say, Terra-close? How often do you think of the Belters (or, as some call them, the Ancients)? I thought not. Funny how some of the stranger societies today can hide in plain view like this, huh?

Now, whether they're a threat or not is entirely for you to decide...

—Starling

officers were taken off the case, superiors started discouraging officers. When I hired private investigators and tried to interview some of Pierre's contacts, I got threatening messages, too.

>

> I finally found the doctor whom Pierre tried to interview. The doctor told me that with a complete mastery of human DNA, the Belters had figured out "centuries ago" how to prevent aging. Because that discovery was so disruptive, they hid it, and only a few Belters now get the treatment. The modern recipients would kill to keep the secret. I met the doctor a second time in a public area of Metis, but they killed him anyway. I was rescued by WoB. A group of Robes had come to throw me and other foreigners out of the Terran system the second time I met Doc Otis. They didn't even know someone had been shooting a laser into a public park, but I didn't care. Whoever it was stopped shooting when the Robes came in. I let them throw me out of the Terran system.

>

> The Federated Suns police gave up the investigation two years ago and since then I've been trying other means, like you. Can MIIO get into the Terran system and investigate Pierre's disappearance? He was a loyal, taxpaying son of the Suns who doesn't deserve this.

>

> I've attached two files. One is Pierre's article on the Terran Belters and another is a letter about his unpublished article on Belter medicine. Maybe they'll help.

>

> Respectfully,
 > Paul Kagame
 > kagamepa.belladonnmail.srv



THE ANCIENTS

THE BELTERS

—Pierre Kagame, from *Stellar Geographic* (July 3057 edition)

I've been through the wonders of the Terran system these past few years, and I hope I've given you an intriguing look into Terra (Terra, Terra and more Terra), Mars, Venus, Titan and even Mercury's Hermes Industrial Complex (Home of the Fighting HiCkies, the best ice hockey team in the system). But by far my most intriguing encounter came when I was poking around Luna's Armstrong City. There, I bumped into a DropShip pilot at a bar, who made me realize there might be a few more fascinating stories left to tell.

Apparently, there's an entire region existing mostly below ComStar's radar: Terra's Asteroid Belt.

EARLY HISTORY

With the early twenty-first century introduction of fusion rockets, the Western Alliance opened the solar system to widespread exploitation. By 2031, a group of North American and European investors encouraged the Western Alliance to settle the Asteroid Belt, where mountains of nearly pure metal tumbled aimlessly through space. The first colony, a possession of the ancient United States of America (USA), was established on one of the largest "Main Belt" asteroids, Metis. Metis proved to be the naked core of a large, primordial asteroid that had lost its mantle in a titanic collision. This 200-kilometer lump of nickel-iron held more metal in it than the Inner Sphere could use in ten thousand years. To the Terrans, who were quickly chewing through the last of their natural resources, Metis seemed like a godsend. And it wasn't alone.

For a glorious century, Terra's "Belt" became the new industrial heartland of humanity. Boundless resources fed Terran industries while the zero-G environment led to breakthroughs in dense materials—factors that allowed fusion engines to shrink steadily. Zero-G factory experience in the Belt also allowed vast, rapid cost reductions in casting Kearny-Fuchida drive coils during the 2100s.

But the Belt became a victim of its own success: improving fusion rockets and less expensive K-F drives brought mines on habitable planets closer to Terra than ever, and those mines were always cheaper to operate than the zero-G, hostile environment of asteroids. By 2200, the Belt was in a steep economic decline. It would take three centuries for domestic growth in the Belt to replace the loss of "foreign" business.

This was the first of several "rejections" by Mother Earth that led the Belters into isolationism. Though Belters won't admit that such ancient events affect them today, their archaic culture, insularity and (in some cases) outright xenophobia seem to stem from being repeatedly spurned by the rest of humankind following such a glorious start.

Refugee groups fleeing Terran Alliance oppression at home reinforced this Belter isolationism in the 2200s. Many refugees to the Belt were those who simply couldn't afford JumpShip tickets, but the Belters' "traditional" politics drew in many others. The Belt had been developed by just a few Western Alliance nation-states,

whose colonists settled their asteroids pumped full of propaganda about national pioneering spirits, the high frontier and all the usual colonial psychological engineering. This situation created populations that stayed truer to their founding nations than many of the nation-states themselves. As Terra itself grew more cosmopolitan and culturally diluted, the Belt claimed some allure for its "untainted" expatriate cultures.

But while "old Belters" looked askance at the new colonists and their escapist politics, the new blood also brought new money and a new labor pool that enabled Belters to climb beyond "zero-G cavemen" to their current spinning habitats, which are today among the largest structures ever built by humans. The new industrial self-sufficiency and dramatically improved standards of living more than made up for any differences between oldsters and newcomers.

THE BELT AND THE TERRAN HEGEMONY

James McKenna's military coup in 2316 and his apparent dictatorship over Terra essentially ended most Belters' interest in outside ties beyond what was necessary for their survival. By the 2330s, said survival mandated the Belt's acceptance of Hegemony governors, but these governors learned (generally via civil protest) that the best policy toward the Belters was to leave them alone. The Belters, in turn, played along with the image that the Hegemony ruled them.

That *laissez faire* attitude continued throughout the Star League period; Belters only drew notice when the region had something to offer the military, or fostered Hegemony independence from foreign natural resources.

Their own resource independence ultimately brought Belters a brush with infamy. One of First Lord Simon Cameron's inner circle, a jaded dilettante of no note, sought a thrill beyond the Riviera Circuit and found the Belt. Afterward, he talked Lord Simon into visiting the exotic area. Lord Simon's opinion of the Belt as a resort was not recorded, but he did find something even more fascinating there: the Belt's vast mineral riches. No doubt Terra's asteroid belt (like those of many other systems) was filled with bountiful resources, but the delicate environments made them too expensive to mine. Nevertheless, since the Terran Hegemony was importing resources from the depths of the Periphery, Lord Cameron hoped asteroid mining might prove viable after all.

Simon Cameron proceeded slowly with Belt mining, to reduce the shock to the Star League's sensitive mid-28th century economy, but never lost interest in plans for a massive expansion. Feasibility studies had progressed to pilot mining operations when the First Lord went on his fateful tour of the Inner Sphere.

According to Belter lore, the First Lord visited a Rim Worlds asteroid mining operation that was making innovative use of robotics. There, the Belters maintained, a Rim Worlds mining company conspired with a Hegemony import firm to sabotage a mining robot. The intent was to discredit asteroid mining in



THE ANCIENTS

general with the berserker robot, hopefully derailing Terran asteroid mining projects into the bargain. The Belters have no doubt this conspiracy existed, but many still argue whether it actually *intended* to kill the First Lord, or if that was an unintended side effect caused by last-minute changes in his tour schedule. Either way, the effort worked. Before the Belt could repair the tarnished reputation of their industry, Stefan Amaris launched his military coup.

THE BELT AND THE FALL OF THE STAR LEAGUE

In the effort to escape Amaris' attention, isolationism once again became a paramount concern throughout the Belt. Unfortunately, the Belters of the Trojans (which possessed major shipyards) were subject to brutal occupation by Rim Worlds troops. *Caspar* drone ships ravaged Trojan Belter spacecraft during unannounced "travel curfews," and whole colonies were destroyed for even minor resistance. After the Liberation, the emigration of Trojan Belters became the primary source of Kuiper Belt and Oort Cloud settlers.

ComStar's rise would eventually replace the Belt's Terran Hegemony government, but in the period between administrations, the Belters used their short-lived independence to address the psychological trauma of the Amaris occupation. They raised militias comprised of extremely capable fighter wings, and placed heavy defensive weaponry around major habitats all across the Terran system.

Accordingly, ComStar took a very light hand toward Belt administration. Indeed, in only one key area was ComStar willing to risk the expense and bloodshed of angering the Belters: maintaining Terra's isolationism. The Branch of Terran Affairs (BOTA) was given the dubious honor of containing Belter foreign trade and keeping the home system sealed. Because BOTA was even more light-handed than the Hegemony, and because of the horrific bloodshed of the Succession Wars, the Belters accepted BOTA governors and isolationist policies.

THE BELT, THE SUCCESSION WARS, AND TODAY

Having already spent nearly six centuries turned inward, the Belters easily maintained several more centuries of effective isolationism during the insanity of the Succession Wars. Left to their own devices, the Belt's population and industrial capabilities reached the point where self-sustaining internal development became possible, ushering in a renaissance that continues to this day. Despite their origins, the Belters gradually lost interest in all foreign trade during this period, largely because exports could only bring a fraction of the wealth generated by the Belters' own growing population.

Like Terra (and unlike most of humanity), the Belt did not suffer from the loss of technology during the Succession Wars. Admittedly, their loss of access to the vast Terran Hegemony university system and industrial base (both devastated by the "atomic infections" of the 2800s) substantially slowed Belter progress in this area, but by the standards of the rest of the Inner Sphere, the Belt remained marvelously well advanced.

Today, the thoroughly insular Belt has refused the invitations of Precentor Martial Focht to open wider contacts with ComStar and the rest of the Inner Sphere, but a small minority seems genuinely interested in the affairs of worlds beyond their terrestrial neighbors. Perhaps in the coming decades the people of the Belt will awaken to the possibilities for trade offered by its minerals, shipyards and medical industry.

BELTERS: WHERE AND WHO ARE THEY?

The Belters are a scattered lot. Despite their collective name, they are not strictly limited to the Terran system's main asteroid belt, though about a billion of these spacer-like frontiersmen reside among these rocks. The other Belters are more widely spread throughout the solar system, with each family seeking its own perfect homestead in space around Sol. According to Marv (my local guide), several hundred million Belters also group

DECISIONS, DECISIONS

"5000 channels of Terran brainwashing or 50 channels of crap from Metis."

This statement, which even today sums up Belter opinion of their entertainment options, also identifies the current reason why the average Belter has little respect for ComStar. Light-speed lags prohibit Belters from large interactive computer networks, so the Belters are more stuck with one-way broadcast entertainment than the average Inner Sphere planet.

Initially, the Belters were politely neutral toward Blake's Word, but wouldn't

adopt it. Key portions of Blake's philosophy entailed restricting the production and maintenance of technology to a techno-theological elite, while life as a Belter required most of the population to have extensive technological knowledge. This cultural disconnect evolved to an outright dislike of ComStar's philosophy when the Order's proselytizing missions grew more heavy-handed.

This distaste has been continually refreshed down the years because ComStar, prime editor of Terran entertainment

programming for two and a half centuries, ceased being subtle with their propaganda after a couple of generations...and Terra was the primary source of broadcast entertainment programming in the Terran system, including for the Belt. Belters are endlessly vexed by parables of Blake in Terran action-adventure and soap opera vids. (Neither can they escape it, as the domestic Belt entertainment industry cannot compete with big-budget Terran studios.)

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together in the Trojan and Spartan asteroid clusters (collectively called “the Trojans”), which lie in the solar La Grange points that lead and trail Jupiter’s orbit (Sol V, a gas giant). About a hundred million more Belters reside in the Kuiper Belt, while perhaps another ten to fifty million homestead the Oort Cloud.

I suppose it says something about ComStar’s inattentiveness that Marv’s population figures startled my ComStar escort (“I thought there were only about fifty million Belters!”) and ignited a snit between Terra and Metis.

As readers might note, other space-dwelling groups exist throughout the Inner Sphere and Clan space, so one might wonder if the “Belter” label applies to them. But while some of the Terran Belters say so, others are strict in applying the term solely to those hailing directly from the Terran asteroid belts (this includes even the “slowboat” colonies of Columbia and Terrelibre).

Belter Habitats

Habs, homesteads, steads, townships, warrens, cities—Belters have many names for their communities, some of which I’ve deciphered. “Habitat” refers to any place where Belters live. “Townships” and “cities” refer to larger habitats or groups of habitats in close proximity. The other terms seem to shift meaning based on context.

The smallest, youngest and poorest are milli-G systems of tunnels (called “warrens”) hewn into the primordial rock of asteroids. Warrens are dug out by families, clans and Belter companies seeking new real estate or wealth. Much of the Belter economic boom comes from their own real estate and industrial speculation, and the little pioneering habitats (“homesteads” or “steads”) that follow represent the cutting edge of that boom.

Older or wealthier habitats quickly construct rotating structures to provide a healthy 1G environment for as many of their facilities as possible. The most common form of this uses rings of railroads, where habitat trains race in endless circles. Such tracks are invariably buried in tunnels of concrete and heaped regolith to protect them from debris and radiation, and more cars can be added as the population grows.

For most of the largest habitats, giant rings (“Stanford toroids”) or stacks of rings (“crystal palaces”) rotate within huge tunnel systems, sometimes encircling the waist of smaller asteroids. These larger townships and cities always have sizable parklands in their upper decks, and the quality of such parks is often a point of civic pride. (Sales of well-sculpted parkland may cost tens of millions of C-bills per hectare, virtually paying the entire habitat’s construction bill.)

Belter Travel

Compared to their habitats, Belter transports seem mundane and mostly fall into three categories: foot, light rail and spacecraft.

Spacecraft travel between Belter habitats uses the normal fare

of DropShips and small craft, and as a lot of habitats are scattered around a lot of locations, the Belters probably have one of the largest aerospace industries of any single “world” in the Inner Sphere. Though their domestic demands leave little room for export, if you’re looking for a spheroid DropShip or small craft, you can’t find a more dependable vessel than a Belter-made ship. You probably won’t find better space pilots than Belters, either—though one Belter small craft salesman confided to me that you probably don’t want to make a Belter pilot or his ship try anything too fancy in an atmosphere.

As an isolationist bunch, one might think Belters have little use for JumpShips, but the vessels they typically build in the Trojans put the lie to that impression. JumpShips are seen not only as a tool of foreign commerce, but a vital lifeline to those Belters who live in the Oort Cloud, where their habitats lie scattered across a sphere whose outer diameter is more than two light-years wide. The Belters thus maintain a “public transit system” of JumpShips that visit clusters of these far-flung homesteads on a monthly to annual basis, and rely on such vessels to cut down in-system travel time in emergencies.

Belter Technology

If you’re familiar with the wonders of Terra from the past several years of *Stellar Geographic* reports and just read the section on Belter habitats, then there won’t be much new Belter technology to amaze you. Belters have taken zero-G industrial operations to a new scale, but you could find the same in Atrean or Galaxan orbit. About the only thing that truly is marvelous (beyond the giant space habitats) about Belter know-how is their medicine.

During my time among them so far, it’s become clear to me that the Belters are far more lax about regulating human genetic engineering than any other nation in the Sphere, and they have truly wrought some miracles as a result. (I would summarize some of them here, but when I got to ten thousand words and two dozen vidclips in the first draft, my editor told me to save it for next month’s issue.)

The two-eagle tour is this: most Belters who work full-time near vacuum have less fear of decompression than the rest of us; virtually no Belter needs to worry about the loss of bone strength or health from extended exposure to zero-G; and Belter hospitals can modify immune systems to deal with virtually any common disease or cancer. Look forward to the details next month.

Belter Religion and Culture

The abiding difference between Belter culture and the culture of any of a thousand “generic” Inner Sphere planets stems from the environment in which they live. Belters are drilled from childhood to handle habitat emergencies, decompressions and zero-G movement. A sheltered, habitat-dwelling Belter who has never been in vacuum can give the average Inner Sphere spacer a run for his money in navigation, maintenance and damage control.



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Obviously, Belters have some deficiencies in skills common in the Inner Sphere (like driving cars, weather watching, and so forth), but they have equivalent interests if you know where to look. The large park areas of major habitats have sports arenas little different than those one might see dirtside. Ice hockey, baseball and football (soccer) are popular and follow major interstellar league rules. Of course, Belters are also interested in rarer zero-G sports, like null-G soccer and jai alai, solar sail racing, ForceCross and Yahn Sun.

An Armed Society: Travelers should know that Belters—especially those in the Main Belt and independents—are an armed society. Local cultural (and technical) differences tend to vary the weapons of choice between blades or firearms, but in the robust hulls of many Belter colonies, these people are not often afraid to “spray lead.” And their excellent medical technology means that most Belters are rather blasé about poking pointy things into irritating people.

Nobility, AWOL: Another interesting point about Belter society is the distinct absence of nobility in Belter culture. Though some Belters have noble titles, these are all awarded by foreign powers and grant no special authority among other Belters. Under Belter laws, a noble Belter is no different than a commoner, a practice rarely seen among the nations of the Inner Sphere and Periphery.

Cultural Groups: Despite their reclusiveness and cultural mores, Belter society is easily recognizable and very human. They maintain an open, capitalist society similar to many planets in the Free Worlds League. They speak their minds openly about their own societies and others without fear of secret police. Individuals can seek profit from honest work, and may move from habitat to habit as they wish (or can afford). In fact, the five Belter groups I’ve identified so far enshrine these “basic rights” in their local constitutions.

A deeper look at the five Belter cultural groups—roughly akin to nation-states—may explain why visitors often see this technologically advanced society as “backward.” While many people from Terra often exaggerate their connections to the ancient cultures of humanity’s homeworld, many of the Belters (who also claim to be descendants of various ancient Terran nation-states) make a point of *living* these ancient cultures. Descendants of the ancient United States, for instance, dominate the Main Belt, though Brazilian communities also claim a stake in this region. (To describe these societies for our League readers, consider the United States society as similar to pre-dictatorship Claybrooke, while the Brazilian people resemble those of Oriente under the Allison dynasty.) Mandarin Chinese settlers, meanwhile, are strong in the Spartan asteroid cluster (though the post-Amaris emigration left a vacuum that drew many Main Belt settlers here as well), while settlers from France dominate the Trojan cluster. (Both of these clusters have more autocratic systems of government than the Main Belt, often granting the franchise only to “station shareholders” rather than to every adult.)

The fifth and final group of Belters might be called “average Belter” or “Belter generic,” and seem to result from a Belter cultural “melting pot.” These people differ from other Belters primarily in their absence of cultural attachment to ancient nation-states, replacing it instead with a kind of formless pioneer spirit.

Religion: As one might expect of a culture a short flight from Terra and deeply interested in its roots (if not interacting with Terra’s current tenants), Belters focus on traditional Terran religions. Roman Catholicism dominates the Belters’ religious universe, largely thanks to the devout Brazilian populations. A multitude of other Christian sects are present, though none in great numbers, which has enabled Buddhism to claim the status of the Belters’ second most popular faith. The range of other Terran religions in the Belt is positively dizzying; all can be found somewhere, but the “extraterrestrial” religions (like New Avalon Catholicism and the One Star Faith) remain essentially unknown here. Atheism and agnosticism are also common among Belter communities, but while their numbers may be significant, other Belters offer a wry saying about such folk: “No one’s an atheist in a blow-out.”

GOVERNMENT

Belter government is a complicated thing. As mentioned earlier, each of the cultural groups maintains a separate government (collectively referred to as “The Big Four”), with an “international” organization called the Metis Commission coordinating these groups and the independents. Nominally, these groups are united in a commonwealth relationship with ComStar’s Branch of Terran Affairs (BOTA), which supposedly dictates Belter foreign relations while granting them domestic autonomy.

Though the Metis Commission loosely oversees the Belters’ many “independent” habitats, most are either family-run or—when slightly larger—model their governments on the nearest “Big Four” system. Still, the Commission maintains some inter-habitat jurisdiction among these settlements and thus has the authority to act as mediator during disputes.

Legally, ComStar’s BOTA is the ultimate authority over all Belters, but in practice, ComStar only involves itself in Belter foreign relations. Even in this arena, however, few BOTA governors (or ROM operatives) seem active in Belter affairs.

SLOWBOAT COLONIES

Talking about the definition of “Belter” with Marv brought up an interesting topic I *had* to pursue: slower-than-light (“slowboat”) colonization efforts that predated the Terran Alliance’s K-F drive colonization program.

As every schoolchild knows, Terran Alliance Kearny-Fuchida JumpShips founded humankind’s first interstellar colony on New Earth. But the “slowboat” colonization efforts of the preceding century are far less noteworthy because—frankly—they came in second despite enormous head starts.

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Columbia

The first two slowboats, incredible as it may seem, were secret parts of the Magellan probe program. I was a bit dubious, but after Marv dragged me through the Metis Museum of History to see the Magellan Colonization Program and offered to arrange a JumpShip ticket to visit Columbia, I'll accept that this "secret sub-program" existed.

As some secondary-school students may recall, history books usually report that the Magellan program, initiated in 2028, sent eight fusion-powered probes to nearby star systems at about two-thirds' light speed. One of the probes, *Magellan-6*, failed and the others found "only" three habitable planets.

But this was not the entire story.

Ten probes were actually built. *Magellan-0* was a prototype used in the Terran system to demonstrate high-speed navigation and debris shielding. *Magellan-9*, meanwhile, was a spare that helped engineers diagnose in-flight problems on other probes. When the other probes had uneventful flights, program budgets were cut and *Magellan-9* was "expended in a flight test" to eliminate the storage costs of what was—for its time—a giant spacecraft.

But *Magellans-6* and *-9* were not lost or "expended" after all, though an effort within the then-dominant Western Alliance strove to make sure history books recorded them as such. In fact, these probes had their large payload bays replaced with even larger habitats. *Magellan-9* was lost in flight due to a debris collision near the orbit of Neptune (Sol VIII), but *Magellan-6* succeeded and founded the colony today called Columbia.

The Magellan Colonization Program owed its existence and its secrecy to factions within the ancient USA that opposed joining the Western Alliance. Popular votes had carried the union, even though it was necessary to hint at embargos to sway some fence-sitters. These threats alienated the extremist factions, including ultra-loyalists within the United States' huge military. Since the USA's aerospace industry (including Federated Boeing) won most of the *Magellan* contracts, it was relatively easy for the ultra-loyalists to arrange an "escape mission" on the *Magellan* probes. If they couldn't keep the USA out of the Alliance, they would build a new, "purer" United States in another star system.

Staffed with about fifty ultra-loyalist diehards, *Magellan-6* thought it was heading toward a habitable planet, since orbital telescopes had spotted free oxygen, nitrogen, water and habitable temperatures in the target system (a world some thirty light-years from Sol). Slowed down by its massive habitat, the vessel took 89 years to discover a bitter truth: the "habitable" planet was a "super-Earth" with a surface gravity almost six times that of Terra.

Thus marooned in an alien solar system, the second- and third-generation crewmembers of *Magellan-6* settled the system's bountiful asteroid belts and collectively named them Columbia after a colonial region in the old USA. Miraculously, this colony thrived, and its resulting culture is (I'm told) strikingly similar to

that of Terra's Belters in the New Washington settlement. Columbia remained undiscovered until 2850, when ComStar found it (apparently via a radio telescope array). I'm told Columbia's first contact experience was akin to waking up in an insane asylum's psycho ward with no warning. The Inner Sphere was in the grip of the Second Succession War and Columbia wanted no part of that. ComStar later turned to Terra's Belters for diplomatic relations with the isolationist Columbians.

Columbia today remains extremely isolationist because its limited contact with the outside triggered two civil wars. The first happened around 2875, when the Columbian government attempted to centralize power in order to remain hidden from the Inner Sphere. The second happened at about the turn of the millennium, thanks largely to economic disruptions from imported technology. Belters are now allowed back in, trading medicine for the products of cheap Columbian labor, but Columbia stridently avoids having anything to do with other foreigners.

Terrelibre

Between 2082 and 2099, another series of slowboats was launched (with no knowledge of the Magellan Colonization Program). These did not come from a single program or class of spacecraft, but were rather a motley group of a dozen ships, including modified interplanetary vessels and purpose-built starships, meant to carry dissidents fleeing the Western/Terran Alliance. Aerospace technology had advanced enough since the *Magellan* era to make these slowboats surprisingly feasible despite the limited resources available. Only three of these ships were lost in flight, likely due to life support failure. Six more arrived at their destinations, the three habitable planets discovered by the *Magellan* probes. However, they arrived in the mid-22nd century to find burgeoning colonies already established by Terran Alliance JumpShips. The Alliance had a long memory for dissidents and turned these missions into laughingstocks, not the historical achievements they were. (This propaganda ultimately forged the modern notion that slowboat colonization is unfeasible.)

The other three slowboats went to uninhabitable systems in hopes of avoiding contact with any future Terran Alliance colonization. Fusion rocketry had reached the point where engineers had come to believe in the feasibility of one-way colonization by small missions. Whether this belief—or merely desperation—spurred these slowboat missions enough to target uninhabitable systems is a matter even the Belters aren't certain of.

The fates of these slowboat missions remained unknown until the 2330s, when rediscovery of the slowboat records by Terran historians prompted the Terran Hegemony to launch a much-publicized "quest for the lost colonies" (an act likely aimed at distracting the public from domestic problems). By 2338, it was found that New London had failed in the mid-2200s, never having quite reached a self-sustaining point, but the Brazilian Paraiso



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From: pierrek.fwlstelligeographic@mail
Sent: Wednesday, May 13, 3057 10:28 PM
To: kagamepa.belladonnaimail.srv
Subject: Fountain of Youth, Paulie

Paul. These Belters are great. I just got here and was sampling the local food when I lost my left index finger over a girl. Another restaurant patron had reservations (hah!) about me talking to the waitress. ("Furriners tain't 'sposed tuh talk at no Belter girl.") While explaining I was just ordering, "Caveman" Marv ("All m'friends call me that") stabbed his knife into the table to make his point (hah!) It was a thirty-centimeter blade thick as my wrist, and split my second knuckle and two finger bones lengthwise. I shouted a "battle cry" (sick whimper) and jammed my spoon into Marv's eye. When the cops got me uncorked from the table, they took us both down to the clinic, snipped off my finger and promised to grow me a new one (and Marv a new eye). I got my new finger stitched on yesterday—they even matched capillaries, so there's no swelling. I have to practice some to retrain motor nerves, but Paul, Belters have organ and limb regeneration! My fingerprint didn't even change.

Once I covered our fine, Marv warmed up and volunteered to be my guide ("Bein' a bit 'tween employments right now.") He said the spoon attack impressed him more than covering the fine. ("Terries n' Robes usually just screams when they gets stuck.") He even bought me "a proper Belter pigsticker" (once I gave him his first payment.) Since then, Marv's been a font of knowledge about the Belt.

I've told you about some of the other things Marv's shown me, but this letter's about their medical tech. Marv is a walking poster child for Belter medicine. There're the assorted machine tool and pistol injuries ("Yeh, a knife in a gunfight wuz a bit slow on my part.") that Marv's endured in his seventy-two years. (Look at the picture—does he look over thirty?)

After one blow-out cost him two lungs, some sinuses, an eardrum "an' a good pair o' underbritches," Marv got some "retrofits" to survive vacuum exposure. His skin and connective tissues were toughened, he got some extra sphincters here and there (did the pics of his sphinctered-up nose and ears come through?), and an extra set of transparent eyelids. When I didn't believe him, he went to the nearest airlock and showed me. He danced outside the airlock for five minutes to show off (I clocked him!), then hurried back in to get some

frostbite treated—the handle he'd held onto in the milli-G had been shaded for hours. A quick spray at a clinic fixed that right up. And you still have to vent a lot of internal gas pressure to avoid embolisms, so I ended up buying Marv another "pair o' underbritches."

Marv's past employment includes a merchant JumpShip that visited the Federated Suns in the 3010s. During one shore leave, he entered (hah!) a passionate but unprotected relationship with a port prostitute, picked up Joshallan Fever ("an' sundry private conditions") and had shrugged off the diseases before his DropShip returned to its JumpShip. (Red dwarf, 3-day transit.) Belter "vaccinations" consist of enhancing immune systems to incredible levels. Paul, this stuff is all genetic, and it's a standard treatment for Belter kids, the ones that don't inherit it from their parents.

Marv's introduced me to Belters who go for extreme cosmetic modifications, to look like animal-human hybrids and weirder things. These aren't just surgery, they're genetic changes. Marv didn't think much of the "weird 'uns" and took pains to point out the changes weren't inheritable, but this sort of thing shows just how advanced Belter medicine is: major genomic changes for cosmetic purposes.

One thing I must look into is these "Ancients" Marv's told me about. I mean, undergrad biochemistry taught me about genetic mechanisms for aging. The Belters must know much more. Marv says it's an open secret that a lot of the higher Belter politicians are lured out of the private sector (and its high wages) with offers of this "Methuselah Treatment," on the theory that this will give the Belters better leaders. After being in public office, they supposedly get new IDs and disappear. Marv's got me hooked up with a local doctor whom the neighbors say is more than 300 years old. This guy, Doc Otis, supposedly met Richard Cameron when he was a kid! I know this sounds like bull, but you wouldn't believe the photos and stories Marv got from the locals. Hell, I even got my first threatening commcall telling me to stay away! This is either an incredibly elaborate practical joke, or I'm on to something. And since SG is still refreshing my expense account, I'm going with "I'm on to something."

Let me know if those pics came through. I used new compression software that I've heard ComStar malfs up.

Pierre

THE ANCIENTS

and French Terrelibre were growing, if not prospering. Paraiso's 15,000 inhabitants abandoned their colony when the Hegemony offered them passage to a habitable planet. Terrelibre lost some of its population to a similar offer, but the majority remained out of dislike for the Hegemony's oppression of Terrelibre's motherland. In fact, Terrelibre's population grew soon afterward with a flood of European immigrants, and the colony came to host a THAF fleet base (which used the system's astronomical name, Ross 248, for misinformation purposes). This base would be administered in time by the SLDF, and today reportedly hosts a ComStar fleet. Terrelibre, I'm told, provides most of the personnel and materials for that base.

Unlike Terra's and Columbia's Belters, most Terrelibrans reportedly live on a couple of Terra-sized uninhabitable rocky planets. The hostile environments there keep Terrelibrans in enclosed habitats, and inspired a relatively Belter-like culture, but the benefits of living in natural gravity and in close conjunction with ComStar have created a society more closely aligned with the Inner Sphere than segregated from it.

GAMEMASTER'S SECTION

Are there ancient immortals lurking in the Solar System asteroids? This is, of course, a question for the gamemaster.

Gamemasters who decide to include these Ancients in game play should not get swept away by the mystery of the name. These are individuals who have lived a long time in good health and were chosen from the Belters' business elite to be capable leaders. The prospect of prolonged life discourages personal adventurism by the Ancients, and so they tend to act indirectly, often through intermediaries.

The Belt is a modern society, with well-evolved social and political mechanisms, not a corrupt world of darkness. The Ancients' actions beyond the Belt are therefore primarily aimed at maintaining their secrets, relying on the intelligence agencies of Belter governments to do the dirty work. After all, they reason, if the trillions of people in human-occupied space were suddenly granted immunity from old age, that might present a horrible overpopulation problem for the entire Inner Sphere. Compared to the collapse of civilization, a bullet in the brain and troubled consciences are worthwhile sacrifices.

KIRI-J(F) SYSTEM SECURITY SCANNER (12.3.89 BUILD 505)



SECURITY LEVEL MARBLE



CULT OF THE SAINTS CAMERON 



CULT OF THE SAINTS CAMERON

From *Cults of the Inner Sphere: The Followers of the Saints Cameron*, by Eva Fragerstrom

ORIGINS OF THE CULT OF THE SAINTS CAMERON

Jonathan Cameron, the fourth to sit in the First Lord's throne, died of a stroke in 2738. On New Earth exactly one year later, Lieutenant Saul Robstein was struck blind and dumb at the controls of his *Crockett*. SLDF doctors could find no medical reason for his affliction, and the lieutenant suddenly regained his sight and speech three days later, ranting that the ghost of Jonathan Cameron had come to him. Holding a flaming sword in his hand, the ghost told Robstein that Jonathan's sister would die in two years, but that her influence would be felt far into the future. After undergoing a thorough medical and psychological evaluation, Lieutenant Robstein was found to be in perfect health. He was cleared to return to duty with the 191st Royal BattleMech Division.

Two years and three days later, Jocasta Cameron indeed died. Five days after that event, another soldier—this time a gunner named Sandra Ustus in the Seventieth Infantry Division—was struck deaf, blind and dumb for five days. As with Lieutenant Robstein, doctors could find no physical or psychological reason for her condition. Ustus, too, claimed to have experienced a visitation during this time—only from Jocasta Cameron. Allegedly, *this* ghost prophesied that Simon Cameron would be slain by an "assassin's digging machine."

Both incidents were all but forgotten until 2751, when Sergeant Heinz Mann inexplicably fell into a coma the week after a malfunctioning [or sabotaged—*Starling*] mining robot killed Simon Cameron. Sergeant Mann, of the 290th Mechanized Infantry Division, had previously been in excellent health and his condition baffled doctors for eight days. When he awoke, Mann talked of experiencing visions of dozens of dead Camerons, all lying in their own blood.

The media was quick to link Mann's story with those of Ustus and Robstein, and interest in these odd tales increased even further with the publication of correspondence between Jonathan

and Jocasta. By an odd twist of fate, the staff at the Court of the Star League was beginning to release these private letters and writings (in accordance with the ten-year rule). The media attention drew unprecedented interest to these collected diary extracts and letters. But while many who read these works dismissed them as mere curiosities (at best), others took Jonathan's writings about his bizarre dreams to be visions of the future. These believers began to meet and eventually formulated a set of common beliefs and rituals, shaping their lives based on the "prophesies" of the dead First Lord's letters. Prominent was the belief that both Jonathan and Jocasta were saints of God, who watched over the Star League from Heaven.

Initially, the general public considered these "Believers of the Saints Cameron" nothing more than harmless crackpots. But in 2753, the haunting similarity between Richard Cameron's first meeting with Stefan Amaris and a dream Jonathan Cameron had recounted in a letter half a century before fanned the embers of public interest. Soon the cult had a following fifty million strong, giving it considerable social and political power in the Terran Hegemony. Many members of the SLDF were also Believers, thanks to the publicity given to the visions experienced by Mann, Ustus and Robstein.

The Cult of the Saints Cameron not only survived the Amaris Coup and the fall of the Star League, but prospered as its adherents unearthed new revelations from Jonathan's writings that warned of these catastrophic events. As the First Succession War raged, small groups of believers sprung up across the Inner Sphere and beyond. But as the generation who had lived through the destruction of the Star League died out, support for the cult began to wane. Meanwhile, arguments over the interpretation of certain key dreams further fragmented the remaining believers.

Bereft of coherent leadership as the Second Succession War ground on, the Believers' numbers dwindled. By the start of the Third Succession War, the cult was reduced to a few small pockets in the Periphery and the Lyran Commonwealth. Only the occasional sighting of a Believer monk or nun (invariably clad in humble robes of homespun material and bearing the sword that is their symbol of office) reminded the Inner Sphere at large that the cult still existed. Over the centuries, tales continued to recount events where endangered

NOTES

I always say there's nothing better than a mysterious cult to stir up a good conspiracy theory. Of literally hundreds out there, some are officially acknowledged or even supported (the state-sponsored Cult of the Dragon in the Draconis Combine, for example). Others are vigorously suppressed. Few survive the passing of their founder (often conveniently the focus of said cult). The Cult of Saint Cameron (or the Saints Cameron, plural, depending on who you talk to) is one of the exceptions to the rule. They have survived through the centuries, guarding the (allegedly) prophetic writings of Jonathan Cameron.

Many scholars agree that, like Nostradamus before him, Jonathan Cameron's letters and diaries can be loosely interpreted to match events centuries after his death. But is the Cult of St. Cameron content to watch and wait for their prophecies to come to pass, or do they nudge things from time to time?

—Starling



CULT OF THE SAINTS CAMERON

communities, lost travelers or wounded soldiers unexpectedly received aid from these mysterious figures.

THE KNIGHTS OF ST. CAMERON

Formerly a battalion commander in the Twentieth Lyran Guards, Martin Gluck retired from the LCAF in 2955. A devoted Believer, Gluck announced his intention to create a mercenary command that would participate in “the struggle between good and evil, in which the knight is always the Lord’s first defense.”

Many thought Gluck mad. Everyone expected him to fail.

But despite the odds, Martin Gluck’s “Knights of St. Cameron” took to the field in 2956. Formed around an assembly of men and women whose ancestors had served in the SLDF, the Knights proved something of an oddity. Maintaining high moral standards far above those expected of mercenaries, the Knights often undertook “charity” missions defending poor worlds out on the Periphery for little or no pay. As a result, the Knights’ equipment and finances were often in poor shape. Unable to attract the best MechWarriors (pedigree alone only went so far), the Knights’ lack of skill and cohesion made them something of a laughingstock in the eyes of other mercenaries, yet they still fielded roughly two full ‘Mech regiments by the year 3050.

The Knights of St. Cameron were operating under contract to the Federated Commonwealth when the Clans attacked the Inner Sphere. Fighting the Wolf Clan with great spirit but little skill, their first regiment was slaughtered almost to the last warrior on Rastaban. On Domain, their second regiment was equally overmatched. Forced from the Casswarn Plain by the 352nd Assault Cluster, the Second Knights attempted to fall back to the Kusson Mountains. Outflanked at the Zazz River, Colonel Dewey led his command to the city of Kusson instead. Close on their heels, the 352nd launched an assault that quickly took the city—but when the dust settled, the Knights had vanished.

THE TRINITY

In the wake of the first Star League’s collapse, the Believers added General Aleksandr Kerensky’s name to those of the two Saints Cameron, thus completing their trinity of divine figures.

Jonathan Cameron: Eldest son of First Lord Michael, Jonathan became First Lord of the Star League in 2690, when his father was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer and retired. In public, Jonathan projected an image of a confident man with few pretensions and affections. Privately, he was haunted by dreams of Terra’s destruction. This was the driving force behind Jonathan’s push to expand and update the SLDF at a time when the Inner Sphere was enjoying a golden age of peace and prosperity. The crowning glory of the rearmament program was the creation of the Space Defense System, which (ironically) would ultimately allow Stefan Amaris take control of the Terran Hegemony and inflict such heavy casualties on the SLDF as they fought to liberate it.

Though he maintained a charming and self-assured exterior, Jonathan Cameron was tormented by insomnia, anxiety attacks and repeated loss of physical control similar to epileptic seizures. He claimed that he had visions during these times, but only confided these visions—most about an endangered Terra—in letters to his wife and sister. Unfortunately, Jonathan’s mind began to crumble under the stress and he became increasingly indecisive, prompting an attempted coup in 2729. Thankfully for the Star League, Jonathan finally realized he needed help, and relied more and more on his sister’s advice. With Jocasta making the critical decisions, Jonathan focused his attention on humanitarian projects such as building hospitals and contributing to relief efforts. He became deeply loved by the people of the Star League during the last years of his reign.

Jocasta Cameron: Jocasta was known as a bright and precocious child with a love of the grand balls, pomp and ceremony that marked life at Court. Thus, she surprised everyone in 2704 when she joined a cloistered Benedictine Order at the Abbey of St. Joan in Scotland. Over time, Jocasta became head of the abbey, living a sheltered life devoted to God.

Mother Jocasta nevertheless maintained a close relationship with her brother Jonathan, and the two corresponded frequently. These letters are the foundation of the Believers’ doctrine. More than anyone else, Jocasta was aware of and concerned about what was happening to her brother. When leading members of the SLDF and Star League Court attempted to remove the First Lord for his growing indecisiveness, they had Mother Jocasta in mind to replace him. She remained oblivious to the plot, but the coup attempt finally made Jonathan realize just how sick he was. He offered to step down in favor of Jocasta, but she refused, saying that her religious life came first. Instead, Jocasta agreed (with the blessing of the High Council) to act as First Lord Jonathan’s most trusted adviser. A sophisticated communications link to Unity City was installed, and Mother Jocasta became the Star League’s secret co-ruler. As Jonathan’s physical and mental health failed, Mother Jocasta shouldered more and more of the burdens of government.

Aleksandr Kerensky: Given his role in the events surrounding the fall of the first Star League, it is not surprising that the Believers chose General Aleksandr Kerensky to complete their divine trinity. The (then) mysterious departure of the Star League Defense Force and its leader into the Periphery spawned a host of theories and predictions. As the Succession Wars dragged on, the idea that Kerensky (or his descendents) would someday return to save the Inner Sphere took root in popular consciousness.

The reality of the Clan Invasion has eroded some of the mystique surrounding Kerensky among the Believers (much as it has done for followers of the One Star Faith). But the Believers are quick to point out that it was in fact Kerensky’s son—not the great general himself—who created the Clans.

Minor Prophets: To many Believers, the ill-fated Simon Cameron became a minor prophet even though he had shown little interest in spiritual affairs during his life and has appeared in no visions after his death. Also on this honored list are Steve Thorvald, head of the first Star League’s Department of Information and Education. He was the visionary behind the Prometheus network; a massive database to which all schools and libraries in the Terran Hegemony had free access.

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MODERN TIMES

The appearance of the Clans also marked an increase in sightings of Believers along the invasion front. They may have been gathering information on the invaders, or acting on an interpretation of some of Jonathan's more obscure visions. The disclosure of the Clans' true origins sparked renewed interest in Star League-era history throughout the Inner Sphere, and brought the writings of Jonathan Cameron back into the public consciousness. For the first time in more than a century, the Believers saw their numbers rise.

The reappearance of the Knights of St. Cameron served to draw additional attention to the cult, even though links with the mercenaries are tenuous at best. In late 3053, a JumpShip entered the Main Street system. Identifying herself as the *Jonathan Cameron*, the *Monolith*-class vessel released her DropShips. Aboard were Colonel Mortimer Dewey and a battalion of survivors from the Knights' second regiment. Rebuffing all inquiries as to how they had escaped the Wolves and where they had been since, the Knights announced their intention to rebuild. Once more the call went out to those with blood ties to the original SLDF.

Reconstruction went quickly. Colonel Dewey had access to a seemingly endless supply of money, and the Knights' DropShips were laden with supplies and equipment—much of it of first Star League vintage. By the start of 3055, the Knights were independently patrolling the Periphery border, aiding worlds the

Federated Commonwealth could not garrison effectively. In 3058, Colonel Dewey announced that the Knights of St. Cameron (now at regimental strength) were ready to accept contracts. Desperate for troops to bolster its frontiers, the newly formed Lyran Alliance signed them up immediately.

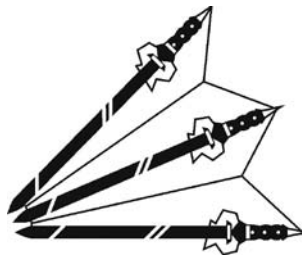
At first, few realized just how different these Knights were from their predecessors. Then they more than proved themselves against the Fourth Davion Guards on Fort Loudon during the FedCom Civil War. No longer the laughingstock of the mercenary community, the Knights have gone on to hand the Jade Falcons' Delta Galaxy a string of embarrassing defeats.

The Cult of St. Cameron has benefited greatly from the FedCom Civil War, the dissolution of the Second Star League and subsequent events. Previously obscure passages from the cult's texts have now been interpreted as referring to these recent occurrences. Across the Inner Sphere, people are beginning to embrace many of the cult's beliefs, looking for signs of salvation in the collected works of the long-dead Jonathan Cameron.

Ironically, this turnabout in the cult's fortunes may also destroy it. Long-standing divisions between disparate groups have only widened, fueled by arguments over the correctness of the latest interpretation of various passages. With no central authority to uphold an "official" version of their beliefs, cooperation—even communication—between the scattered groups appears to be breaking down.

SYMBOLS

At the cult's height, the symbols of the Believers of the Saints Cameron were a common sight across the Inner Sphere. These symbols appeared everywhere: on the sides of buildings, on BattleMechs and combat vehicles, even on the hulls of DropShips and WarShips.



The Three Swords: Arrayed in a fan, the Three Swords of Saint Cameron represent the three Saints. The use of swords originates from the flaming sword carried by Jonathan Cameron (known to have been an expert swordsman) in his visitation to Lieutenant Saul Robstein.

Today the swords have been adopted by the Knights of St. Cameron as their unit symbol.



Jocasta's Habit: A rendition of the habit worn by Benedictine nuns, the Believers use this symbol to commemorate their second saint, Jocasta Cameron.



The Bloody Throne: One of the most powerful (and prophetic) images from Jonathan Cameron's dreams, the bloodstained throne is used by Believers to remember the fall of the First Star League—an event that many feel tragically vindicates their faith.



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[[[FORUMID192.1946.175.16/CULTS/STCAMERON]]]

Interesting. But what do they actually believe?

--Bonduur

That they can foretell the future?

--19HUCK885

Not quite. They think Jonathan Cameron could, though.

--Veladrum

OK. Here's a question. If you know the future, would you try and change it?

--Bonduur

Please! Don't ask! You'll just start one of those fate/predestination/God's will debates. Makes my head hurt.

--19HUCK885

What about these "monks." Anybody got anything on them?

--Bonduur

My uncle ran into one on La Grave back in '51.

--LTDmasch

Is this your uncle who was ambushed by aliens on Stein's Folly, or the one who says Hanse Davion is still alive and running a holiday resort on Leamington?

--Veladrum

Neither. This was Uncle Jacques. He was with the Fifth Davion Guards then. Fighting the Jade Falcons. His *JagerMech* took a hit to the ammo bins and he had to punch out. So there he was, armed with nothing but a survival knife and with these two Elementals heading right for him.

--LTDmasch

And?

--19HUCK885

Well, Uncle Jacques is thinking he's got no chance and maybe he'll surrender. Discretion being the better part of valor and all that. Then all of a sudden up pops this

mysterious robed figure swinging this real big sword.

--LTDmasch

A sword? Against a pair of Elementals?

--Veladrum

Hack. Slash. Two Clanners in full battle armor down, and all in a couple of seconds. Must have been some kind of vibro-blade. You know, like the DEST vibro-katanas? Anyway. Night is falling now. Uncle Jacques' savior walks up, grabs him by the arm and gets him off the battlefield and into a cave. Never a word the whole time. When he wakes up next morning he's alone in the cave with a SAR unit just arriving outside.

--LTDmasch

Come on. Nobody drops battle-armored troops with a sword! So what happened to your uncle?

--19HUCK885

Got a new BattleMech. Went back into the line. He died during the FedCom Civil War—covering Victor Davion's back on York.

--LTDmasch

Hmmm. The link between the Believers and the Knights of St. Cameron are just a bit tenuous, don't you think?

--Bonduur

So who do you think is bankrolling the Knights, then? The One Star Faith? Another bunch of whack-jobs nostalgic for the "good old days" of the Star League. They'd get on like a house on fire.

--19HUCK885

Wolverines!

--Nuzo

Please! That is your answer to everything. Somebody disappears in the Periphery. It was the Wolverines! Unidentified raiders attack some world. It was the Wolverines! A whole roll of toilet paper gets used in one day. It was the Wolverines! Get a grip!

--19HUCK885

I want to know where they got all their equipment from. First Star League, eh? What do you think? ComStar? Word of Blake?

--Veladrum

Wolverines!

--Nuzo

Nuzo, don't make me come over there and hurt you.

--19HUCK885

Main Street is right on the Periphery border. How about a forgotten Star League cache?

--LTDmasch

Gods! I hope not! That one got old with *Immortal Warrior VII*.

--Bonduur

How about the Clans? Some of their second-line units use old Star League designs.

--19HUCK885

But the Clans aren't exactly handing over their old equipment. How could a bunch of second-rate mercs knock off a Clan arms depot?

--Veladrum

We're sure these guys ARE the Knights? Could they be another covert Clan unit, like Wolf's Dragoons, Snords irregulars or Clinton's Cutthroats?

--Bonduur

We don't know that the Cutthroats were Clan. The Clans don't have any record of them. From the sounds of it, these are the real Knights. The question is how they escaped from the Wolves, and where they got all their equipment. Somebody has to be backing them.

--19HUCK885

If not Clan, then who?

--Bonduur

Wolverines!

--Nuzo

Nuzo!

--19HUCK885

VIEWS OF THE FUTURE?

What is perhaps most striking about the collected letters and writings of First Lord Jonathan Cameron is the vivid imagery from his dreams and visions. Often it is impossible to accredit them to known events. Others appear to be so startlingly accurate that it is no wonder some believe he could see the future.

In a letter to his wife in 2692, Jonathan talked of “dreams of Terra scarred and mutilated.” At the same time he confided to his sister that he had experienced a vision of “foreign flags on Earth’s soil and strange, coarse men walking the white halls of Unity City.” With Amaris’ coup, these dire predictions would come all too true. In a 2703 letter to his sister, Jonathan wrote “...a Cameron child shall stand before a distant ruler and be beguiled by his rough country ways and the interests they share. I fear for the child because the distant ruler has cruel, dark thoughts...” In 2753, Richard Cameron met Stefan Amaris for the first time in a hauntingly similar scene.

In light of more recent events, some of Jonathan’s visions are open to reinterpretation. The image of “Terra dimmed and no longer the bright beacon of the Human race” previously was thought to relate to the Amaris occupation or the fall of the first Star League. But with Terra firmly in the hands of the Blakists, a third possibility suggests itself. The First Lord talked of seeing “an impenetrable shield of swords and ever-vigilant eyes to guard against any threat approaching Terra.” This was one vision he attempted to fulfill personally with the introduction of the SDS system, but it could equally apply to the ease with which the Word of Blake defeated the Com Guards’ ill-fated Case White.

Was Jonathan’s dream of “Terra under threat by a pack of ravening beasts” warning us about the Clans? Could his vision of “all the stars above blotted out by a creeping darkness” have been a warning of the damage to the HPG network? Then there is the recurring image of a lone figure, standing in defiance of some seemingly overwhelming force. Different interpretations have suggested everyone from Hanse Davion to Anastasius Focht.

In the end, people find what they look for amid the centuries-old writings of a deeply troubled man.

GAMEMASTER’S SECTION

Born during the fading glory of the First Star League, the Cult of St. Cameron once enjoyed enormous power and prestige. When Stefan Amaris’ Rim Worlds Republic troops seized Terra, all that came to an end. But even as the Hegemony fell under the Usurper’s control, a small group of Believers who held positions in the Court of the Star League managed to escape. Led by the Court Archivist, Gerrit van Munster, they carried away with them copies of many unique documents. Chief among these records were letters and diary entries written by Jonathan Cameron that had not been released to the general public for security reasons.

These records have formed a secret core to the cult’s beliefs. Only the most senior Believers have ever seen them. Central to the divisions plaguing the Believers is the vision that some terrible calamity will overtake the Inner Sphere and all of humanity. From the start, the Believers began preparations to face this event—to ensure the survival of the human race. They established safe havens on lightly inhabited planets, and in isolated regions of more populated worlds. They quietly stockpiled food and supplies. They converted their wealth into imperishable gold and gems. They hoarded knowledge in secret caches.

And then the Believers settled down to await the apocalypse.

A CULT DIVIDED

As the Star League disintegrated and the Inner Sphere plunged into the Succession Wars, the first divisions began to appear within the Believers’ ranks. Surely the cataclysm had come, for what could be worse than the tableau of death and destruction now playing itself out? Many of the Believers abandoned their self-appointed task. But some remained convinced that the worst was yet to come.

Down through the centuries, the cult’s senior members pored over Jonathan Cameron’s words, interpreting and reinterpreting their meaning. This inevitably led to further divisions. Today, the modern Cult of St. Cameron is divided into three major groups: Traditionalists, Cloisters and Templars.

Traditionalists

These Believers contend that the original interpretation was correct, and that the Amaris Coup and subsequent Succession Wars were indeed the cataclysm Jonathan Cameron foretold. While they still adhere to many of the cult’s practices, they no longer consider themselves the guardians of humanity’s future. As their emblem, they have adopted the bloody throne.

Cloisters

Holding to the idea that the cataclysm has yet to come, the Cloisters are isolationist almost to the point of xenophobia. More common out in the Periphery, their scattered settlements take a long view, often eschewing technology for a more sustainable long-term lifestyle of subsistence farming.



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Unknown to their neighbors (if any) and passing Periphery raiders, these groups are often sitting on carefully hidden caches of high-tech equipment. The pride of these secret storehouses is the data cores many of these Believers have uncovered, which contain fragments of the Terran Hegemony's Prometheus database.

The Cloisters use the stylized habit of Mother Jocasta as their emblem.

Templars

This third main group in the Cult of St. Cameron is itself fractured into many smaller ones. Some lean toward the Cloisters' interpretation of Jonathan Cameron's prophecies, that the cataclysm is yet to come. Others contend that the Clan Invasion or the Word of Blake's Jihad may be the long-awaited events. Regardless of their beliefs, the one thing all Templar Believers share is the conviction that they cannot stand idly by and watch.

Each Templar group (or Order, as they call themselves) operates from a chapter house, though they rarely resemble an ecclesiastical structure. Each Order chooses its own course of action. Some travel the poorer worlds of the Inner Sphere, serving as doctors or teachers. Others take a more militant bent in the "struggle of good against evil," whether against evil nobles, Periphery raiders, the Clans or the Word of Blake. The Templars have adopted the three swords as their emblem.

Templars use a ranking system that dictates the duties and responsibilities they must undertake.

Lay Member – The Templars depend on lay members to provide each Order with funds and supplies. Lay members seeking to advance to the next rank usually take service in the chapter house, providing the Order with its menial labor force. Through faithful service and a suitable aptitude, a lay member can achieve advancement to the rank of squire.

Squire – An Order draws its skilled workers from the ranks of the squires, who commonly receive education up to university level. Squires are entitled to carry a sword and receive armed and unarmed combat training. Especially promising students will be apprenticed to a knight.

Knight – Each Order has forty-seven knights. A squire can only progress to this rank when one of the existing knights dies. Candidates must undergo a grueling (but rarely fatal) series of trials not unlike a Clan Trial of Position. Upon becoming a knight, an individual is expected to choose a weapon or form of combat. This will become a life study for the Templar. A few will achieve the exalted accolade of Weapon Master, the undisputed champion in their selected field. Knights receive schooling in modern strategy and tactics, and many also receive MechWarrior training.

The Sword: A Believer Templar knight's sword is no ordinary weapon. In the right hands, these finely crafted vibro-blades can even cut through BattleMech armor. All knights carry a sword in addition to their chosen weapon.

The Code: Templars are sworn to uphold the chivalric code: courage, honor, courtesy, justice and a readiness to help the weak.

The Quest: At least once in his life, each knight is expected to undertake a quest. Often inspired by studying the writings of Jonathan Cameron, the object of a knight's quest can range from bringing aid to a disaster-struck community, to hunting down pirates in the Periphery, or discovering a long-lost Star League artifact. On occasion, groups of knights and their squires have undergone quests into the Inner Sphere as mercenaries, to fight in the Succession Wars or against the Clans.

KIRI-J(F) SYSTEM SECURITY SCANNER (12.3.89 BUILD 505)



SECURITY LEVEL SLATE





THE SAURIMAT





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NOTES

THE SAURIMAT: A COMPENDIUM

"The Saurimat are a predatory sect of mercenary assassins hailing from the planet Shaul Khala."

"Khaled, Hassan Ali: Major. Born on Shaul Khala, Khaled began his career as a Saurimat Commando, or "Quick Death Assassin." After leaving the Commandos under non-disclosed circumstances, he worked as a freelance mercenary before joining the Gray Death Legion, where he remained until his death."

End of entry. No additional data available.

—From *Bruckner's Guide to the Inner Sphere*, Dobless Info Services, 3068 Electronic Edition

CURIOUS, ISN'T IT?

Generations of children were kept in line by stories of an evil Saurimat warrior grabbing them at night. Not many unexplained murders haven't got at least one ninja, ROM operative or Arabic assassin on the short list of suspects where the public's mind is concerned. Uncountable bar tales tell of chance encounters or near brushes with the "Quick Death."

And yet...everything this condensed public knowledge yields when one queries the Saurimat is summed up in those two snippets of data above.

Let's take stock and have a closer look at what we know:

"The Saurimat are a predatory sect of mercenary assassins..." Yikes! A sect! Not exactly non-info, but not helping much, either. Warrior sects or orders are nothing new, and it is a legitimate form of organization (whether or not something's supposed to be kept secret). It gets catchier with the "assassins" part, of course; this automatically means the group's actions have to be oriented outwards. (Otherwise, they wouldn't last that long, right? I mean, while surely fun, playing assassin and counter-assassin in a closed membership usually reduces the number of potential targets rather quickly!)

Added to this comes the label "mercenary," which definitely establishes the Saurimat as guns (or knives) for hire. Which brings us to the question: Why don't they leave any data traces? Not in reports, contracts, rumor-mills. Yes, it can mean that they are either very, very good, or they operate under false flags (or both). Nonetheless, such an utter absence of hints is highly uncommon for someone depending on contract work, no matter how elite they are.

"...From the planet Shaul Khala." Now, this is just hard to confirm. A planet is a big place to hide, but the locals there *do* have a large amount of folkloric "hooded man in the dark" tales. And our dear late Major Khaled hails from there, right? But please note: Khaled only stated that he was *born* on Shaul Khala.

Anyway, what's to say? For a Sphere-wide phenomenon, it is highly unlikely (but not impossible) to be or have been localized to just one planetary system. But who would have carried the tale, then? The word "Saurimat" has been in use much longer than

In case the Cult of St. Cameron doesn't do it for you, let's try something darker, shall we? How about a good old-fashioned assassins' guild? Well, you're in luck, my friends, because the next bit looks at the Saurimat. Cult? Mercenaries? Freedom fighters? Blakist pawns?

As ever, read and let your own wisdom decide...

—Starling

from the point where Major Khaled came in the open. Maybe the major just rode a clever publicity wave for his own benefit? Probably not.

"...Khaled began his career as a Saurimat Commando, or 'Quick Death Assassin.'" Here are some fun details. Are they assassins or commandos? While probably only a play on words, Khaled's early career title might hint at a wider range of skills that possible Saurimat warriors possess. This bit does not contain helpful confirmation or denial info, though. And the "Quick Death Assassin" subtitle sounds positively bad-ass, but does it really reveal anything new? I mean, let's face it: slow assassins generally don't live very long or in secret.

So the question is as simple as it is valid: Do the Saurimat exist? And if they do: What are they really?

The answer?

Yes, they do.

But not quite like expected.

BELIEF TO THE STARS

When believers in Islam finally left Terra in the mid-25th century (relatively late in the colonization game), their search for a messiah gradually fused many distinct groups of northwest African Muslims into a group known as the Azami. The Azami groups settled worlds with hot suns and desert sands—places that most reminded them of their Terran homelands and allowed them to live their lives in accordance with the Koran (Qur'an). Being among the last major religious movements to spread into space and adapt their canon to the new age, Muslims saw themselves often outnumbered and even ridiculed by adherents of other beliefs. Their preference for harsh worlds kept them separate from most other populations, which further fostered a sense of separation between them and the rest of the interstellar community.

More than any other worlds, their settlements became bastions of faith. Arkab, Algedi, Al Na'ir, Markab and Shaul Khala—all were resoundingly dominated by the Muslim religion, and remain so today. In fact, the world of Arkab (as most any Spheroid knows) is considered the interstellar center of the off-Terra Islamic faiths.

Traveling among the stars, the Azami took with them not only their beliefs and scripture, but also tried and true traditions of everyday life. Like *hawala*, their honor-based, informal money transfer system.

As one might expect, interstellar culture did not take kindly to

THE SAURIMAT

non-conformists. Anything went in those days, and the weak were relentlessly exploited, crushed and left for dead (not necessarily in that order). But the Azami were quick to counter, and established early on an equally informal “security service” that assured safe passage for settlers and their goods to Azami worlds.

This network called itself the Saurimat.

At first merely colonial companions, these men (and a few women) gradually morphed into other fields of travel assistance, providing a wide range of services related to safe interstellar travel for fellow Azami. They provided basic information and flight arrangements, aided the search for lost ones, assisted with spiritual needs, and of course, provided bodyguards.

This last service naturally could not be performed by just anyone. Saurimat bodyguards had to have the right aptitudes and training. As mercenaries could not be trusted to follow the way of the *Shari'a*, the Azami solution was to establish their own schools of martial arts on Arkab.

Step by step, the loose collective calling itself the Saurimat transformed into a more formal organization working directly for the newly formed Azami governments. It grew steadily, tasked with running spaceports and other hubs of transportation as the colonies spread across planets and established new civilizations. With nationalization, the name Saurimat slowly went out of use, kept only as an honorific for the armed section of the security branch.

And this might very well be the first seed of the legendary mercenary murderers we hear whispers of today. True to their calling as non-military security, alumni of the Saurimat martial arts schools were held to act as inconspicuously as possible, while being constantly alert, swift and decisive. Their training focused on unarmed combat and close-in fighting with a variety of weapons, skills best suited to fighting in the close quarters of DropShips and space stations. Cultural demands saw to it that these men were also thoroughly schooled in the way of the mind and the Koran, to reinforce not only their role as protectors, but also their faith in what they were protecting.

The next step forward in the Saurimat’s evolution came in 2680, when Coordinator Urizen Kurita launched a campaign to exterminate all non-Japanese culture in Combine space. By way of their Arkab Legions, the Azami leaders had the military part of the resistance covered, but they lacked an effective counter to the Dragon’s ISF, whose operatives targeted Azami mosques and other clerical or cultural centers with terror attacks.

So who better to call on than the loyal sons of Allah already being trained on Arkab?

After Saurimat operatives proved successful in thwarting numerous Kurita terror attacks, the Azami’s high council decided to keep their “special forces” even after the Dragon and the Azami reached an accord. The Azami honored the Saurimat by remodeling them into a religious order, tasked with “safeguarding the sacred ways.”

Over the next several decades, the Saurimat became a cadre of temple guardians, based out of desert holds on Arkab (and later, other Azami worlds). Tasked directly by the Azami Elders, Saurimat warriors felt responsible only to the Muslim clergy, not to the secular governments that ruled the Azami planets. (Some, naturally, viewed this distinction with skepticism, given the actions of some *Mutaween* on pre-spaceflight Terra, but unlike those religious police, the Saurimat saw themselves more as passive wardens of sacred grounds than enforcers of belief.)

HUMBLE BEFORE CHANGE

For nearly two hundred years, the Saurimat fulfilled its role quietly and—for the most part—unnoticed. Members of the order honed their skills or stood guard at mosques and other religious centers, perfecting their martial arts and knowledge of the Koran all the while. Many achieved the ultimate goal of becoming *hafiz*—those who knew the entire scripture by heart—and more than a few would serve their communities as *mullahs* after retiring from active warrior duty.

Of course, technological advancement did not halt at the gates of the order. As their off-the-record tasks still included special forces work, the Saurimat kept up with modern weaponry, and even incorporated BattleMech training when the superiority of these machines could no longer be ignored. This would prove a wise choice when the Succession Wars erupted and—for the first time since Urizen’s reign—Saurimat warriors would be called upon to defend the Azami’s holy places against invaders.

In 2775, the Saurimat’s loyalty faced its greatest test, when Kurita troops incinerated Dalkeith—another predominantly Muslim world—in a nuclear assault. A cry of outrage arose from the Kurita Azami worlds when they heard of the fate of their Lyran brothers and sisters, but even then, the Saurimat held still, assisting the Azami high council in calming the public.

Or so it seemed.

In 2989, centuries later and far away on the other side of Combine space, Muntasir Surur, the *Maulana* of Shaul Khala’s Saurimat enclave, cited the Dalkeith massacre as one of many reasons to make his intentions public.

Surur was a strong believer in a deviant version of Azami scripture, one based loosely on ancient Terra’s *Isma’ili* sect. With a romantic notion of the Islamic past, he remodeled his warrior lodge into the warped image of what he knew about the *Hashshashin* (a sub-sect whose specialty included assassination), and proclaimed himself a descendant of the *Hashshashin* leader Hassan-i Sabah himself. Hailing from a secluded fortress high in Shaul Khala’s barren mountains, Surur declared for all Azami to hear that the true Assassins were back!

But unlike their namesakes who spawned the term, Surur’s assassins did not only act on their own behalf. Available to the highest bidder, their “services” could be bought by anyone—and directed against anyone.



THE SAURIMAT

Shocked by this revelation, the Azami leaders tried to reason with the renegade *Maulana*—to no avail. His mercenary business continued, practically subsidized by Combine officials who sought to even some personal scores. It was during this time that the Saurimat reputation became common knowledge, but not in the way their masters had intended. It would take the Azami Elders more than twenty long years—and the death of a sympathetic member—to finally decide that something drastic needed to be done to curb their radical brothers.

On the evening of December 15, 3010, a joint force of Saurimat commandos from four other Azami enclaves successfully assaulted Surur's fortress and put a violent end to his order's schism. Those who resisted were killed on the spot, and those captured were executed by morning.

Only one of the neo-*Hashshashin* was kept alive, to be banished and sent into the deserts by his brothers as a living memorial to what happened. This man was a young initiate, known by the name of Hassan Ali Khaled.

FAITH RISES

From then on, the Saurimat orders practically dropped from public view, silently returning to their intended duties and praying to atone for the sins of their brothers.

But the bloody lessons of Shaul Khala fueled another transformation within the organization and the faith upon which it stood. Already floating around as a whispered dream for more than a hundred years, when the term was considered more of an honorific, the idea began to solidify around the time of the Fourth Succession War that the Saurimat truly were "the sons of the Prophet," carrying *his* very blood in their veins.

What made this particularly unusual was that, though they inferred descent from the Prophet Mohammed, the Saurimat never truly proclaimed *which* of the fifty or so Muslim prophets in consolidated Azami scripture (as of the 3020s) they believed they descended from. Candidates included *Mullah* Rashid al-Musafa, said to be one of the first Muslim elders to travel to another star. This lack of distinction may well stem from a desire not to alienate any specific Azami sect, despite the near-sacrilegious nature of the claim itself.

The full repercussions of this change cannot yet be fully identified, but it had an immediate impact on the Azami Elders and their high council—the latter now effectively controlled by Saurimat *Maulana*. Where in the past the council decided the course of the faith and the Saurimat, now the Saurimat lead the high council and therefore the Azami faith.

Though this last fact is publicly unconfirmed (by Azami custom, the Elders and the high council are considered the spiritual rulers of *all* Azami, rather than any one sect or sub-sect), it would explain unusual events, like the Dalkeith incident in September of 3037. There, two Arkab Legion regiments (allegedly the Second and the Fifth, though official records do not bear out that a Fifth

Arkab Legion ever existed) reportedly escorted a company of BattleMechs bearing Arabic sigils during a planetary raid that pitted them against the Eleventh Lyran Guards and the Fourth FedCom RCT. The devastating five-day attack (largely denied by FedCom media at the time) destroyed or damaged nearly two regiments' worth of 'Mechs and vehicles. It ended shortly after the mysterious company of 'Mechs (bearing the *hafiz*, a sigil that translates to the Arabic word for "guardian" and is used for people who have memorized the Koran) secured and stormed the small town of Helden and looted a cemetery there. After-action reports cited warriors in black caftans and face-shrouding *keffiyehs* performing some kind of washing ritual before unearthing an old tomb, to retrieve what was later revealed to be a Muslim prophet's burial shroud. Escorted by the two Legion regiments, the mysterious company and their prize departed as suddenly as they came, and though neither side has confirmed all details of the action, many residents of Dalkeith claimed afterward that the attackers were led by Saurimat holy men.

Luckily for the Inner Sphere, this has been the only major Saurimat military action seen so far.

THE SAURIMAT TODAY

As of the start of the Blakist Jihad, the state of the Saurimat was as shrouded in mystery as ever. Four years later, however, the picture has sharpened somewhat.

For one, the order still exists and still holds considerable clout in the Azami community, hiding as it were in plain sight. But the days of the mercenary Saurimat, available for hire, are no more. The loyalty of today's Saurimat lies not with money or power, but with his faith. As an order, they are led by an unknown *Imam* and his inner circle of four *Maulana*, who acknowledge no authority other than the Azami high council—and even then only in questions of faith, not worldly matters.

The order's secretive nature makes its strength hard to determine, and estimates have fallen anywhere between a few hundred active Saurimat to three thousand initiates spread unevenly across the major Azami worlds. Small Saurimat centers are said to be located on Algedi, Sakai, Dabih and (of course) Arkab, while even smaller outposts can reportedly be found on Odabasi and Al'Nair and even a few worlds outside the Draconis Combine where the Muslim faith is particularly strong. Meanwhile, on Shaul Khala, Azami followers believed to be Saurimat maintain a constant, solemn vigil in memory of the Surur incident, in the hopes that the tragedy that happened there will never occur again.

The more recent recall of the Arkab Legions to defend their homeworlds has also not gone unheard by the order, and DCMS observers have reportedly braced for some kind of reaction by the secret sect. Despite the debunking of a lot of exaggerated tales over the centuries, the Dragon maintains a healthy paranoia toward the Combine's Arkab population, and remains vigilant against the threat of "Arkab commandos" like the Saurimat. Especially with

THE SAURIMAT

(14 March, 3069)

Al Na'ir [INN] — "...everyone is up in arms against the invaders, war rages in the streets! I can see burning hovercars everywhere. Men, women, carrying whatever weapons they could find, are running between them. Even the Muslim monks in the mosque just across from where our hotel stood are joining the fray! ... Ouch! That must have hurt... And... WOW, Paul, did you see that? I think Father Mohammed there just trimmed that *Purifier!*..."

(21 May, 3070)

Al Na'ir [VOICE OF TRUTH [PEEP OF THE MEEK]] — People of Al'Nair! After the tragic demise of former Governor Salieri and his staff [*in an accident caused*

by a leaking gas line two weeks ago], we are proud to present his successor, Dame Uta. She is—on very short notice—taking the place of Claudio Manolo [*who sadly passed away last night—a stroke, they claim*].

Dame Uta will continue the great work of her predecessors, [*fulfilling the promises Storia Manning couldn't hold in her short reign*] as well as trying to fill the large footprints her uncle has left [*before his "hunting accident"*]. May she guide these people well. [*Until she bites the dust herself, that is. Which is about...four days away according to local betting pools! Way to go, whoever's doing this! And don't forget, people: Broadcast tomorrow at ten. You know where. Free Al Na'ir!*]

(12 April, 3072)

—Alleged broadcast on DCMS general channels (source unknown), Algedi

Dragon!

Our world suffered. You did not reply. We prayed for you. Your claws grabbed our holy grounds on Dabih. On purpose. We forgave you.

Your fiery breath scorched Azami homes on Algedi. To the ground. We warned you.

Your eggs made barren the Prophet's lands. Once and for all. We pray again, this time for us.

Dragon.

Do not sleep. Do not stand still. We will come for you.

You will not be safe.

May your death be quick.

tempers flying high amid the Legions' desertion, the DCMS and the ISF are likely keeping a sharp eye out for these mysterious holy warriors.

Some DCMS war game scenarios—according to rumor—place as much as a battalion of BattleMechs in the hands of the Saurimat, with additional resources that may equal a full-fledged army capable of materializing within hours of a planetary assault on any Azami stronghold. (Some have even suggested that a full Saurimat-trained Arkab Legion may be hidden off-the-books somewhere, just waiting to be revealed.)

Though it's doubtful such warriors would field top-notch equipment, the Combine military is likely taking into account the Saurimat's reputation and the strength of Azami faith. Surely, they would know that in hand-to-hand combat, armed duels or even in 'Mechs, these warriors will put up a hell of a fight. Indeed, recently disclosed battleROMs from the Dalkeith incident show a pair of presumed Saurimat *Grasshoppers* pummeling a Lyran scout lance in minutes without even bothering to use their lasers—this *after* losing a *BattleMaster* and an *Atlas* to prior combat action.

One thing is clear: Nobody wishes for the Saurimat to enter the current conflict. But when they do, everyone will be watching—to see his or her childhood terror in action.

Insh 'Allah, indeed. May the Prophet have mercy on all souls.

GAMEMASTER'S SECTION

The Saurimat do exist, but in exactly what form is the real question. Their secrecy makes it hard to find the answer—and the secret is often maintained by violent means.

The Saurimat are strong believers in the Azami faith, which is built on the teachings of the Koran. While some of the men (no women are allowed in the order) live the secluded life of monks, spending their time training, honing their skills and studying scripture, most Saurimat do not shy away from populated areas. Many, in fact, may be well integrated within local communities,

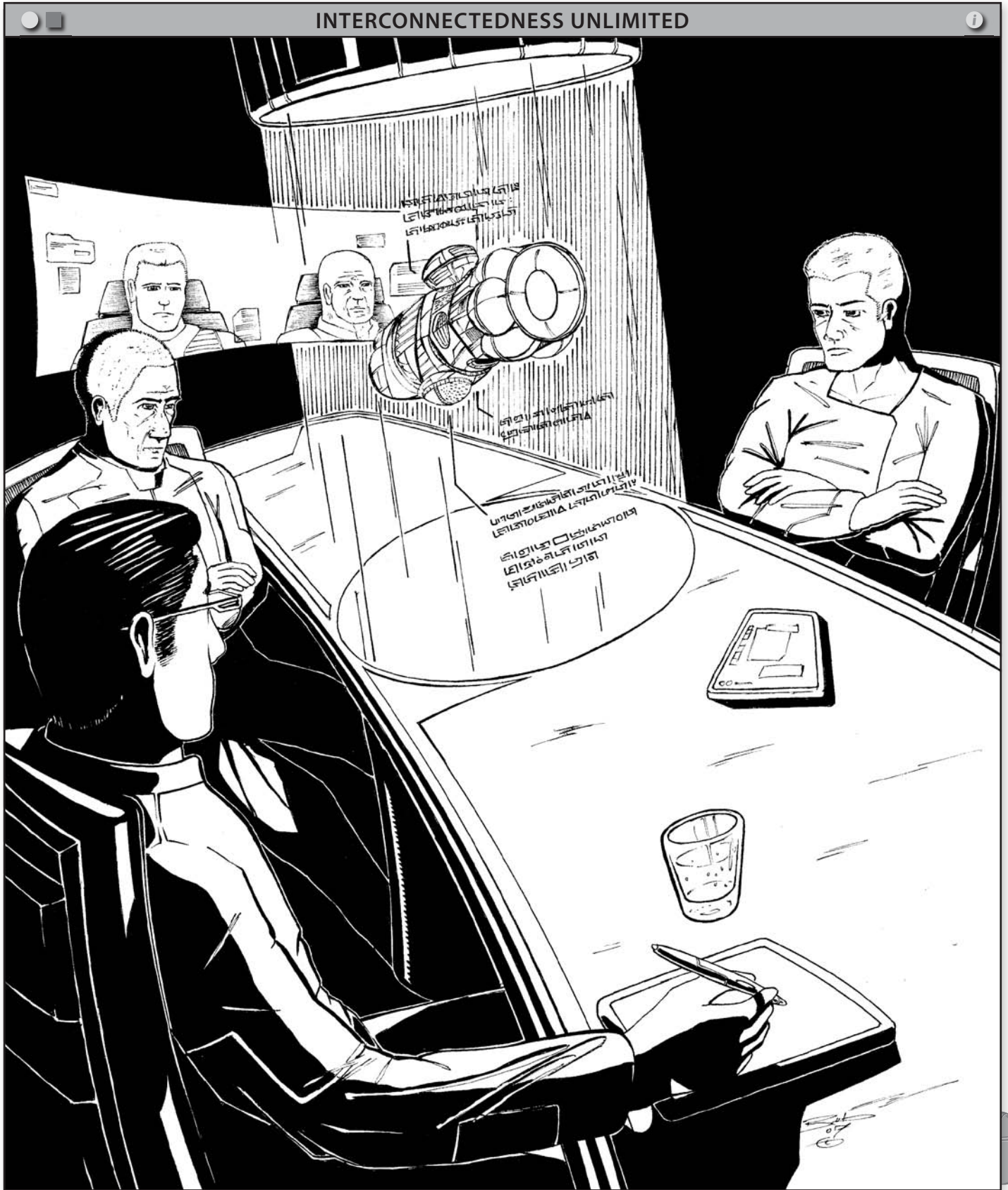
where they act as temple guardians or as servants to the *mullahs* and generally lend aid to the needy. Their outward calm does not exude fanaticism, though they are known to act as missionaries when the opportunity presents itself, hoping to impress the tenets of their beliefs on others.

Underlying their public façade is the martial background of the Saurimat order. Every Saurimat aspires to be a master in the way of the "Quick Death," a special form of close combat. This discipline teaches agility, decisiveness and stealth, and is applicable to all forms of melee fighting, whether with bare hands or blades. The "Quick Death" relies heavily on surprise, and the use of poison is not uncommon. The Saurimat's preferred weapon is the *jambiyya*, a dagger favored by desert folk.

Shaul Khala was home to most of the specialists in the discipline of the "Quick Death," who sold their skills to the highest bidders. But while other Saurimat apparently destroyed the enclave there, rumor has it that Hassan Ali Khaled was not the only survivor of Surur's sub-sect, and that a few more managed to escape to New Samarkand. There, they may have built a new fortress in absolute secrecy, known to no one but these radical Saurimat. A mission to contact one of these renegade Saurimat could be a particular challenge for the players—one fraught with mortal peril.

With the Jihad pulling the Inner Sphere into chaos, the Saurimat may abandon their shadows and come to the fore to avenge any injustice visited upon the Azami peoples. By any means necessary, these warriors may hunt down any Word of Blake officers linked to the desecration of Azami holy sites or other crimes against the residents of Azami worlds.

These Saurimat may even emerge armed with BattleMechs, and as many as a battalion of Saurimat 'Mechs may be found on the Azami worlds of Arkab and Algedi, flying the order's colors. Most of these machines will be of older vintage (some may even be ancient), but with few exceptions all will feature at least one fully articulated hand actuator—or even two (as Saurimat Mech-Warriors have a penchant for physical attacks).



INTERCONNECTEDNESS

>>>EYES ONLY: PROTOCOL (1/79)

Date: 1 June, 2979

ATTENDING:

Count von Steffelbus (presiding), Prof. Markovsky (protocol), Prof. Julian, Prof. Attenborough, Dr. Erdogan, Dr. Liechti, Ass. Berger, Kovacs (guard)

TRANSCRIPT:

Count Steffelbus (CSB) opens the assembly by thanking everyone for accepting this "highly irregular" invitation.

CSB outlines his plan to extensively fund advanced research in the field of "inter-connectedness," namely HPG and JumpShip technology. This research will be conducted in secret until results are ready for wide-spread use. (See attached presentation.)

Financing will be entirely assured by outside sources, channeled through CSB.

The projects will report directly and only to CSB, in a manner yet to be determined.

PA then presents the state of work so far: A detailed analysis of possible fields of research, sorted by estimated timeframe, projection of investment, probability of success. "Quick Wins" are: Alternate means of interstellar communication, medical bionics and agricultural bio-genetics. Identified as long-term projects are social sciences, improved interstellar travel and time-warp.

CSB approves of the analysis and sets the momentary focus on communication and travel again. He dismisses cyber-technology and time-warp, but will fund additional research groups for social studies and bio-genetics.

Prof. Julian (PJ) asks what the planned duration of these projects might be. Reply from CSB: "Until they are done."

NOTES

I got this from a scavenger acquaintance of mine. Says it comes off an uncharted satellite orbiting Rosamond. Apparently the machine intercepted a burst stream toward something making a pass through the system. He even identified the source: ABJ's local correspondent's office (which conveniently went up in flames a couple of hours after transmitting). Yeah; so much for credibility.

On the other hand, the data is not without appeal: If the hints are true, it would explain what Steffelbus' I.U. has been up to and why it's hurting so bad now (To my chagrin, it doesn't cover how the company came to be in the first place. We're still working on that.)

Oh, and about that satellite: ITT-F-281 as a designation sounds definitely Irian to me. Looks like old Siggie had his personal pair of eyes up the Count's blue-blooded behind all the time.

—Starling

CSB stresses the importance of utmost secrecy, especially toward ComStar and affiliated organizations.

PJ would like to know why the projects do not involve ComStar, as the premier specialists in most of the fields to be researched. Reply from CSB: "Because they are not to be trusted and were responsible in the first place."

CSB does not elaborate, discourages further questioning and asks non-interested attendees and PJ to leave the room.

PJ and Dr. Liechti (DL) leave.

CSB informs those remaining that the departing individuals' next of kin will be notified of their accidental deaths later this evening. Families of DL and PJ will be contacted the day after tomorrow, because the bodies have to be sent back first.

CSB thanks the assembly for their engagement so far and signals his hope for a promising future.

>>>END TRANSCRIPT



INTERCONNECTEDNESS UNLIMITED

**INTERCONNECTEDNESS UNLIMITED:
TAKING THE FALL**

The following summary comes from the *Andurien Business Journal* (dated November 3071). I should point out that the article is unpublished and unfinished. It was leaked as part of a data dump by individuals unknown.

INTERCONNECTEDNESS UNLIMITED (IntUnl)

Main Headquarters: Granite Falls (Rosamond)

CEO: Count Elric Von Steffelbus V

Main Products (Holy Order Press): Philosophy and religious media

Main Products (Peloran Motors): Civilian vehicles

Profile:

During the first quarter of this century, Interconnectedness Unlimited (IU) was the biggest success story in Federated Suns

business. Coming out of nowhere in the latter half of the 30th century, Interconnectedness began gobbling up corporation after corporation—big and small—without apparent rhyme or reason.

By the start of the Fourth Succession War, IU had a total of twenty-three major divisions. But just as the FedSuns economy was turning around, Interconnectedness began to suffer from cash flow and management problems. Even the mass opening of Lyran markets did little to aid the ailing conglomerate, which began to sell off its lesser-producing divisions. By the mid-3040s, IU had become a shell of its former self, with many observers baffled as to what went wrong.

And it's not getting better. After the insolvent remnants of the SLDF ceased payments on the 2.8 billion C-bill stadium project on Solaris VII, Interconnectedness apparently suffered from massive liquidity problems. At the same time, the corporation's first and biggest asset, Triple-F, encountered another series of lawsuits not unlike those of the early 3030s. With the fast-food restaurant chain

INTERCONNECTEDNESS UNLIMITED

>>EYES ONLY: PROTOCOL (2/94)

Date: 28 November, 2994

ATTENDING: Count von Steffelbus (presiding), Prof. Markovsky, Prof. Attenborough, Dr. Erdogan, Dr. Berger, Ass. Monroe (protocol), Ass. Lupin

TRANSCRIPT: CSB greets the body and thanks them for the good work. He inquires as to progress made in the past six months.

PM elaborates on the current status of technical projects (see attached files for presentation):

Interstellar communication:

Improved HPG range:

- Theory is sound and proven
- Practical application highly questionable due to tremendous power needs
- Available computing power takes too long to calculate receiving station
- **PROJECT SHELVED**

Lightweight, transportable HPG generators and receivers

- Categorized Lostech (used on WarShips, etc.)

- Reproduction not yet possible

- Input needed

- **PROJECT ON HOLD**

Low-bandwidth, FTL radio transmitters

- Theoretically possible
- First "fax"-tests inconclusive
- Further investigation of SL research notes necessary
- **PROJECT IN PROGRESS**

Remote guidance

- Categorized Lostech
- Exact scope of application to be defined
- **PROJECT ON HOLD**

Interstellar travel:

Improved K-F range

- Several theories confirmed
- Testbeds under construction
- **PROJECT IN PROGRESS**

Improved JumpShip batteries (energy storage for multiple jumps in sequence)

- Categorized Lostech
- Re-engineering of lithium-fusion batteries complete
- Tests completed

- **READY FOR MARKETING**

Improved solar sails (accelerated energy consumption)

- No suitable replacement materials found
- Superconductors too unreliable for asked quality
- **PROJECT CANCELLED**

Stationary K-F drives ("jump gates")

- Physical installations possible
- No theoretical approach yet found on how propelling other objects might be possible
- **PROJECT CANCELLED**

In-system flight capability

- No work done due to other priorities
- **PROJECT ON HOLD**

CSB appears pleased and assures his support and sufficient funding. Before dismissing the assembly, he once more reminds us of the need for absolute secrecy. To aid in that matter, the new mobile laboratories should be finished "in a couple of weeks."

>>END TRANSCRIPT

INTERCONNECTED

already reeling from the direct effects of the Jihad, widespread government rationing and plummeting sales in general did the rest, forcing Count Steffelbus to liquidate the entire chain. It remains to be seen whether Peloran Motors might suffer a similar fate, as its civilian market sales have also plunged in recent years.

Still going strong, however, is Holy Order Press, which literally thrives on the current crisis (a recent FedSuns contract to print pocket-book editions for AFFS troops springs to mind). The religious publications division also recently expanded its portfolio with quickly available and affordable services perfectly suited to the needs of various other faiths and upstart sects.

Nevertheless, the situation looks grim for the once mighty corporation: IU stocks have plummeted 34 percent over the past two months alone (at the few exchanges still open). With insiders claiming that the company's financial reserves are nearly depleted, analysts wonder why Count Steffelbus has not yet started cross-funding out of his personal fortune, which many suspect amounts to more than 45 billion C-Bills. The Count has not been available for a statement.

THE TURNING

Whatever the real mystery behind the corporation might be, there is no doubt that it's all closely tied to a single family: The Steffelbus clan of the Federated Suns. Elric von Steffelbus, founder of Interconnectedness Unlimited, formed the company when he was in his early twenties. He led the corporation in first generation long into his eighties, though neither his exact age nor his birthplace were ever known. During his earlier years, Steffelbus was a handsome young man with flamboyant taste in clothes, vehicles and women—a typical example of an up-and-coming FedSuns corporate magnate who quickly became the darling of the upper class. He acquired his title and many of his companies mainly through connections made during this time.

In his heyday, von Steffelbus spouted a philosophy about the interconnectedness of all things, which he attributed to an ancient book he'd read as a youth. This eccentricity endeared him to people, especially the younger rich, who saw him as a kind of professional religious guru.

Around 3010, however, Count von Steffelbus went into seclusion and has not been seen publicly since. Countless explanations arose as to why, some of which are undoubtedly pure fantasy. One of the more plausible suggests that Count von Steffelbus suffered from a rare degenerative disease that required his isolation.

In the late 3020s, rumors swirled that von Steffelbus had a wife and a son nobody knew about. Reportedly, they initially appeared at the Count's mansion on Rosamond at this time, but were turned away. Not until 3035 were these rumors proven, when von Steffelbus publicly accepted the legitimacy of his son (Elric von Steffelbus V) and introduced him as his successor to head Interconnectedness Unlimited.

Elric von Steffelbus V not only continued his father's business,

INTERCONNECTEDNESS UNLIMITED

>>EYES ONLY: PROTOCOL (2/05)

Date: 3 October, 3005

ATTENDING: Count von Steffelbus (presiding), Prof. Markovsky, Prof. Berger, Dr. Erdogan, Dr. Lupin, Dr. Bonetti, Ass. Monroe (protocol)

TRANSCRIPT:

CSB asks for a minute of silence in honor of Professor Margaret Attenborough, who died on March 5 peacefully in her sleep.

Sales:

CSB informs attendees that a high-ranking representative of the Lyran state has acquired basic blueprints, a prototype and total reproduction rights to our *Space-Fax* for a substantial sum and several commitments.

Projects:

DE reports that no further progress has been made concerning the "super-jump" technology. The last test seems to have worked, but he and his team were unable to track anything. Residue and multi-spectral analysis of the jump-off point were inconclusive as well. This leads to the conclusion that the fifth test bed in as many years is either lost in hyperspace or has materialized outside instrument range, but is unable to return.

DE and his team will again go over all the available DCMS data from jump accidents, mis-jumps and even the recently acquired notes of Kearny and Fuchida.

PB announces a plan to install one of the newly developed mini-HPGs on the *Lucretia*. Extensive testing in ComStar-controlled space ended positively. They cannot be intercepted by third parties.

He also presents the schedule for the bi-yearly exchange of *Lucretia's* lithium-fusion batteries.

Varia:

PB thanks CSB for financing his new prosthetic arm and leg, but reveals his reservations about colleagues in social sciences being allowed to test their new concepts on *Lucretia's* crew. In addition, he states—as a vegetarian—his thankfulness for the progress made in the hydroponic department.

>>END TRANSCRIPT

INTERCONNECTEDNESS UNLIMITED 

>>EYES ONLY: PROTOCOL (1/36)

Date: 15 February, 3036

ATTENDING: Count von Steffelbus (HPG, presiding), Elric von Steffelbus V (HPG), Prof. Markovsky, Prof. Monroe (protocol), Dr. Lupin, Dr. Bonetti

TRANSCRIPT:

Note: This meeting takes place as a real-time conference call between the research ship *Lucretia* and Rosamond, Steffelbus' residence.

CSB introduces his son, ESB, as his successor and declares his own retreat from any active part in the project, effective immediately. We express our sincerest regret that the treatment developed for him seems to have had no effect.

ESB summarizes the events of the past five years and concludes in the outlining of his drastic actions: Funding for the biogenetic and social science departments will be eliminated.

Apparently ComStar is closer than ever on our heels, pressing I.U. hard for the last piece of the puzzle. The pesky robes did their homework at New Syrtis. To think they figured out we have super-jump capability on sensor telemetry and debris alone! Not bad for guys who mainly concern themselves with 'safekeeping' and destroying knowledge, and don't know squat about developing. Now, the SBs have been forced to sell off quite a few of their companies just to keep us here on *Lucretia* warm and running.

Projects:

DL informs everyone about the plus side of our situation. We finally managed to retrieve the New Syrtis prototype! Both its LF and JD cores were burned out, as expected. Retooling of the prototype has already begun and finding the flaws in the calculations will only be a matter of time.

ESB urges us not to hasten this close to the final goal. He will make sure the necessary parts and equipment are delivered quickly. However, building another prototype is out of the question, as C* surely keeps a close eye on all the shipyards. We will need to make do with what we have.

>>END TRANSCRIPT

INTERCONNECTEDNESS UNLIMITED 

but shared his reclusiveness. After the takeover announcement, the younger von Steffelbus retreated to the family's Rosamond estate and largely refused to confer with the public, save for his annual semi-religious activities. However, this did not prevent him from marrying a young woman named Verena Bannson in 3049, or fathering two children—a daughter and a son—in the years that followed.

The young Count, who did not formally take over until after his father's death in 3039, was often held accountable for the demise of the Steffelbus legacy. But while this ultimately might prove true, it is not through lack of trying or poor business management. After all, the downfall did not begin until five years after the younger Count's takeover, and the only thing he sold off in a 27-year career were the divisions that had been profitless before his tenure. Those companies remaining under the IU banner meanwhile demonstrated top-notch performance, right up until something unexpected turned the tide.

THE PRESTIGE

Interconnectedness Unlimited has always maintained a low political profile. The conglomerate heeds the laws and pays its taxes, but otherwise keeps out of government or politics. The famous exception to this rule concerned the alliance between the Federated Suns and the Lyran Commonwealth. As the company name implies, IU enthusiastically supported interconnecting the two realms—not only because the alliance would open a whole new market for the company, but because Count Steffelbus' political engagement at that precise moment also served to deflect interest from another incident involving his corporation.

In June 3022, AFFS troops were sealing off the New Syrtis Shipyards, the main repair site for FedSuns JumpShips and DropShips. Armed DropShips and constant aerospace fighter patrols discouraged any unauthorized person from approaching the shipyards. A near-constant flow of coded communications went back and forth between the facilities and the New Avalon Institute of Science. The press, of course, went wild and so did the other realms' Intelligence agencies.

It took the Federated Suns more than three years to release the first official communiqué and subsequently reopen the New Syrtis yards. As predicted by many, the communiqué was short on words and information: An explosion in one of the dry-docks supposedly triggered a chain reaction that involved several chemical storage areas and a fusion reactor. The disaster required extensive repairs and decontamination of the affected areas. Interest waned after this brief but believable explanation until only conspiracy nuts still ran around shouting "New Syrtis incident" in their pamphlets.

In hindsight, with the investigation file available (opened to the public in 3065), the case does not appear quite so clear. For one, most of the file is still blacked out and marked "classified,"

INTERCONNECTEDNESS UNLIMITED

which seems excessive for a mere accident. In addition, while most witness statements speak of huge explosions, many claim that the dry-dock was not destroyed, but “disappeared” instead. The dry-dock was on a four-month lease to Golden Star Lines, a company then belonging to Interconnectedness Unlimited.

Further digging—this time in military archives—reveals what borders on raiding actions around New Syrtis aimed at nearly everything carrying an antenna or sensors capable of listening out into space. Combined with the fact that the sensor logs for the shipyards and the recharge stations were purged “for maintenance” and the entirety of their records for June 3022 got lost in the shuffle, the plot thickens.

GAMEMASTER’S SECTION

In short: Interconnectedness Unlimited did it.

The Steffelbus family rose out of nothing to a title, untold riches and a Sphere-spanning enterprise. Much more important, they fooled ComStar and would have given the prestigious NAIS a bad name if some of their technological achievements had come out in the open.

But the Steffelbus family did not let that happen. Instead, they condemned scientists to a life in hiding. Mastering challenges for no one to see in an ivory tower hopping between the stars.

And though some mysteries are revealed, others are not.

Who was the elder Count Elric von Steffelbus IV? Where did he come from? And how did he start this conglomerate? What were his motives for sealing away scientific ideas instead of throwing them out onto the market, like anyone else might have done?

What of his alleged son? Why is he watching the demise of his father’s empire with such calm? Does he still have a few cards up his sleeve or is he just waiting for the end?

Gamemasters exploring this mystery should be aware that whenever one riddle about IU is solved, others will pop up. IU can be played straight as a mere front for technical research, where players get jobs either protecting or stealing secrets. Or it can be much more. After all, IU’s founder was revered as a guru of “interconnectedness” and funded “social sciences” on a par with more practical applications. From that point of view, players might encounter a basic manipulation plot as nearby as their Local Triple-F: The meat did not fail regulations, it was laced with psychosomatic proteins, making a planet-wide behavior experiment out of today’s special. Yummy!

FACTS: THE CORPORATION

Interconnectedness was once a huge corporate empire and remains powerful to this day—if somewhat diminished. Its diversity is immense and follows no form or structure. Somehow, everything a Steffelbus touches turns instantly into gold.

Yet no gold can be found behind this façade. Both Steffelbus CEOs were hardliners to the core and they rule with an iron fist. Those divisions that fail to perform are cut, and whoever complains

INTERCONNECTEDNESS UNLIMITED

From: Precentor Ali Ahmad Kassed

To: Precentor Martial Cameron St. Jamais

SOJ/ROM Security Protocol: Avanti – Basso 6898

DATE/TIME: 10033071 – 1341 Casino

///Mission not accomplished. Capture failed, target destroyed.///

///Precentor, after a long hunt we finally managed to trick the prey. Thanks to the upgraded core, we took a hundred-year jump and surprised the *Lucretia* in her recharge cycle at the nadir point of system PX-4509.///

///Fighters and DropShips scrambled immediately, but we had dropped out too far away from the jump point, too late. Somehow Bannson scrounged up enough charge for his *Lucretia* to make a micro-jump into the system’s sun, but late enough so that our boarding parties were also destroyed in her wake. I guess that’s what you get when attacking a colony ship full of KF-scientists with nothing to lose.///

///We will soon join them. My Invader’s jump core and L-F batteries are blown out, as predicted. We are fifty light-years away from the next system, and so rescue cannot be attempted. Now the station-keeping drives are sputtering as well.///

///For the Master!///

gets “the letter.” Especially in the early decades, IU takeovers were considered very hostile, and Count Steffelbus IV faced scores of labor problems, which he solved swiftly and without patience.

The tender spot on the whole apparatus was (and is) the secret research IU funded: Requiring massive amounts of money to run and lately even more to protect, these projects have drained the empire’s coffers. Since the mid-3030s, when ComStar (and later the Word of Blake) started its mudslinger campaign in earnest, IU’s efforts to live up to the ideals of its founder have effectively left the company bleeding to death.

FACTS: BEHIND THE STAGE

Planned to be huge from the start, the research behind IU is what the Steffelbus family truly lives for. But how to keep such a project free from unwanted attention? Simple: In a world of constant war, the key to survival is to remain unseen. So the *Lucretia* came into existence: A *Tramp*-turned-laboratory. Jumping from empty system to empty system, the scientists on board worked undisturbed on technological and biological sciences.

The New Syrtis incident, according to the wildest rumors, was one of IU’s early demonstrations—the modified *Lucretia*, a new super-JumpShip that IU used the local dry-docks to complete. In an effort to avoid exposure after a security breach, the project manager on-site initiated a jump-sequence in the middle of the shipyards, taking all evidence (and a big chunk of the installation) with her. But whether or not the rumors are true, the *Lucretia* was apparently lost in 3071. And though theories swirl that the vessel’s drive was a success, to date IU has yet to market such claims or offer “super-jump” technology to anyone.

Be that it as it may, Interconnectedness Unlimited has put a stamp on the Inner Sphere in its own way— if only through its mysteries.



MINOR PLAYERS



NOTES

Once more, we wrap this up with a few “minor” players, though one should never look at a conspiracy as minor. I reserve the term for those who are upstarts or known fringes, the kind that maybe aren’t so hard to peer into as the others. This time around, I bring you three, and the first is about some new messiah that’s shown up around the Kittery front...

DEVLIN STONE

Now, I’ve known Ella Reese for a while, and we’ve had a lot of fights about her willingness to listen to just about any cockamamie theory the wind blows her way. When it comes to someone like Devlin Stone, though, her approach might be the best, and maybe somewhere in the mishmash below is something that resembles the truth.

—Starling

THE ELUSIVE DEVLIN STONE: THE TRUTH (OR A FEW REASONABLE FACSIMILES)

—From *BullsEye*, an INN-sponsored talk show (recorded 18 January 3073)

[Ella Kay REESE]: “All right, let’s get to Devlin Stone. Has anyone had so much of an effect on the Inner Sphere with us knowing so little about him? Sure, we don’t know anything about the Bounty Hunter, but with all due respect, he has nowhere near the influence Stone has gathered in just two years. And okay, there’s the Word of Blake’s Master, but he or she was *designed* to be mysterious and shadowy. Stone has emerged as a man of the people, but the people rallying around him don’t know a thing about him. At least, nothing before he came out of the Blakist camp on Kittery.

“Well, we’re going to fix that now. No one in the Inner Sphere—besides Stone himself and his friend Lear—is really an expert on Devlin Stone, but we’ve got three people who are as close as it gets. With me is Forrest Barsun, who’s managed to freelance for most media organizations and half of the intelligence organizations in the Inner Sphere; Brenda Moore, who somehow gets invited to every state function she wants to attend—I’ll get her secret for doing that one day—and Elliott Korschack, who, for my money, has the best network of weasels and lowlifes in the entire Inner Sphere, with the possible exception of some of the darker recesses of the MIIO.

“So, guys—Devlin Stone. Where was he before he ended up in the Blakist camp on Kittery? Go!”

[Brenda MOORE]: “Oh, no-brainer. He was in the elevated halls of one of the Inner Sphere’s noble families. This is simple logic. You do not develop the leadership ability this man has shown out of nowhere. The skills he’s displayed in building his Kittery Prefecture are skills he brought with him into the camp. If you want to know the truth about who Devlin Stone is, start with this: he’s a noble.”

[Forrest BARSUN]: “Elitist hogwash, Brenda! A sure sign you’ve been spending too much time with nobles is when you adopt their canard about how only *they* are eligible to rule, that they’re the only ones with the real ability. The simple truth is that many people, regardless of their lineage, have the ability and

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temperament to rule, and it’s only our over-reliance on so-called nobles that holds such people down. Well, the walls between nobles and commoners break down pretty fast in a prison camp, and you start caring about actual ability a whole lot more than you care about blood. Stone doesn’t lead these people forward because he’s a noble—he leads them because he has the guts, the fire to beat back the Blakists.”

[MOORE]: “All right, if he’s not a noble, then who is he?”

[BARSUN]: “Now, now, Brenda, you’re asking me to skip ahead to the ending! Let me lay the groundwork for you—I’ve been interested in this fellow since he first threw back the Blakists on Kittery, so I’ve spent a fair amount of effort the past few years trying to track down his past.

“I started with what seems to me like a simple assumption, but others will probably find it radical—I assumed that his real name is, in fact, Devlin Stone.”

[Elliott KORSCHACK]: “How charmingly naïve! Tell me, do you think God’s name is actually ‘God’, too?”

[BARSUN]: “Despite Korschack’s condescension, I think it’s a reasonable assumption. After all, why would someone doing what Stone’s doing want to hide his identity? He’s become the shining hope of the Inner Sphere! Armies on hundreds of planets are using his name as a rallying cry! If I were Stone, I’d want to hear my *real* name on all those lips, not some pseudonym.”

[MOORE]: “All that proves is how utterly out of touch Barsun is with the real world. The politics of the Inner Sphere are *never* simple—there are always reasons someone needs to hide from someone else. I could list dozens off the top of my head, but let’s pick just one, the most obvious one—Stone is using an assumed name because his real name could easily be tied to the Word of Blake, which would undermine his recruiting efforts. Stone, in his previous life, was a noble with well-known Blakist sympathies.”

[KORSCHACK]: “You may not be going far enough. One of the more interesting stories I’ve heard lately says that Stone had a lot more than Blakist sympathies—he was *one* of them, and highly placed, too. His success owes a lot more to his insider knowledge than to any military genius.”

[BARSUN]: “You see how quickly these conspiracy theories go off the rails? That last story is clearly wrong on its face—the Blakists aren’t gentle enough to simply reeducate their defectors. If you’re highly placed and then defect, they don’t leave you free to use their secrets against them.

“Now, I’ll admit Brenda came up with a possibly compelling reason for Stone to change his name, but it’s nothing more than conjecture—a neat story, but she’s got nothing to back it up.”

[MOORE]: “Oh, quite the contrary, Forrest! I’m not engaging in mere guessing games here. If I think he’s a noble; that means somewhere in the Inner Sphere, a noble family is missing one of its male members.”

[BARSUN]: “More than one family, I’d wager.”

[KORSCHACK]: “Right. There’s probably a hundred or so male nobles buried in the wreckage of sports cars at the bottom of various cliffs and mountains.”

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[BARSUN]: "Yeah. And another hundred hiding at their mistresses' houses."

[MOORE]: "You're both quite amusing. Now, I certainly can't pretend to know the whereabouts of every noble in the Inner Sphere, but I didn't have to track everyone. I had two primary criteria: first, the noble should have come into contact with the Word of Blake in some way, thus exposing himself to capture. Second, seeing as how Stone ended up on Kittery, he was likely near that planet when he was designated for reeducation."

[BARSUN]: "I'm not sure how useful either assumption is, but I've gotta say I'm interested to hear where this is going."

[MOORE]: "Where this is going is Ziliang. Seven years ago, Duke Malin Alexander's third son, Pierre, expressed some Blakist sympathies in an interview. His father tried to muzzle the boy, but rumors persisted that Pierre not only had Blakist sympathies, but that he was trying to go against his father's will by joining the Word. This mini-controversy persisted for three years, then stopped. Pierre has not been seen in public since, and I've talked to a few former friends of his who said they lost contact with him."

[BARSUN]: "That's not much to hang a theory on."

[MOORE]: "Ah, but there's more. I've heard reports of a few intelligence intercepts about Blakists plotting to kidnap nobles in order to force their families into concessions. Someone like Pierre Alexander would be an ideal subject for kidnapping, as he had already demonstrated Blakist sympathies and might even have sought Blakist contacts. They'd have to do little to capture him besides wait for him to come to them."

[BARSUN]: "I've heard nothing about these kidnapping plots."

[MOORE]: "That's hardly my concern. Now, we should also remember the planet we're talking about—Ziliang—is a harsh mining world populated by rough characters. Duke Alexander is not a gentle man, and he's raised sons to be prepared for the tough atmosphere of their homeworld. Someone who grew up under Malin's tutelage is exactly the kind of person who could not only survive, but triumph in a Blakist camp."

"And, of course, there's the matter of the first name—Pierre. Trace that name's etymology back to ancient Terra, and you get the word 'petros'—stone. Pierre needed to adopt a pseudonym for obvious reasons, but like so many before him, he chose a name with ties to his own. Devlin Stone is Pierre Alexander."

[KORSCHACK]: "A very entertaining story, with enough of a veneer of truth to make it appealing to anyone who doesn't mind ignoring a few key facts."

[MOORE]: "Such as...?"

[KORSCHACK]: "Well, for starters, Pierre Alexander was a well-known incompetent, a dilettante who couldn't lead an army to the mess hall, let alone to the conquest of multiple planets. He's been silent, all right, but that's because his father finally got tired of being embarrassed and put him under wraps. Pierre Alexander is not leading an anti-Blakist revolution on and near Kittery—he's in the back rooms of some palace in the Federated Suns, drunk out of his gourd."

"The second problem is that someone like Alexander, who

flirted with Blakism mostly out of youthful rebellion, wouldn't have gathered the depth of Blakist knowledge that Stone has demonstrated. People talk about his guts, his toughness, his tactical brilliance, but his victories come down to one thing—he knows how and where and when to hit his enemy. He's got the knowledge of an insider, knowledge someone like Pierre Alexander would never have obtained."

[BARSUN]: "You're at least right about the tactical brilliance part, Elliott, which leads nicely to my theory. Once Stone started making noise on Kittery, I started looking for him. Finding every person in the Inner Sphere named Devlin Stone is not easy, but it's possible. Now, there may be a few people in barbarous areas like the Federated Suns' Outback that my scan missed, but honestly, how many people in those areas would ever be captured by Blakists and then rise to become a great military leader?"

"As you may guess, my initial sweep came up with a huge list of names. 'Devlin' is not the most common first name in the Inner Sphere, but there are *billions* of Stones out there, and the combination of the two names is not as rare as I had hoped. There was, of course, no way to go through the list name by name, even with the help of my network."

[KORSCHACK]: "I'm impressed at the amount of work you put into a task that was fundamentally flawed from the outset. If I was making a list of people who were likely to become *the* Devlin Stone, people who were named 'Devlin Stone' at birth would be the first group I'd *eliminate*, not investigate."

[BARSUN]: "That's because you're bogged down in your conspiracies. The rest of humanity doesn't work like you, Elliott. We're more straightforward."

"Anyway, the next step was to apply some filters to the list. Age was a natural one; so was general health. Then I added military service, since it's pretty clear Stone didn't learn about war on the fly—he was trained somewhere."

"The list of candidates started getting smaller. I used geography, too—like Brenda, I didn't figure the Blakists would ship a prisoner across the entire Inner Sphere. They'd just drop him somewhere close to where they caught him."

"Now I had a manageable list—too big for one man, of course, but not too big for my network. So I sent my feelers out, and before long the candidates were reduced to a mere handful. I took the investigation entirely into my own hands at that point, and soon I had only one name left on my list."

[KORSCHACK]: "Let me guess: Devlin Stone."

[BARSUN]: "Devlin Stone of Cold Basin, Colorado, to be specific. He fits the profile perfectly. Born in 3041, he enrolled in Point Barrow Military Academy in 3060. He became the type of soldier Point Barrow is renowned for—tough, brutal and at his best when conditions are worst. He was given his own battle armor squad in 3068 and assigned to the Sixth Crucis Lancers. He was on Galax when the Blakists attacked in 3069 and listed as MIA after the attack, and he hasn't been seen since—until, of course, he emerged on Kittery."

[MOORE]: "Nonsense."

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[KORSCHACK]: "Hogwash."

[MOORE]: "You're saying Devlin Stone is nothing more than some FedSuns foot soldier?"

[KORSCHACK]: "The Blakists took the trouble of sending an infantry soldier off to Kittery for reeducation instead of just killing him?"

[MOORE]: "I find the whole story preposterous."

[BARSUN]: "You two don't like my account only because it's too direct for your twisted minds. Remember, I said Stone was a talented soldier, a squad commander with a bright future. Why would the Word throw away such an asset when they could bend his mind to their will and put him to their own use? Look, the simple fact is this—a skilled soldier named Devlin Stone disappears after a Blakist assault in 3069. Then a skilled soldier named Devlin Stone escapes from a Blakist camp on Kittery in 3071. The facts are plain."

[KORSCHACK]: "Ah, but that's the problem. Since when have any stories of the high and mighty in the Inner Sphere contained 'plain' facts? When have they ever traveled in a straight line? The lives of the powerful are as crooked as an arthritic snake."

[BARSUN]: "Snakes don't have ..."

[KORSCHACK]: "That's not the *point*. The point is, do you know how disappointed people will be if they ask 'Who is this Devlin Stone character?' and you answer 'He's a soldier named Devlin Stone.' No, no, no, that will never do."

[BARSUN]: "Well, since you haven't liked either my explanation or Brenda's, I suppose you've got a better one."

[KORSCHACK]: "Nope. At least, I don't have a carefully laid-out investigation to share with you. I've been at this game for too long, I know that the truth tends to pop up in a place completely different from the one you'd expect. So I haven't taken time to concoct a grand theory. All I've done is listen."

[MOORE]: "And what, pray tell, have you heard?"

[KORSCHACK]: "Many things, many things. Enough so that I could've done this whole show by myself, except you two wouldn't shut up. So let me hit the highlights."

"First, there's the Blakist angle. Plenty of people out there are convinced that Stone has demonstrated far too much knowledge of Blakist tactics and forces to be an outsider. He's an insider, they say, who turned. In fact, a lot of them think he wasn't imprisoned on Kittery at all—they say he was working at the prison, probably as a ranking administrator, and he finally got fed up with what he saw there."

"There's an interesting companion piece to that theory. It goes like this: Stone has demonstrated so much knowledge of the inner workings of Blakist operations that it's clear he had pretty high rank. So high, in fact, that a lot of people are amazed he's alive—ranking Blakist traitors have a very, very short life expectancy. So, according to this theory, the only reason Stone is still alive is that Blakists *want* him to be. It looks like he's fighting them, but in reality he's doing their will, and every person he draws to his side is another person signed up to this secret Blakist cause, wittingly or unwittingly."

[BARSUN]: "And what are the Blakists going to gain by fighting themselves?"

[KORSCHACK]: "Beats the hell out of me—the workings of the WoBbie mind are pretty twisty. Whatever the scheme is, though, it's a long-term game they're playing. The current war and mayhem fits with their immediate goals—whatever Stone's up to is laying the foundation for their goals a few years, maybe even *decades*, down the line."

[BARSUN]: "Why *that* makes more sense to anyone than the fact that Devlin Stone is actually Devlin Stone is beyond me."

[KORSCHACK]: "I'm sure it is. Now, rumor-mongering in the Inner Sphere is not complete without a few stories out there claiming that one famous person is actually another famous person with a new name. To that end, a number of interesting identities have been attached to Devlin Stone. The Arthur Steiner-Davion rumor, for instance, is quite popular."

[BARSUN]: "Arthur Steiner-Davion's been dead for nearly ten years!"

[KORSCHACK]: "Well, yes, but ever since the attempt on Thomas Marik's life in 3055, people have been suspicious about assassinations through explosions. Without a complete corpse, stories spread."

"Speaking of Thomas Marik, that's another amusing rumor I've heard a few sources deliver with complete earnestness. Not that Marik himself—the real one, not the one that's been leading the Free Worlds League over the past decade and a half—is Stone, but that Stone is the mouthpiece for Marik. It's not clear if Marik was supposed to be in the camp with Stone, or if they met after Stone's escape, but everyone supporting the theory agrees on one thing—Stone's leadership capabilities come from Marik's training."

"There's also a theory that Stone is actually a Clanner who's been Inner Sphere-ized. I haven't heard much speculation about the actual name or affiliation of the Clanner, but supporters of this theory believe it accounts for Stone's considerable battlefield prowess. Like a new Jaime Wolf, if you will."

[BARSUN]: "Congratulations, Elliott—each of those theories is more ludicrous than the last."

[KORSCHACK]: "I didn't say I believed *any* of them—just that there's an ever-growing number of people out there who do."

[REESE]: "...And we're about out of time here, folks. I guess we'll wrap it up on that stunningly inconclusive note. And for our viewers at home, if the question is, 'Who is Devlin Stone?' the answer seems to be 'Whoever you want him to be.' Good night."

GAMEMASTER'S SECTION

As should be clear from the transcript, the truth about Devlin Stone's background is elusive. At this moment, no concrete facts about the man have emerged, and Stone isn't talking. He is a screen onto which people project their own hopes, fears or dark thoughts. Gamemasters should feel free to adopt (and adapt) any of the explanations above—or invent their own.



MINOR PL

THUGGEES**///Security Classification:** Omega Ultra – Eyes Only**///Security Priority:** Alpha One Ultra**///Date / Time Group:** 30730228—18:50 Zulu Local**///Transmission Method:** Classified**///Transmission Origins:** Classified**///Transmission Destination:** Classified**///Transmission Sender:** Damocles**///Transmission Recipient:** Sun-Tzu Liao, Chancellor, Capellan Confederation**///Begin Message:****OPERATION: REVELATION**

Chancellor,

Per your request on 30710624, my team and I followed up on the situation concerning the Thuggees and Word of Blake. I have confirmed the reports of two new “Warrior Houses” comprised of Thuggee and what appear to be some new type of Manei Domini (MD) cyborgs, all loyal to Kali Liao. In addition, I can confirm that the relationship between Kali Liao and Cameron St. Jamais goes well past a mere alliance. The mission has been costly, as you will find in my report below:

CHESTERTON

We began our investigation on Chesterton, target of a so-called “Warrior House Rakshasa” attack earlier this year. Having already been in the general area, my team made planetfall two weeks after receiving your operational request. Working covertly, so as not to draw attention from any hostile operatives on-planet, we infiltrated the FedSuns military base and the hospital for intelligence.

Militia Base

The militia base suffered extreme damage when local reservists mobilized to meet the Rakshasa attack. Our main objective was the area where the defenders made their final stand. Unfortunately, we found no bodies or cybernetic hardware in the field. However, we did find a number of blast locations consistent with known MD suicide detonations; the blast radii averaged thirty meters.

Hospital

Bravo Team accessed the hospital to find any survivors for personal accounts of what took place. Their secondary task led them to the morgue for remains of the attackers. The morgue’s security provided standard protection, and Bravo infiltrated without incident.

Survivor Accounts: Very few personnel survived or lived long after the attack. Bravo did gather intelligence from five survivors, including a Lieutenant Ashley Johnson. Each personal account corroborated the others. The attackers were an unknown Capellan unit comprised of cybernetically enhanced troopers believed to be MD, and led by one MD in particular described as “very large.” Johnson’s detailed account also provided an important

NOTES

In a way, this one’s a supplemental report. For those of you who missed my last compilation (hey, it happens!), there was quite a bit of buzz linking Kali Liao to the Manei Domini and the Sixth of June. Well, while we undoubtedly got a lot of that right, there’s always a twist or two nobody considered. Want to see the kind of horror one gets when the Word and another murderous cult join forces? Take a look!

—Starling

detail: She stated that she recognized the insignia as that of a Thuggee cult.

Morgue Investigation: Bravo’s incursion yielded some interesting information. They located the semi-intact remains of a Thuggee warrior killed in the battle by a lucky head shot. After taking the remains elsewhere to inspect and dissect them, we found body modifications that included cybernetic eyes, hearing and mastoid communication system. The hardware is of apparent Blakist and Capellan origins, but the detonators for the major implants were definitely Blakist technology.

Observation

Initial conclusions determined that Kali Liao’s military force has support from the Word of Blake, based on the information obtained in firsthand accounts and cyber hardware in our possession. I have included vidpics of the all the physical evidence. For further investigation, we determined to infiltrate Highspire.

HIGHSPIRE

Infiltrating Kali’s domain proved most challenging. My team and I considered “joining” the Thuggee cult as one method; however, if Blake’s Light of Mankind were on-world, our chances of making it were not good. After exploring a number of options—all equally dangerous—we chose an orbital insertion. For our own operational security, I will acknowledge we were successful in grounding without detection.

During the inbound approach, we managed to gather a large amount of encrypted elint, identified numerous signal sources and located the primary operations center through triangulation. Once we cleared orbit, we deployed our parasails at 19.3 km, landing about ten kilometers north of the furthest transmission point; we activated our mimetic systems and moved out.

To avoid detection during our ingress toward the first Thuggee compound, we spent five days covering the distance. During this time, we monitored all transmissions, attempting to decode and break their encryption. By the third day, my comms specialist successfully deciphered part of their security protocols. We discovered that Cameron St. Jamais happened to be inbound at the time, and due to land within the next 24 hours. I modified our mission to classify St. Jamais as a target of opportunity. On the fourth day, we spotted a combined Thuggee and Manei Domini unit out on a training mission, and held our position until they swept back through our area. When they did so, we shadowed them to their base, our first target.

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The unit we trailed was exceptionally well trained and disciplined. They operated and moved in a manner similar to a Blake's Wrath unit (or in this case, Light of Mankind). Once they arrived at their compound, two operatives met the returning unit. Though we were looking at Manei Domini, it took my unit several minutes to recognize these operatives as such. Unlike MD troops sighted to date, these operatives had two sets of arms towering over the others. My second in command, Thor, recognized these two as members of my former unit. The sight—combined with the recognition—was most disturbing to look at.

At that point, we backtracked one kilometer to regroup and analyze our observations, while Samson—my comm specialist—and Hercules broke the rest of the Thuggees' encryptions. (I am attaching the "0101" encryption at the end of this report.) My operators discovered a number of important items in the various logs, but two caught their immediate attention. I have listed them in order of importance.

The Relationship between Kali Liao and Cameron St. Jamais

This is a very serious and intimate romantic affair. Kali Liao is deeply in love with St. Jamais, so much so, it appears—from the messages between them—that she practically worships the ground he walks on. Here is an excerpt of one decoded exchange that supports this conclusion and more.

Date/Time Stamp: 30711015/1815 – 1820 Zulu Local:

>>>Begin Transmission<<<

[Kali]: "Welcome home my dearest love, Cameron. We have missed you. I have missed you. When you land, I've everything prepared, just the way you like it. Tomorrow, we shall celebrate our son's birthday. Cameron Victor turns seven and he cannot wait to see his daddy after so long apart. Afterward, I will take your mind off all your problems so you can relax, then we will make love until we fall asleep, spent and sated."

[Cameron]: "Thank you, my queen. You know how to make me feel welcomed. I have been away far too long from you and young Cam. I cannot wait to put my arms around you, drink in your beauty, and listen to your beating heart. I have brought something special for Cam from Terra; a little something I picked up in London. My dearest, I have missed you so. I'd like to try for another child; I know you've been longing for one."

[Kali]: [Coos] "Oh, my darling, I have waited so long to hear you say that. I had begun to fear that with all the fighting between the Confederation and your Word of Blake, you had forgotten about us. But we can discuss that later. Right now, I just want to wrap my body around you. How much longer until you land?"

[Cameron]: "My love, take heart; I will be with you in just twenty hours. I know you're distressed over fighting. Remember that I would never act against you or your Confederation. These strikes instead aim to remove those who are disloyal to your family—our family. With precision, the Word purifies your realm, purging those who would break ranks and betray us. And I commend you on unleashing our Rakshasa upon Chesterton. It was an

awe-inspiring, masterful stroke. Truly worthy of the Goddess."

[Kali]: "Ah, you truly know me, dearest Cameron. Your selfless devotion to seeing the path cleared for our rule, our unity against the enemies of the Confederation and your new Hegemony, will bring the other Houses to their knees, and we shall toast our combined victory with the blood of our foes when the new age dawns."

[Cameron]: "I will owe it all to you, my darling. Oh yes, the unification between the New Terran Hegemony and the Confederation will be unstoppable. I must sign off for now, my queen; duty calls. But know this: I love you dearly, and I will see you tomorrow, after I land. Sleep well, my love."

[Kali]: "It will be a fitful sleep until you are with me again, my dearest. Be sure you get everything done before you land; I want nothing to take you away from me for at least a week. You are the air that I breathe and my reason for living. I am yours forever, Cameron."

>>>End transmission<<<

Observation

Kali is clearly smitten with St. Jamais. Apparently so much so that she actually believes the Blakist units fighting the CCAF are doing so on her behalf. What surprised me—as I am sure it may you—is that this also confirms the existence of a son, whose name appears to be *Cameron Victor St. Jamais-Liao*. Chancellor, it is not for me to make suggestions, but if this child is legitimate, he could pose a grave threat to your line of succession.

Senior Level Manei Domini

The next message confirmed the presence of a high-level Manei Domini, identified solely as Precentor Ravana. Ravana apparently hails directly from the Manei Domini ranks, and is held as joint commander for the Warrior Houses Rakshasa and White Tigers (including all support forces). The Dynasty Guard's infantry regiment apparently trains exclusively with both Warrior Houses, and the entire regiment deploys Ying Long armor, though we were unable to determine the source of these suits' manufacture. I have coded the details about all force compositions into the end of this transmission.

THUGGEE TRAINING CENTER

With limited time, I put my entire team down for four hours of rest. We slept in the modified armor recently acquired by Hermes, my requisition and supply master. As the suits were Ying Long models outfitted with experimental C³ gear (thanks to your Celestial Wisdom for this support, though I regret to report that the C³ gear suffers from some grievous limitations), we hoped to pass ourselves off as a Death Commando recon team, if discovered.

At 0245 local, we deployed into three squads and moved out for our first of three targets. The team infiltrated from three different points; Alpha (my squad) from the north, Bravo from the southeast and Charlie from the southwest. This was an



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intelligence mission, not combat. I chose 0330 local because security watches are most vulnerable then, and seeing as we were on Highspire, the possibility of an attack—we hoped—was a low priority.

My team entered the compound undetected. As expected, this was the training center for new Thuggee members who would later be integrated into existing units. Each team recorded several gigabytes of video for further analysis, and—after Charlie team remained behind to leave some “surprises” for use in possible diversionary tactics—we regrouped to move on to the next objective, Kali’s palace.

With sixty kilometers of forest-covered mountains between the objective and us, time was precious. I thus ordered the team into a “V” formation dispersed at a maximum distance of ninety meters, allowing detection of any patrols without endangering the entire team, while we advanced at an increased pace.

CHU-LI MOUNTAINS

By dawn, we had covered roughly a third of the distance when Bravo and Charlie squad detected a forward watch position. Apollo—Charlie leader—detailed the position, comprised of a squad of what appeared to be cybernetically enhanced Thuggees. Thor of Bravo confirmed the same at his location. While they held, I moved Alpha up parallel to their positions and found no sentry watch. After a sensor sweep found no electronic detection equipment in my area, my team crossed through, while Bravo and Charlie converged on our location. It was going to be slow progress from this point in.

At approximately 1500 local, we emerged atop the crest of the last mountain and sighted the place, nearly twenty kilometers distant. I called Thor and Apollo in to discuss our next move. From our position, we had a commanding view of the plateau below. The palace lay at the center, and about five kilometers to the north was a large military spaceport, protected by at least twelve anti-air missile emplacements. The third target of our mission would involve taking control of four of those silos and destroying the remainder. St. Jamais’ DropShip was due to land in less than six hours.

With no cover beyond small rolling hills and a river supplied by a waterfall ten kilometers to our right, Apollo suggested the river—which snaked by the spaceport—as our best means of approach. Thor and I concurred. Moving back down the northern side of the ridge, we moved briskly to reach the falls and ran headlong into a Thuggee patrol. Our speed betrayed our stealth; we engaged. The Thuggees—apparently modified, but only lightly so—were outnumbered by our men three to one, and wore no battle armor. I thus ordered a close-in assault, catching the Thuggees by surprise. The fight was over in seconds, with the Thuggee MDs slain before they could react. After assessing our situation, we descended along the falls and into the river. The current helped cut our time to the target.

THE PALACE

Three hours later, we emerged from the river close to the spaceport. I sent two scouts to secure the area and awaited the all-clear before the rest of us surfaced, ready to fight. As our scouts moved to the nearest emplacement control stations, they encountered only a single non-modified Thuggee standing watch at each. We deployed, took out the sentries quickly and eliminated the weapon operators inside, securing all three control stations, which Samson confirmed as the entirety of the spaceport weapon control network. Apollo put two men in each station, to await my command when the time came. My remaining men then moved toward the palace at a slow pace. The sheer number of weapons emplacements we could now make out marred the beautiful, classical Chinese architecture of Kali’s palatial estate. Gaining entrance to it would prove very difficult.

My team had moved within a thousand meters when a sonic boom erupted above us. Instinctively, we hit the ground, as floodlights sprang to life and transformed night into day. I slowly rolled on my back and spotted an inbound DropShip; St. Jamais had arrived ahead of schedule!

At that moment, the doors to the palace opened. Out marched a total of twenty Manei Domini, four abreast, bearing Thuggee and Blakist markings. As these troops headed toward the spaceport, the largest man-monster I’ve ever seen appeared, following the entire formation. He stood at least two and half meters tall, wearing a red robe adorned with gold-inlaid archaic writing. His hood lay back, exposing long, raven-colored hair. With the exception of red glowing eyes, his face appeared extremely handsome, almost angelic.

This, I realized, was Ravana. Following him were five more red-robed MDs, though none stood as tall.

As I directed my team to reorient toward these men, the roar of the DropShip grew louder as it closed to land. Apollo broke silence to inform me that Thuggee troops had appeared from an underground bay at the spaceport and were now closing on his position. I ordered him to lock and fire, setting the emplacements on automatic defense before falling back to the river. We would rendezvous at the base of the falls.

At that point, Thor informed me that the primary Thuggee-Blakist formation had stopped. As I looked up, I found Ravana had turned in our direction, and his eyes narrowed on me. In that moment, I could taste the fear in my mouth; the hair on the back of my neck stood up and my stomach grew cool. Ravana smiled, exposing a mouthful of razor-sharp teeth and fangs. I knew he’d made us when he ordered the main formation onward, while he and his five companions faced us, waiting.

I slowly stood, ordering the rest of the team to do likewise and prepare to engage. Ravana removed his robe in one fluid movement. Frankly, if I or any of my men were ordinary infantry, we’d all have pissed ourselves and broken at the sight. Ravana was massive. His metallic legs ended in razor-sharp claws and blades extended from his massive arms.

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Then he spread a pair of broad, demonic-looking wings, the likes of which I have never seen on any of the Word's Domini troops.

He pointed directly at me, or so I thought, and in a clear, calm voice ordered his people to disrobe. All were similarly modified, except none of the rest sported wings. At that moment, Apollo fired a full spread of missiles at Cameron's incoming DropShip. That brief distraction was all we needed, and I ordered my team to target lock and fire!

Twelve plasma bolts reached out for the Manei Domini and bathed them in an explosion of convergent fire. When the plasma dispersed, only three of the six stood. Two bodies lay on the ground, still burning, but Ravana himself had vanished. The three remaining MD sprinted toward us. We fired again and again, and again until the last one dropped three meters in front of us. I ordered a tactical withdrawal toward the river, even as multiple explosions rocked the incoming DropShip overhead. More missiles launched toward the ship as we continued our fallback.

Titan half-called a warning, but was cut short. I turned in time to see Ravana fly by, grab him and rip through his armor with those forearm blades. Streaking into the sky, the monster disemboweled my man, and dropped his mangled corpse from close to one hundred meters up. I ordered a flanking team to watch our right and the rest of the team tried to track Ravana. In the air, he was fast, almost too fast for our suits' fire control systems. We moved and fired and he flew in and took out half of Alpha and Bravo squads before we made it to the river. I was about to dive in when Ravana caught up with me, driving me to the ground so hard I was stunned in spite of the armor. I tasted blood, and knew the pain of broken ribs.

Ravana stepped back and sneered at me. As the air slowly returned to my lungs, he stalked around me as if I were prey ripe for the kill. He stopped on my right, and his words will haunt me forever: "I know who you are, Damocles. How *dare* you defile this holy place, heretic?" He then kicked me—armor and all—a full ten meters. I managed to stand up and face him, and even raked him twice with my battle claws as he reached for me again. He roared in pain and I tried to make the river, but he recovered too quickly, grabbed my right arm and twisted me back toward him. His claws pierced my armor, biting deep into my arms.

Ravana then said, "I am going to dine on your heart as I watch the rest of your team flayed alive." He pulled one hand back to do just that, when I fired my plasma weapon into his chest.

The punch and heat of the blast forced him to let go and I felt myself thrown back toward the river's edge. We both stood up slowly, and I could clearly see Ravana's exposed metallic ribs and myomer muscles, still glowing from the discharge. He stepped toward me, but paused. Five of my team had returned to face him. With that same fanged grin, the monster pointed a razor-sharp finger at me and declared, "This isn't over, my old friend...this isn't over." Before any of us could react, he'd leaped into the air, extended his wings and vanished.

Under cover of darkness, my remaining men carried me to our rally point, where Apollo and four of his team were waiting. During our journey back, I tried hard to remember if Ravana and I *had* been friends before the schism, but I drew a blank. His voice, however, was vaguely familiar. We spent two weeks heading back to our drop zone and supplies. Doc patched me up enough to operate my battered armor. Apollo reported that Cameron's DropShip crashed on the tarmac after the second missile strike, but did not explode as we'd hoped. He also distinctly witnessed a "bat-winged object" flying away from the craft, and I knew Ravana had saved St. Jamais.

Though the mission was ultimately compromised, Celestial Wisdom (either by a mole in your staff or else Ravana read my thoughts—at this point I'd believe it), we managed to escape with a good amount of intelligence that may confirm your suspicions about Highspire and Kali's activities there. Per the terms of our contract, that would make this a technical success, though the loss of eight good men and women (including Cameron and Hercules) make it a Pyrrhic victory, at best. We are scheduled for extraction in a week, Celestial Wisdom, and will be offline until we rest, recover and replace our losses. Afterward, per our retainer, I will let you know when we are operational again.

—Damocles

///End message///

///Attachment encoded Alpha Zebra One Charlie One///

GAMEMASTER'S SECTION

That Kali Liao has somehow managed to raise two self-styled Warrior Houses of her own on Highspire, while ostensibly under lock and key is no longer a secret to the Capellan leadership or that of the Federated Suns' Capellan March. Nor is it a secret that these "Warrior Houses" (the Rakshasa and the White Tigers) incorporate the extensive cybernetics featured by the Word of Blake's Manei Domini. But while these facts are no longer in dispute, the question of how far the relationship goes between Kali and Cameron St. Jamais may decide what the ultimate objectives are for such terrifying new forces. Are Kali Liao and Cameron St. Jamais scheming lovers, plotting a coup against the Celestial Throne? Does Chancellor Sun-Tzu Liao know more about them than he's willing to let on, even to the mercenaries he sends to confirm his suspicions? How much direct control do the Manei Domini have over these Thuggee-Manei Domini hybrids? And are their even more radical implants a sign of the lengths to which the Word will go in order to further modify their most fanatical and bloodthirsty warriors?

Players who encounter ordinary Thuggees in combat can expect little mercy and lots of bloodshed. Combined with the sheer terror of their cyber-enhanced elite, these fanatical followers of Kali Liao have grown even more deadly and unpredictable—a combination that could easily tip the balance of power throughout the region.



MINOR PL

THE TANITES

<FORUMID816.9877.22.766.42/CLAN SOCIETY>

SUBJECT: The Tanite Civilization

NOTES

Here's another fun fringe group that comes up often in the lore of some Clans, yet strangely never appears on the maps of the Clan Homeworlds. Some accounts make them sound like a Clan-style Bandit Kingdom or Kerensky's answer to the JärnFolk, but this worldnet forum thread offers some even better theories to contemplate.

—Starling

Gordasch | Posted: 23:54:41.25; 19073061T

I think it's time to talk about the so-called Tanite civilization again. Some new material has come available recently that sheds a little more light on this secret society and just how far their control lies.

What do we know already? Supposedly the Tanis system lies just fifty light years away from the Clan homeworlds, but somehow this advanced civilization remained undetected by the best technology the Clans had to offer for centuries. And when the Clans finally came in to take over, by their own admission they had a hard time assimilating these Tanites. But there is no talk in their history poems about great battles and glorious victories. It's a huge black hole that ends as suddenly as it appears. All of a sudden, the system is controlled by the Cloud Cobras and the Burrocks, but neither Clan lets anyone, other than the Star Adders, in. And somehow, this makes sense to every Clansman, who all live under such overpopulated conditions that they have to fight each other over tiny apartments. They don't think that this entire system, just a couple of jumps away, is worth fighting for? That's what they all want you to believe.

In reality, the Tanis system was colonized by a team sent by **the Illuminati**, who were tracking Kerensky. The team, led by 34th-level Master Templar Hoban Tarik, utilized this system as an outpost while they carried out their real mission—to kill Kerensky, destroy his command and take charge of his “Star League in Exile.” It didn't take much for these propaganda masters to infiltrate Kerensky's civilization and incite the Clan Civil War. With Kerensky and DeChavilier dead, they incited the war that nearly wiped out the few survivors. But the Brotherhood managed to sneak Kerensky's sons away long enough to build a force that could reconquer the Pentagon while the Brotherhood kept the **Illuminati's** Templars occupied.

Ultimately, the Templars managed to assassinate the two Kerensky brothers, but the Brotherhood's influence remained. So they built their secret base up in the Tanis system and used that as a staging area to slowly infiltrate their own agents into the Clans, while bringing more resources in from their other bases in the Deep Periphery. When they were finally ready, they lured ships from the only Clan to be fully subsumed by the Brotherhood—Clan Cloud Cobra—to their base. There, they disabled the Clan ships and 'Mechs with their CENTURION weapons. It didn't take them long to brainwash the Clanners and send them back for reinforcements. Within a few years, they had killed every Brotherhood operative in that Clan and begun to reach their tendrils into the rest of the Clans.

They completely infested half a dozen other Clans, and soon had control of the entire Grand Council through their “mind slugs,” mental leeches that burrow into a host's brain and make him completely subservient to anyone with the right ultrasonic transmitter. They made the Clan Invasion happen, they had Clan Burrock destroyed when some of their warriors found out the truth, and they ordered the Ghost Bears and Nova Cats to move back to the Inner Sphere.

Their agents and mind slaves are throughout the Clans now, having all but destroyed the Brotherhood there. Only the so-called “Wolves in Exile” remain free of Templar influence. The Templars command Clan society from their never-seen homeworld of Tanis, where two dozen galaxies of elite shock troops await their orders, along with hundreds of regiments on staging worlds surrounding the Inner Sphere, to mount their final offensive to subjugate Humanity under the Templars' thumbs—once the Jihad has ground the militaries of the Successor States down further.

What bothers me is how long they were sitting there unprotected in the Tanis system when they could all have been wiped out so easily.

Other findings have recently come to light. I'll let those researchers present their own evidence.

Hokum6652 | Posted: 17:01:14.87; 20073061T

This is the biggest conspiracy in Clan space. The Tanites have burrowed their way throughout Clan society without opposition, save the too few members of the Brotherhood. They are the masters behind all the Clan wars, and when the Clan brutes need something else to fight or start trying to think for themselves, they send in the Dark Caste to take everyone's attention off their maneuvering.

From information I've gathered, the Tanis worlds are the most populous and industrial in all of Clan space, terraformed by the Templars to serve as their base of operations. Over the centuries, they kidnapped hundreds of thousands of Clanspeople, under cover of

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Clan battles and Trials, bringing them back to their worlds and brainwashing them. And they started to build their own army. First they used 'Mechs and tanks stolen from Brian Caches. Later, they built their own factories, which allowed them to create entire divisions of high-tech OmniMechs.

These shadow warriors and their allies are the greatest threat to Humanity that exists today, bigger than the puppet Blakists. That is why they must be defeated. The only way we can hope to do that is to let the galaxy know about them. That is why I'm coming forward with what I know. At this point, I'm sacrificing myself for this, so before they get to me, I'm going to give you everything I have. Don't let them get away with this!

Hokum6652 | Posted: 17:23:33.01; 20073061T

This first file is an interview with a Clan warrior captured during Operation Serpent:

>>rec072252to73060.ts110415to23061<<

"Twice during Operation REVIVAL we requested use of the Tanis system to recharge our JumpShips, but were denied. During that time, one JumpShip from another Clan entered the system and invoked a Trial of Possession for use of a recharge station. That ship, and the forces it carried, was never seen again..."

"As a Star Captain in the Jaguar Swords Cluster, I had an opportunity to interrogate many captured Cloud Cobra and Star Adder warriors. All knew of the Tanis system, but only a few ranking warriors confessed to ever having been to those worlds. Each told of barren planets populated only by a few miners and small garrisons. Even under narco-interrogation, none broke, though the bio-monitors indicated they were lying... How they could do so under such conditions is unknown, but we were instructed by our commander to execute each of them for unspecified crimes rather than allow them to infect our Clan.

"When I became commander of the Jaguar Swords Cluster, ilKhan Lincoln Osis officially struck our Cluster from the rolls so that no one would know of our secret assignment to discover the hidden truth behind the Cloud Cobras and their untrustworthy allies. He spoke of rumors that the scientist caste was conducting illegal genetic experiments and creating armies of mutated abominations in this secret star system. The Dark Caste was also involved in this, apparently supplying not only civilians and warriors captured during raids, but also significant secret technologies and guidance. Lincoln Osis never spoke directly of this, but I believe he thought that the Clans had been infiltrated by a powerful unknown force.

"We never had the chance to launch our investigation. This unknown force somehow learned of our mission and directed the destruction of our Clan before we could find out their secrets."

>>endrec<<

Hokum6652 | Posted: 17:35:12.51; 20073061T

This next bit of information is from a smuggler who spent many years in the Deep Periphery before being captured by the FedCom. He spent several years under Lyran supervision while they pumped him for information. Eventually, he was shipped off to the Marian Hegemony and released. He was killed under circumstances considered "suspicious" even for the Periphery.

>>Begin Transcript:

"I got paid transporting cargo containers into the Deep Periphery. They came from all over the place, but the pickup was always on Kooken's [Pleasure Pit]. From there, we'd go out a few hundred light years and meet up in an uncolonized system with a pulsar as the primary, I suppose so nobody could notice the traffic. Always did this with two JumpShips just in case. Our contacts was always different, but they had the money, well at least the precious metals, so we gave 'em the cargo. They looked and talked like normal, so I didn't think much about them. Far as we cared, they was doing their own thing and we was doing ours.

"One time, the maid of the deep black, she caught up with us, real good. We was three or four jumps away from the pulsar when my drive blew. Damn seals just let go. The Malcolm was dead in space, but our other ship was still good. So we left a skeleton crew behind an' took Nina to make our meet. I figured we wouldn't get paid or they'd be put out. Damn if I wasn't surprised.

"They followed us back to the blown ship and had their crews fix it up. I don't know where they got 'em from, but these guys was the real deal. Better than I ever seen before, even the jackboots in the service. They fixed her up better'n she ever was. New seals, changed out the old bum catalyzer, fixed her up prim and right.

"But those guys was as strange as any I ever seen. It's like they was talking and I understood the words and all, but damn if I had a clue what they was sayin' half the time. One thing I remember, an' I asked my mate 'bout it just to be sure. They kept talking about 'Tanis High Dock.' Them's the words. This an' that, 'Tanis High Dock.' They could fix anything there. Hell, they could build me a new jump drive quicker than it would take 'em to fix up the Malcolm. But then some thick-neck types shut 'em up right quick. That all stuck with me. Ain't no doubt they was talkin' about their homeworld. Hell if I've ever heard of that place though."

>>End Transcript.



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Hokum6652 | Posted: 20:45:18.88; 20073061T

And finally, this piece of information from Ivan Lier. He's brought incredible amounts of black information to public light. This bit is from his time within Loki while assigned to Federated Commonwealth Intelligence Corps Outpost 221.

>>SCRAM/DEC87F1027AF//Start<<

I spent eight months on Outpost 221 during the first days of the Clan Invasion. The few Clansmen our boys could capture on the "left" side of the Commonwealth—mostly Falcons—during that time were routed through our little station, along with their equipment. You hear about how Clansmen are the toughest and never break. In reality it took about two hours. You can hold out against pain, or keep reciting the same limericks all you want, but that won't stop a cerebral probe at full power.

We found out a whole lot of interesting bits of information while we had them there. Hell, we had the location of the Pentagon worlds ten years before someone leaked the story about that Clan "defector." My office mate at the time came up with that one at a brainstorming session, but we all rejected it outright as too unbelievable. He fabricated the cover anyway, just as a contingency. We gave the general public far too much credit, as it turned out.

We had our share of bullshit, of course. Most of it from the fresh-out-of-training Clanners and their version of civvies brought along for support. The tale of the Tanites was right up there with the biggest crocks, but over the years I've seen enough supporting evidence to confirm these outrageous tales.

The story begins with the expulsion of Clan Wolverine and the Minnesota Tribe mystery. The Wolverines made a complete circuit of the Inner Sphere, eventually settling in a former Rim Worlds Republic system that, like Outpost 221, had been erased from the maps. Like the tale of the Tanites, it was discovered during the interrogation of prisoners. What they found was one of Amaris' hidden industrial worlds. Slave populations kept the factories running while the Amaris Dragoons secret police kept the "peace" though public executions and other terror tactics. When the Republic fell, Amaris' troops executed every single prisoner, took everything that wasn't nailed down, disabled what they could and left.

While the bulk of the "Minnesota Tribe" made their trip around the Inner Sphere, a smaller group secretly made their way to this world and claimed it for their own. The larger group gathered a big contingent of refugees on their circuitous trip, adding much-needed manpower, and rebuilt the world. At the same time, they used the technologies of Kerensky to build a clone army, equipped with the most advanced tech of the Star League era.

While steadily increasing their numbers, they sent spy ships back to Clan space. They ultimately made contact with the Clan Resistance, the so-called Dark Caste. The Dark Caste were still in their infancy, and were primarily raiding for subsistence. The Wolverines gave them the organization and backing they needed to truly fight against the Clans, but they needed a base of operations. That's where the Tanis star system comes in.

It had been cataloged decades earlier, but the actual report was lost sometime during the great exploration push prior to the Clan Civil War. Wolverine navigators found the system by sheer accident in one of their JumpShips' navigation computers. They had their base of operations near the Inner Sphere, but that was 2,000 LY away. They consequently began a crash program to build up the Tanis system, bringing in cloning chambers and constructing cities and factories. Within a decade, they had more than a million "citizens"—mostly children birthed from the cloning chamber using the genetic legacies they'd stolen from the Snow Raven repository years earlier (before nuking it; some stories say they did that to cover their tracks, while others say it was an accident).

These clones became second-class citizens, led by the "elite" natural-born—an ironic twist considering how the other Clans developed—though classified into castes not unlike the Clan society they so reviled (another bit of irony) and given only minimal education.

While the Wolverines built a massive army, their spies within the Clans kept them apprised of political movements and technological breakthroughs. The Wolverines were out to destroy Kerensky's "Clan way of life" and to unite the Inner Sphere under their own ideals of peace, but they were still woefully under-equipped to do so. Their break came in the form of a Clan expedition that found the hidden Tanis system. The expedition was no match for the Wolverines, who spent months mind-bending the crews, replacing those that couldn't be brought under control with clones, surgically altered to take their place.

This one bit of luck allowed them to eventually replace scores, then hundreds, of Burrock and Cloud Cobra warriors and scientists as more and more were brought in to "visit" and then "garrison" the worlds. To outsiders, those Clans took control of a minor star system with an indigenous population that descended from an old Star League-era colonization attempt. In reality, the Wolverines began to systematically conquer those Clans from the inside. They used them to destroy those Dark Caste groups that failed to fall in line or that attracted too much unwelcome attention. Soon enough, they infiltrated the Star Adders, taking complete control of that Clan.

While their replicates took over the militaries of the three Clans, other agents infiltrated the scientist caste, eventually working their way throughout all the Clans. At first, their goal was simply to abscond with the Clans' technological advancements, allowing the Wolverines to not only keep pace, but even to jump ahead in many cases, thanks to the advanced research labs Amaris had built centuries before.

During the 30th century, they hatched an even more insidious plot. They used their infiltrated scientists to begin subtly altering Clan gene pools, diluting strong lines and incorporating defects into the entire genetic library.

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Soon afterward, everything nearly came crashing down. Unaligned Dark Caste groups began attacking the Clan civilization in earnest, bringing the wrath of the Clanners down on them. The Wolverines scrambled to keep everything under control, but when that failed, they instructed the Burrocks and Cloud Cobras to strike out, destroying the last vestiges of the unaligned Dark Caste. That move, along with a planted story that some former Burrocks were involved in a cover-up and eliminated in the process, pacified the rest of the Clans and maintained the peace.

At the turn of the century, the state of affairs in the Inner Sphere prompted the Wolverines to do something about it. Their agents began to stir the pot, so to speak, rallying more and more Clansmen behind the call for invasion. It took some time, but they finally pushed the invasion in 3048.

The rest was almost history. They had to increase the intensity of their operations, exposing them far more than they wanted. Their actions got noticed, and very nearly brought them down. Up to that point, they replaced only certain key persons within the three Clans they'd infiltrated. They couldn't control everyone, including a group of up and coming Burrock warriors. Ristars, they call them. These ristars found out something was wrong, and they won command of their Clan in true Clan fashion—by killing their leader. Problem is, they were Clanners, which basically means that naïveté is inbred. They wanted to clean up their Clan, so instead of bringing in outsiders to help them, they tried to take care of it themselves, and that got them Absorbed. The Wolverines sicced the Star Adders and the Cloud Cobras on the Burrocks, and spurred the Blood Spirits to jump into the fray for good measure. The resulting mess eliminated all opposition, and gave them the opening they needed to replace almost all of the Adders and Cobras with their replicates. Since the "Absorption," every Star Adder and Cloud Cobra unit has either rotated to the Tanis system or rotated personnel and equipment with one that has gone there.

The takeover is nearly complete. The Clan wars are already beginning, and the Wolverines mean to come out on top. And when the Jihad and the Clan Wars are over, they will be in position to launch the last phase of their plan: they have fifty divisions waiting to assault the Clan homeworlds, and more than two hundred more poised to sweep through the Inner Sphere, destroying every last vestige of civilization so that they can impose their own on the survivors.

You have been warned.

>>SCRAM/REC///Stop<<

BendR74 | Posted: 14:00:33.12; 21073061T

Thanks for sharing. Do we have maps to Tanis or the Wolverine homeworld, or at least some information on those worlds? We've been hearing about hidden and lost worlds ever since I've been around, but this is the first hard evidence I've seen on these.

Steug | Posted: 16:07:22.68; 21073061T

Ivan, thanks for putting your life on the line again to share with us. Keep sharing your Loki experiences. We need to let everyone know what they are up to.

SHAEPR | Posted: 19:45:29.85; 21073061T

<Message deleted by controller>

NameRedacted | Posted: 09:12:53.00; 22073061T

I agree. Everything Ivan says is golden, even if it doesn't make a whit of sense.


Kommandant^Kreuk | Posted: 01:16:20.09; 23073061T

I don't even know why I try, but here I go in any event.

If the Lyran Alliance or the Federated Suns, or the Federated Commonwealth, or anyone knew about something this big, there is no way, I REPEAT NO WAY, for something as large and wide-reaching to remain secret. The members of the Star League would have to know, and to date not a single piece of shared intelligence has ever remained classified. It is absolutely impossible for anything this gigantic to be kept under wraps for this long. Period.



5

MINOR PLAYERS **Maaraa5559** | Posted: 21:43:33.39; 23073061T 

My grandfather worked with a contractor that used to build and repair black ops stations throughout the Lyran Commonwealth. He never talked about it until his last days, even after he found out they infected him with terminal cancer. He never said much, but he did tell a few stories about Site 221. I remember the name clearly because that was my sister's birthday. He helped build it into the side of an asteroid, and then would be called back every five to ten years to expand the facility. The last time he was there was ten months before he died. He said he saw something he shouldn't have, and they killed him for it. Ivan, contact me. I have some evidence I want you to verify.

SkeptyKryttyr | Posted: 12:07:43.91; 24073061T 


Seems like everything here has to be a galaxy-wide conspiracy. Seems more logical that the mythical Minnesota Tribe died out long ago instead of coincidentally finding some hidden Amaris super-factory-world. Or that maybe a couple of Clans happened to stumble upon a world that they want to keep all for themselves, so they defend it.

Anguis^Gryndui | Posted: 05:19:22.48; 29073061T 

What about the Word of Blake? Are the Blakists just puppets for the Wolverines or are the wolverines the blake puppets because I keep hearing about these hidden worlds and if they have these hidden worlds that they keep attacking everyone from how come they don't know about the wolverine hidden worlds. I don't see how they cant know about those worlds because they have the star league maps of all the worlds they inspected even if they didn't send anyone there to colonize. The wolverines have to be word of blake or maybe they became the word of blake back when they came to the inner sphere but had to become comstar because that's what they were before they were wordof blake. But if they aren't then how come they can have hidden worlds out there because they know whre all the hidden worlds are just look at jardine and the hidden planets they've been hiding at.

K8uy1logs | Posted: 14:54:07.73; 30073061T 

I do remember seeing some information that looked pretty funny. I snagged a copy of the last Field Manual the Star League put out before the Jihad that showed some pretty impressive Cobra and Star Adder forces on Tanis. You don't put that many forces on a single planet unless you have something to hide.

ML873otty | Posted: 14:54:07.73; 30073061T 

I remember hearing something about the scientists, but I thought that had something to do with the Falcons. Do you think they could all be in league together? How would we prove it, even if they are?

SkeptyKryttyr | Posted: 06:06:52.00; 06063062T 

I'd be more apt to believe a drunk on the street than the rubbish coming out of Ivan's mouth. He's a chronic liar and purveyor of fantastic stories. Hokum believes everything he says. Hopefully the rest of you can apply a little logic before you swallow it whole.

MINOR PLAYERS **GAMEMASTER'S SECTION**

The Tanite civilization is a mystery even to most Clansmen. Few hard facts are known about this small system on the edge of the Clan homeworlds. Conjecture runs rampant throughout conspiratorial subcultures in the Inner Sphere and among the Clans, yet to date no one has asked the serious questions or challenged Clans Cloud Cobra or Star Adder to rights in the system.

What is known is that those two Clans jealously guard the Tanis system. They have at least a full Star of WarShips on patrol, waiting to pounce on any intruders, and at least two Galaxies of troops on the ground. No Clan has been able to land its own troops or ships on any of the Tanite worlds, and no ship without a pre-approved travel plan has ever left the system without first being claimed by Clan Cloud Cobra or Star Adder in a Trial of Possession.

NOTES

Ladies and gentlemen...I give you the cherry on the cake...or a rotted pit. Can't figure it all out yet. But I recently received a packet unlike anything that's crossed my desk in long, long years of ferreting out the secrets you all don't want to see.

The encryption on the copy I received (and I now know it is just a copy of the master documents) made the electronic lockdown on the Alliance Reserve Bank look as easy to crack as it is to score in a Canopian Pleasure Circus. I've barely scratched the surface ... and I've been at this a while. I keep thinking I should tap Lefty ... but not sure I trust him enough with this gem.

However, what I have been able to dig up ... damnation if it didn't get my blood pumping at the possibilities. And all I've really been able to ferret out yet is some file names! Now some of it seems to simply be a compilation of news reports from around the Sphere, ala Bosworth before he got plastered. Another section is an odd assortment of biographies, from interstellar mega players down to the seemingly innocuous ... who's keeping tabs on these people, I'm not sure ... though I've got some good ideas.

But the real meat and potatoes of these files ... they scare the living shit out of me. Now, I've had my fair share of run-ins ... you all remember the erasure of The Hidden documents the first time I tried to publish. But if my code-breaking is good enough (and it usually is), then the markers on some of these files bear coding that place it directly off of Victoria Parrdeau's hard drive. You all remember her, right? Precentor ROM ... first for ComStar, then Word of Blake, now missing? Doesn't get much more authentic than that. And if that's authentic, then we might finally have hard information on Word of Blake military deployment over the past several years. Not something I'm gonna wet myself over, but other military leaders? Yeah, invaluable.

No, the kernel that stands the hair on the back of my neck on end is the last few file names I cracked (more encrypted than anything else!). But I teased out some file titles ... and normally I'd laugh them off as much as I do aliens in the void or the genecaste (sure, I published them, but that's because I'm a media whore ...). But after verifying Victoria's electronic stamp ... and seeing the vista those few file titles open ... the possibilities are enough to rock this completely jaded discoverer-of-secrets to his core. And if it's true ... whoever holds these secrets will decide the fate of the Inner Sphere for the next decade and more. Empires will rise and fall through these secrets ... even I'm not sure I'm willing to place the bull's-eye on my chest for revealing everything...which is why I'm only dropping innuendos at this point ... and scuttling back to the shadows.

Enjoy the light show, people ... it'll be unlike anything seen in centuries

—Starling



JU<CORRUPT>SS
 101.....Roots of the Jihad
 102.....Word of Blake and True Peace
 103.....The Point of the Jihad
 104.....The Clans Must Die
 105.....Ways and Means

200 JIHAD: THE EARLY YEARS

201.....Operation: Sovereign Justice
 202.....Operation: "Thunderstrike"
 203.....Operation: "Überschatten/Broken Fist"
 204.....Operation: "Steel Hammer"
 205.....Operation: "Showtime"
 206.....Operation: "Ice Storm"

300 AROUND THE SPHERE

???. <UNRECOGNIZABLE/WRONG TYPE>



OPENING FILE//TSSMOOMH.A12 <WARNING:PARLOUS CONTENT>

CBS.Dterm (UNENCRYPT)



B<UNRECOGNIZABLE/WRONG TYPE>

401.....Albert Benton
 403.....Alex Keller
 404.....Alys Rousset-Marik
 405.....Janice Annapoulis
 408.....Jocelyn "Joey" Myrianna Nichole
 411.....Marcel Webb
 412.....Ross McKinnon
 414.....Stacy Church
 415.....Bounty Hunter
 416.....Gavin Dow
 423.....Kiyomori Minamoto
 424.....Shakir Jerrar
 505....."Thomas Marik"
 507.....Titus Cameron-Jones
 664.....David Lear
 666.....Devlin Stone
 710.....Wolfgang Hansen
 A03.....Apollyon
 A09.....Avitue
 A98.....Berith
 A02.....Cameron St. Jamais
 B08.....Geoffrey Zucker
 470.....Lindon Ashley
 808.....Kali Liao

PGUP/PGDN <NEXT>

<MORE>

OPENING FILE//TSSMOOMH.A12 <WARNING:PARLOUS CONTENT>

CBS.Dterm (UNENCRYPT)



M00 THE WORD OF BLAKE PROTECTORATE

M01 Overview.....Organization
M02.....Protectorate Theater
M03.....Lyran Theater
M04.....Federated Suns Theater
M05.....Capellan Theater
M06.....Free Worlds Theater
M07.....Draconis Theater
M08.....Periphery Theater
M10.....Protectorate Militia Forces
 Deployment
 Operational Standards
M15 Shadow Divisions
M1A Mercenary Support Forces Mercenary Deployments And Status

PGUP/PGDN <NEXT>

<MORE>





OPENING FILE///TSSMOOMH.A12 <WARNING:PARLOUS CONTENT>

CBS.Dterm (UNENCRYPT)



J00 <UNRECOGNIZABLE/WRONG TYPE> THE LOOKING GLASS

J01 Overview

.....Victor Steiner-Davion Married?
Sun-Tzu's Parentage?
Clinton's Cutthroats
Katherine Set Up?
Arthur Steiner-Davion: The Truth?
Kali And Cameron?
What's In A Name?

X00

X01

X02

Exile

.....Log: 7 August 2824
Log: 29 August 2824
Log: 20 September 2824
Log: 31 October 2824
Log: 19 November 2824

<FILE CORRUPT>

<FILE CORRUPT>

<FILE CORRUPT>

.....Log: 17 January 2825
Log: 12 February 2825
Log: 3 March 2825
Log: 26 March 2825
Log: 11 April 2825
Log: 19 April 2825

<FILE CORRUPT>

<FILE CORRUPT>

.....Log: 15 July 2825
Log: 21 September 2825
Log: 29 October 2825
Log: 14 December 2825
Log: 9 January 2826
Log: 212 January 2826
Log: 29 April 2826

<FILE CORRUPT>

.....Log: 27 June 2826
Log: 29 June 2826
Log: 11 August 2826
New Era Day 46

XA1 The Book of Vengeance

XF1 The Scorpion Doctrine

XF3 The Hidden Hand

XX0 What Lies Beneath

RULES ADDENDUM



RULES ADDENDUM

The following rules cover roleplaying as well as the *Classic BattleTech* board game, allowing players to integrate the organizations, groups and powerful individuals in this book into almost any type of campaign or game play.

CLASSIC BATTLETECH RPG RULES

The following rules expand on those presented in the *Classic BattleTech RPG (CBT: RPG)*, as well as its supplements, such as *Lostech (LT)*, *Classic BattleTech Companion (CBTComp)* and *Combat Equipment (CE)*. Where applicable, these rules also expand on those established in *Interstellar Players (ISP1)*.

As noted in the *Introduction*, most players and gamemasters may consider these rules optional for their campaigns. Some, however, are generic enough to add depth even to those games that do not include the power players featured in this book. All players in a gaming group should agree upon the inclusion of any of these rules before using them.

INFLUENCE AND SPECIAL CONTACTS/ENEMIES

The following section contains the selection of expanded trait rules originally featured in *Interstellar Players*. Unless otherwise stated, these traits follow the rules in *CBT: RPG* (see p. 78).

Remember that some of these new traits are so closely related to existing traits (such as Contacts) established in previous rulebooks that players can exchange them at the end of character creation to give existing characters more flavor. When making such trait swaps, however, the player must switch among similar traits of equal point values, with the gamemaster determining whether the exchange is appropriate.

Developer's Note: The rules for Effects of Influence presented here correct a minor error in the interaction between characters with Influence in rival organizations. As such, these rules supersede those found in *Interstellar Players*.

Influence Trait

The Influence Trait reflects a character's overall power and status within his or her organization, and may be used to "pull some strings" or affect the outcome of negotiations and other social interactions both within and beyond the organization's umbrella. This trait applies only to the character's membership within covert organizations and secret societies; for more public roles, such as government administrations, military command structures, noble society and corporate circles, the SOC attribute remains the measure of the character's stature.

Initial Influence

Characters who possess the In for Life Trait automatically gain an Influence Trait for whichever group they are "in." The starting level of the character's Influence is automatically assumed to be 0, but for every two Life Paths taken while In For Life, the character's Influence in that organization increases by one level to reflect the

connections made over the years. Also, after acquiring the In for Life Trait, the character's Influence increases by 1 point for any event roll result of 17+ on a 2D10 Life Path (10+ for a 2D6 Path), or decreases by 1 for an event roll result of 8 or less on a 2D10 Life Path (5 or less on a 2D6 Path).

Additional levels of Influence may not be purchased during character creation; they can only be earned through roleplaying.

Jim's PC takes the Fugitive Life Path and gets a result of 4, meaning that his parents indoctrinated him into a clandestine rebellion against the government, and he thus gains Influence (0): Rebellion. His next two paths, Mercenary Brat and Military Academy, yield event rolls of 7 and 9, respectively, which add nothing to Jim's Influence, though the time spent automatically increases it to Level 1.

In Jim's first Tour of Duty Life Path, he rolls a 4 for the event, which decreases his Influence by 1 point (back to 0). He decides to push his luck and takes another pass through Tour of Duty, this time receiving an event roll of 10, which increases his Influence once more by 1 point (to 1). Because this is also his fourth path taken since he gained In for Life: Rebellion, he automatically gains one more level of Influence, bringing his final initial Influence level to 2.

Altering Influence

Events in which a character gets involved often cause his or her influence to rise and fall, depending on the character's participation and the outcome. Certain events may cause an automatic shift (promotion within the organization, making new contacts and so on) while others may have a more hit-or-miss effect. The Influence Table below provides a guide to which situations improve a character's Influence, and which may decrease it. Certain events cause an automatic change in value, as demonstrated under the Automatic Events header, while others yield a possible opportunity for Influence change—deemed positive or negative, as appropriate to the situation.

For possible changes, the character must make a SOC Attribute Check, adding the character's current Influence Level, divided by 4 (rounding down), to the result. If the check is successful on a possible opportunity to raise Influence (noted by a Positive listing under Type of Roll), the character's Influence increases by 1 level for every 5 points (or fraction thereof) by which the roll succeeded. If the check fails on a roll for a possible decrease in Influence (indicated as a Negative under Type of Roll), the character loses 1 Influence Level for every 5 points (or fraction thereof) by which the check failed. Any other results—failure in an opportunity to increase Influence, or success in a check to determine possible Influence loss—has no effect on the character's Influence Trait.

A character also receives one free attempt to increase his or her Influence for each year in game time that progresses during a campaign. This is treated as a positive possible change roll, but



RULES ADDENDUM

may increase the character's Influence by no more than 1 level, regardless of the roll's Margin of Success (MoS).

To avoid undue Influence inflation or over-use, gamemasters should use discretion when deciding which events should be worthy of changing a character's Influence Trait.

or aware of one another (which depends on the campaign and is ultimately up to the gamemaster), the character with the higher trait level gains a bonus to all SOC-related checks between them (such as Protocol) equal to the difference between their Influence levels.

Rival Organizations: When two characters with Influence in rival organizations interact, the difference between the characters' Influence Levels is subtracted from both characters' SOC-related skill checks, rather than added for either character. This means that if a character with an Influence level of 10 deals with a character who has an Influence of 4 in a rival organization, both characters must apply a -6 penalty to the SOC-related roll result when attempting to negotiate with or influence the opposing character, rather than seeing the more influential character add his usual +10. This penalty, however, only applies if both interacting characters are aware of each other's ties to rival groups, as determined by the gamemaster.

Jason's character has the Influence (10): Manei Domini Trait and is currently dealing with a character who has Influence (6): Cult of St. Cameron. The gamemaster decides for this campaign that the Cult is fiercely opposed to the Domini, so their spheres of Influence rival each other. This means that Jason's character and his St. Cameron "enemy" apply a -4 modifier to each other's SOC skill checks against each other (the difference between Jason's Influence of 10 and his opponent's Influence of 6). If, on the other hand, the gamemaster had decreed that the two organizations were allied, Jason's character—as the one with the higher Influence—would have added 4 to any SOC-based skill checks against the St. Cameron character (10 - 6 = 4), while his counterpart would have received no modifier.

INFLUENCE TABLE

Automatic Events	Influence Change
Promoted within organization	+1
Demoted within organization	-2
Eliminated a threat to organization	+2
Created a threat to organization	-4
Successful mission for organization on own initiative	+1
Gained new Contact (Special or normal)	+ value of contact
Exposed organization secret	-5

Events for Possible Changes	Type of Roll
Successful mission for organization under orders	Positive
Increased level of Reputation (good or bad)	Positive
Eliminated rival within organization	Positive
Failed mission for organization	Negative
Acquired Enemy	Negative
Under observation by authorities or media (per game month)	Negative

Effects of Influence

Unlike the SOC Attribute or the Glory and Prominence Traits, which denote one's standing within open societies and public life, Influence represents a character's standing within specific circles. The Influence trait has no affect on someone unfamiliar or uninterested in said group. Indeed, when interacting with a rival organization, a character's Influence may even have a negative effect.

Players using the advanced Contacts/Enemies rules (see pp. 209-212, *CBTComp*) may also use their character's Influence Trait to aid in finding a contact through the organization's resources, adding a modifier equal to one-third of the character's Influence level (rounded down) to any required Protocol, Streetwise or Scrounge checks as necessary. Rather than making such checks only once per day, however, a character with the Influence Trait and access to his or her organization's resources may make as many attempts per day as the character has levels in Influence.

Same Organization: When dealing with other members of the same organization, add the character's Influence level to the result of all SOC-related checks.

Different Organizations: When using Influence between characters of different organizations that are somehow related

Influence and Contacts/Enemies

Under the Advanced Contacts and Enemies rules presented in *CBTComp* (see pp. 209-218), the contacts and/or enemies acquired by player characters over the course of character creation or roleplaying were given an overall Influence Rating to reflect their resources, usefulness or status. For a more precise accounting of this NPC characteristic, a numerical Influence Trait rating may be assigned to any Contacts or Enemies the PC may have, if said character is connected with an organization that can exercise vast powers on the interplanetary scene.

To find the basic Influence rating of an NPC Contact or Enemy, cross-reference the ranking (level) of the Contact or Enemy with the Contact/Enemy Table below. The NPC's numerical Influence

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level appears in parentheses beneath the Influence Rating column, but may be modified if the NPC lacks the In For Life Trait or is a Special Contact/Enemy.

This table also incorporates the data found on p. 209 of *CBT Companion*, and so can be used to determine an NPC's relative point values in Attributes and Traits (using the character possessing the applicable Contact or Enemy Trait as a basis), as well as the NPC's range of skills and upper limits (once again relative to the player character in question). Skill Points for NPCs are spent at a direct rate of 1 point per skill bonus level (starting at +0). For example, an NPC Level 2 Contact—in addition to having a base Influence level of 5, if he also has an In For Life Trait—would possess 5 more Attribute points, and additional Traits worth 2 points more than the character. Said NPC would also have between 10 to 12 skills, with a total of 15 NPC skill points spent between them, though none of these skills can outmatch the player character's own skill by more than a +2 bonus. (If the gamemaster elected to give the NPC the Pistols skill, and the player character has Pistols Skill +4, the NPC can have Pistols Skill +6, though such a skill would cost 7 NPC skill points.)

If using the *CBTComp Advanced Contacts and Enemies Rules* (see pp. 209-218) to locate a Special Contact, the point cost of the Special Contact Trait is added to the base TN, reflecting the difficulty in getting through to these secretive character types. However, this same value is subtracted from any TNs when using a Special Contact's influence to obtain manpower, information or supplies, reflecting this individual's superior ability to make things happen.

Skills and Fields

The following section contains a new skill and several skill fields for *CBT: RPG* characters. Unless otherwise stated, these follow the rules as presented in *CBT: RPG* and *CBTComp*.

Martial Arts/Quick Death (New)

A purely offensive form of combat, Quick Death's intent is in its title: to kill as fast as possible. Providing no defense at all, this style is best used in conjunction with stealth or in situations where surprise is on the character's side. Otherwise, characters using this skill in melee combat will suffer a +2 TN modifier for rolls to defend against another character's Martial Arts skill. (RFL / WIL)

Temple Jab (Attack): This attack adds 3D6 damage to a successful strike against the target's head, but cannot be used against a character that is wearing a helmet. If the attack fails, the attacker is momentarily thrown off-balance, and any TN to hit the attacker in the following round receives a -3 modifier.

Side Stab (Attack): The TN for this special attack increases by the target's RFL Attribute, plus the target's highest Martial Arts Skill Bonus (if any). If successful, the target must make an immediate Knockout

Check with a TN Modifier equal to the attack's margin of success. If the attack fails, the attacker is momentarily thrown off-balance, and any TN to hit the attacker in the following round receives a -3 modifier.

Weapon Style: A character must have a +2 Skill Bonus or better in Quick Death to use this ability, which allows the character to combine any of his known martial arts maneuvers (such as Temple Jab) with weapons in which he is skilled. When using Weapon Style in an attack, use the *lower* skill bonus of either the Martial Arts or the weapon being used. If successful, the weapon's damage is added to the normal damage and effects of the attack.

CONTACT/ENEMY TABLE

NPC Ranking	Influence Rating (Level)	Attributes/Traits	Skills (NPC Points)/Limits
Henchman*	None (1)	-5 / -2	6-8 (15) / +0
Level 1	Low (2)	+0 / +0	8-10 (20) / +1
Level 2	Medium (5)	+5 / +2	10-12 (25) / +2
Level 3	High (8)	+10 / +4	12-15 (35) / +4
Level 4	Very High (12)	+12 / +6	18-24 (55) / +7

Additional Modifiers

NPC is not In For Life	x0
NPC is Special Contact or Special Enemy**	x2

*Henchman NPCs may serve any Ranked NPCs of Level 1 or higher ** Special Contacts/Special Enemies are always In For Life

SPECIAL CONTACT/ENEMY TRAITS

Cost (Special Contact): 2 per Level (Max 4); Value (Special Enemy): 2 per Level (Max 4)

Special Contacts and Special Enemies are particularly well-connected NPC Contacts and Enemies that a player character may develop (or run against) in the course of an adventure. Special Contacts or Enemies are always In For Life within a major organization—secret or otherwise—and are beholden to said organization's goals and directives. They also tend to hold far greater influence as a result, and are often far more skilled and capable than comparable NPC Contacts and Enemies, typically wielding enough clout to have the player characters do their bidding, rather than the other way around.

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NEW WEAPONS TABLE

Item	Skill	Equipment Ratings	AP-Damage (CBT)	Type	Range S/M/L/E	Shots	Cost/Reload	Weight	Afil	Notes
Jambiyya Dagger	BLA	A/A-A-A/A	1•1D6 (0.02)	M	—	—	15	300 g	DC	—
Templar Vibrosword	BLA	E/F-F-E/D	5•3D6 (0.26)	M	—	3 pps*	500/*	5 kg	Per	-1 TN
Thuggee Rumal	WHP	E/F-F-F/F	2•4D6 (0.14)	M	—	1 pps*	350/*	280 g	CC	**

*Uses power packs, shots given as power points per shot (pps), reload cost based on power pack used.

**Requires successful hit to the target's head; base damage is 1•3D6 if unpowered.

PERSONAL EQUIPMENT

The equipment below follows the standard rules set down in *CBT: RPG*, *CBTComp*, *LT* and *CBT CE*.

Jambiyya Dagger

A traditional Arabic dagger, the *jambiyya* (or *gambia*) is still widely used in many Azami cultures. While the blade itself is short and slightly curved, its distinctive feature is its bent sheath (usually made from native wood). Often created from exotic materials, with elaborate adornments on its sheath and hilt, the dagger is as much a mark of status as it is a deadly weapon. This weapon is favored by many Saurimat assassins, who often lace the blade with contact poisons and leave it at the scene of a successful "assignment."

St. Cameron's Templar Vibrosword

Created as much for ceremonial duties as for combat, the vibroswords used by the Templars in the Cult of St. Cameron are elegant in style, hearkening back to the classic long swords of ancient Terra. With a longer blade than most vibros, balanced for superior fighting, the Templar vibrosword matches the capabilities of the vibrokatanas used by the Combine's elite DEST—an astounding feat for a weapon practically handcrafted in the Periphery.

Thuggee Rumal

A ritualistic weapon for stealthy kills, the rumal is a weighted garrotte-like weapon that outwardly resembles a scarf (usually yellow) and is often worn as such (or as a sash) by Thuggee warriors. The current incarnation of this weapon adds a modified form of monowire to the scarf's weave, granting this weapon the ability to crush through personal armor or even slice through flesh when powered up. To achieve the desired results, however, the attacker must first make a successful attack against the target's head before using the weapon to strangle.

ROLEPLAYING ADDENDUM

The following information for gamemasters and players of *CBT: RPG* campaigns is intended to cover other aspects of life related to the power players in this book, and should be used to help add a more distinctive flavor to such campaigns and characters.

However, as with the skills, traits and equipment listed previously, many of these game rules may be applicable even to those campaigns where secret groups are not a factor.

Possession

Though no proof has ever been found of their existence, uncounted rumors still maintain that sentient aliens exist in the space-savvy times of the thirty-first century, perhaps even watching human affairs with fear, envy or hatred. In many tales, such beings are as ruthless as they are inconceivably advanced, and persistent stories tell of alien possession—the sublimation of the mind to the will of an extra-human intellect.

Whether or not these rumors are even close to the truth, abundant documentation exists regarding people who have suffered profoundly life-altering mental changes after a hyperspace jump—often in ways that make the worst recorded cases of Transit Disorientation Syndrome (TDS) seem mild. Whether attributed to aliens, "space madness" or the disruption of the human brain's electrochemical processes by the unknown fluctuations of hyperspace, the folklore term "possession" has taken hold in many circles to describe this unusual phenomenon.

Gamemasters willing to allow for such possibilities (especially in light of the alien hyperspace-dwellers hinted at in *Mysteries of the Void*) may explore the possibility of alien possession any time a character or NPC experiences a jump through hyperspace. These rules presuppose that such creatures hate humanity and will do anything to cause pain and suffering to as many humans as possible, but creative gamemasters can develop alternative motivations for such entities, with potentially different effects.

Game Rules: A successful possession occurs in a similar fashion to the brainwashing effects described on p. 123 of *Interstellar Players*, with the following key differences:

First, because of the strange nature of time within hyperspace, the effects of breaking down and reprogramming a mind essentially take place immediately. The weeks normally required to brainwash a subject do not apply in the case of possession.

Second, because the physics (or inhabitants) of hyperspace have direct access to human minds, there are no physical signs of torture or deprivation. Characters and NPCs will have no memory of the mental ordeal they've been through.

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Gamemasters therefore should conduct possession rolls in secret and not reveal the results to the players.

In RPG game play, the gamemaster makes a 4D6 roll for each character or NPC who undergoes a jump, subtracting one-third of the character's WIL (rounded up) from the roll result. If the modified roll result is 20 or higher, the character is psychologically altered during his transit through hyperspace. For example, if Spaceman Nadia has a WIL of 8 and undergoes a jump, the gamemaster makes a 4D6 Possession roll with a result of 22, but subtracts 3 (WIL $8 \div 3 = 2.667$, round up to 3), for a final result of 19. Lucky Nadia has (unknowingly) resisted or avoided possession.

In CBT game play, the same roll is made only for unit commanders and pilots who pass through hyperspace (rather than for every crewman on a given vessel). This includes all transported units, such as DropShips and fighters attached to an attendant JumpShip.

In both RPG and CBT game play, the effects of a successful possession are determined by rolling 2D6 and consulting the Possession Effects Table below. Each possession effect is described below. When any such effects are determined, gamemasters need not explain them to their players. Instead, the gamemaster may assume control of the player's character and perform the actions described. CBT units whose commanders or pilots succumb to possession effects must roll a separate Initiative from all other units.

If a character's possession is recognized by his comrades, and he is then captured or subdued, deprogramming as described in the *Brainwashing* section of *Interstellar Players* takes effect

from pre-existing traits such as Transit Disorientation Syndrome.

In CBT play, a unit suffering from possession-induced extreme paranoia suffers a +1 to-hit modifier to all Piloting and Gunnery rolls for the duration of the effect, and may not execute physical attacks during this time (including ramming). In addition, fighters and other single-pilot units under the paranoia effect must roll 2D6 during the End Phase of each turn. On a result of 9+, the unit will attack the nearest friendly unit with no additional modifiers to Piloting or Gunnery skills, and no concern for heat issues or critical damage. Crewed units under a paranoia effect suffer a +3 to-hit modifier for all Piloting and Gunnery rolls (reflecting extreme wariness between the commander, his loyalists and the rest of the vessel's confused crew). After the paranoia effects wear off, the affected units may no longer expend Thrust, maneuver or make other actions for the remainder of the scenario.

Minor Disorientation: In RPG play, a character suffering minor disorientation from possession is subjected to mild grogginess, akin to being suddenly roused from a deep sleep. For 1D6 + 5 minutes after the jump, the affected character's DEX and REF attributes are modified by -1. These effects apply in addition to any that stem from pre-existing traits such as Transit Disorientation Syndrome.

In CBT play, a unit suffering from minor possession-induced disorientation suffers a +1 to-hit modifier to all Piloting and Gunnery rolls for the duration of the effect, and may not execute physical attacks during this time (including ramming).

Disorientation: In RPG play, disorientation from possession is akin to suffering a blow to the head. For 2D6 + 5 minutes after the jump, the affected character's DEX and REF attributes are modified by -2. These effects apply in addition to any that stem from pre-existing traits such as Transit Disorientation Syndrome.

In CBT play, a unit suffering from possession-induced disorientation suffers a +2 to-hit modifier to all Piloting and Gunnery rolls for the duration of the effect, and may not execute physical attacks during this time (including ramming).

Major Disorientation: Possession-induced major disorientation is similar to severe intoxication or "jump sickness." For 4D6 + 5 minutes after the jump, the affected character's DEX and REF attributes are modified by -3. In addition, the character's BOD, INT and CHA scores are modified by -1 to reflect significant loss of grace and function. Even after the effects wear off, the character automatically receives the Transit Disorientation Trait (if he did not have it previously) as a permanent side effect of the trauma.

In CBT play, a unit suffering from major possession-induced disorientation suffers a +3 to-hit modifier to all Piloting and Gunnery rolls for the duration of the effect, and may not execute physical attacks (including ramming) or re-enter hyperspace during this time.

Coma: In RPG game play, possession-induced comas render the character unconscious immediately after the jump. The coma lasts up to 6D6 + 10 hours. If medical attention is available before the end of this time, the character will survive on a successful

POSSESSION EFFECTS TABLE

2D6 Roll	Effect
2	Extreme Paranoia
3-5	Minor Disorientation
6-7	Disorientation
8	Major Disorientation
9	Coma
10	Turncoat
11	Berserker
12	Headhunter

Extreme Paranoia: In RPG play, a character suffering extreme paranoia from possession feels everyone around him is out to get him and will disbelieve anything told to him, no matter how obvious the evidence. The character is essentially subjected to all the effects of the Combat Paralysis Trait (even if not in combat at the time), and suffers a -3 TN modifier to all actions for 1D6 + 5 minutes after the jump. These effects apply in addition to any that stem



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MedTech Action Check with a +4 TN modifier (other conditional modifiers apply as well). Otherwise, the comatose character suffers an apparent stroke and dies at the end of this period.

In CBT play, coma effects render any fighters or other single-pilot units inactive for the duration of the effect. Larger units—such as Small Craft, DropShips, JumpShips and WarShips—may function normally, but suffer a +1 to-hit modifier to all Gunnery and Piloting rolls, as well as a -1 initiative modifier as secondary officers attempt to cover for their stricken commander.

Turncoat: In RPG game play, for 1D6 + 3 minutes after the jump, the affected character will turn and attack any friendly characters he can reach. The turncoat is not truly controlled by any opposing force, however, and may not be used as part of a coordinated attack; he will simply engage whichever of his comrades are nearest until he is rendered unconscious, immobilized or killed.

In CBT game play, fighters and other single-pilot units under the turncoat effect will attack the nearest friendly unit as though it is an enemy, with no modifiers to Piloting or Gunnery skills. Crewed units under a turncoat effect will attack friendlies for only $1D6 \div 2$ turns (round up), with a +2 to-hit modifier for all Piloting and Gunnery rolls (reflecting a struggle between the commander and his loyalists, and the rest of the vessel's confused crew). After the effects wear off, the unit functions normally again.

Berserker: In RPG game play, for 1D6 + 3 minutes after the jump, a possession-induced berserker rage drives the affected character to attack *any* character nearby—friend or foe. The berserker will neither withdraw nor coordinate attacks with others, and will ignore any and all orders from superior officers. Instead, the berserker will rush the nearest unit and attack without regard for defensive actions—literally fighting until he is killed, or his nearest targets are obliterated (at which point the berserker will find another target and continue).

In CBT game play, fighters and other single-pilot units under the berserker effect will attack the nearest unit (of any affiliation) as though it is an enemy, with no additional modifiers to Piloting or Gunnery skills, and no concern for heat issues or critical damage. Crewed units under a berserker effect will attack other units for only $1D6 \div 2$ turns (round up), with a +2 to-hit modifier for all Piloting and Gunnery rolls (reflecting a struggle between the commander and his loyalists, and the rest of the vessel's confused crew). After the berserker effects wear off, the affected units may no longer expend Thrust, maneuver or make other actions for the remainder of the scenario.

Headhunter: The most insidious possession effect in game play, a character who becomes a "headhunter" in RPG play appears outwardly normal after the jump and—if in combat—will fight alongside comrades and other friendly units until the opportunity to attack his or her own vessel (or force) leader presents itself. At that point, the possessed character will turn and strike, focusing entirely on killing the command target without any regard for self-preservation.

In CBT game play, the "headhunter" unit at first rolls Initiative with the rest of its allied side. However, once a friendly command unit enters the headhunter's forward or forward side/wing arcs (for non-JumpShip/WarShip units), or along any non-rear arc (for JumpShips and WarShips), the headhunter will attack the command unit with no modifier to Gunnery or Piloting skills for the first turn. For all subsequent turns, the unit operates per the rules for a possessed berserker unit. If the possessed headhunter unit *is* the command unit, it functions normally for 1D6 turns after the jump, only to suddenly explode during the Movement Phase of the following turn as the vessel's self-destruct systems are engaged.

CUTTING IN

On exceedingly rare occasions—and invariably with no warning or discernible reason—JumpShips and WarShips thought lost to long-forgotten hyperspace accidents have been known to appear out of the thin vacuum, sometimes unaware of their own disappearance, and sometimes as little more than drifting, dead hulks. Many long-time spacers call this bizarre phenomenon "cutting in," and consider it one of the great mysteries of the void.

Before incorporating this unusual effect in game play, a gamemaster should realize first and foremost just how incredibly unlikely a Cutting In event is. While JumpShips and WarShips have disappeared countless times in *Classic BattleTech's* history, the odds of a ship suddenly emerging in the midst of a player-run unit's activities—or even during a space battle—are nearly nil. It is thus up to the gamemaster to decide when a vessel's "cutting in" is appropriate to the campaign, and it shouldn't happen more than once or twice in any given crew's lifetime.

If a sense of pure randomness is desired to check for Cutting In effects, the gamemaster may roll 2D10 once for every hyperspace jump the players have taken where their vessel simply waits to recharge. On a result of 20, reroll the dice. If the second result is also 20, a lost JumpShip or WarShip will appear. The vessel should materialize within sensor range of the player characters' ship, raising all sorts of alarms.

The class and identity of the newcomer is entirely up to the gamemaster's imagination, but the following factors should be considered before making the decision: will the lost vessel become a prize to be claimed by anyone parked in the local area, and will she resist capture? Which local faction or factions might the appearance of the vessel aid (or cause the most difficulties for)? Is the lost vessel meant to take part in a space battle, or is it a ferry for cargo, passengers or military troops? Will the presence of this single vessel cause an imbalance in the forces arrayed?

After determining the vessel's identity, the gamemaster may then roll 2D6 to determine its condition and reactions and consulting the Cutting In Vessel Disposition Table. Full explanations for each disposition result appear below. As with the vessel identity, however, gamemasters should feel free to tailor vessel disposition to meet the needs of their specific scenario.

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CUTTING IN VESSEL DISPOSITION TABLE

2D6 Roll	Arriving Vessel's Disposition
1-3	Debris
4-7	Black and Quiet
8-9	Damaged but Operable
10	Functional/Stand Off
11	Functional/Communicates
12	Shoot First, Ask Questions Later

Debris: The arriving vessel is completely destroyed. It appears as a shower of debris three hexes long, which drifts across the map sheet at a rate of 1 hex per turn, along a vector determined by the gamemaster. Any unit moving within a hex occupied by the destroyed vessel must make a successful Piloting skill roll with a +2 modifier or suffer damage equal to a successful attack by an NAC/10 (location determined randomly, based on the unit's facing relative to the debris' movement).

Black and Quiet: The lost vessel reappears intact, but shows no lights and emits no signals or radiation. It drifts across the map in the same fashion as debris (see above), but may be boarded and captured per standard rules, with no rolls required to determine success.

Damaged but Operable: The lost vessel reappears functional and largely intact, but clearly has suffered substantial damage. It doesn't communicate with either side, and drifts in the same manner as debris (see above). The disabled vessel may be boarded per standard rules, but any possible crew on board may resist.

Functional/Stand Off: The lost vessel reappears in good condition. If combat is going on in the area, it moves clear of the crossfire along a vector chosen by the gamemaster. Either way, the vessel does not immediately communicate with other ships.

Functional/Communicates with Both Forces: The lost vessel reappears in good condition. If combat is going on in the area, it moves clear of the crossfire along a vector chosen by the gamemaster. It communicates with both sides, and may—at the gamemaster's discretion—decide to help or hinder local vessels.

Shoot First, Ask Questions Later: The lost vessel reappears in good condition. Whether or not combat is going on in the area, it immediately attacks the nearest unit upon emerging from hyperspace.

ROLEPLAYING WITH INTERSTELLAR PLAYERS

The additional interstellar players presented in this sourcebook represent more shadow organizations and individuals who may wield considerable influence in the *Classic BattleTech* universe. In general, most of these groups play out the same way as any major government, military organization, noble house or Clan,

with upper-tier leaders clinging to the shadows as their pawns and followers interact with the outside world, acting as their masters' eyes, ears and hands. Though the methods and styles may vary from group to group, and can be adapted to suit any gaming environment a gamemaster so chooses, the following paragraphs provide a general guideline on how to use these interstellar players and other shadow groups in a standard RPG campaign.

Character Creation and Shadow Groups

Strictly speaking, every time a character gains the In For Life Trait, he or she has become a member of a shadow group, from a mere criminal organization or political conspiracy to membership in a secret intelligence agency or one of the interstellar players featured in this product. Membership in all such cases carries with it an air of secrecy—an imperative to keep full public knowledge of the character's organization, its true motives, and its true goals closely guarded, available only to those who have earned the proper level of respect and trust.

To reflect this general distrust of outsiders, players whose characters acquire the In For Life Trait may also add either the Dark Secret or Quirk (1)/Paranoid Traits, if neither has already been obtained during the creation process. In exchange, the player may add 1 point to the character's SOC or WIL Attributes (regardless of affiliation limits, to a maximum of 10), signifying a rise in public status or intensity that often accompanies membership in such dangerous and powerful groups. A character with In For Life must also compute his relevant Influence Trait Level within that group (see *Influence Trait*, pp. 100-102).

Player characters should not be able to join just any shadow group during the creation process, however. While covert operative groups, government conspiracies, rebel factions and organized crime are certainly possible, groups such as the Illuminati, the Ancients and the Scientists' Cabal, should not simply be chosen or randomly rolled, as such groups are highly restrictive and so secretive as to be nearly invisible in daily life. These types of groups should be accessible only through roleplaying. Gamemasters should carefully review which groups may or may not have any impact on their games, and decide up front whether characters may be generated that belong to such groups fresh from character creation.

Roleplaying and Shadow Groups

By and large, most of the shadow organizations the player characters might encounter will reveal themselves through their NPC members, and whole adventures may be based on discovering, joining or even attempting to destroy or expose a shadow group to the universe at large. Once again, it falls to the gamemaster to determine how hard or easy such a process is, using the published source material on such agencies and organizations as a guide. Joining the ranks of the Brotherhood of Randis may be an easy enough feat for a Periphery-born character with a noted hatred of



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pirates, but slipping the same character into the Thuggees should be nigh impossible.

Because they shroud themselves in secrecy, in fact, characters may well be In For Life with a shadow group before they even gain enough influence to affect the group or learn its secrets. The Hidden's cabal, for instance, may put prospective members through a series of tests with and without the character's knowledge, all of which must be overcome to reach a new level of trust within their order. Less sophisticated groups may ask the same of a player character, usually in the form of loyalty tests such as killing a member of a rival group or member of society, risking life and limb as necessary to survive such rites of passage. These tests often have the additional effect of forcing the character to accept the leadership of the shadow group; they can shatter long-standing allegiances to others or even violate laws that in effect make the character an outcast from normal society, hunted and shunned by all but his new "comrades in arms."

The ultimate goals of any shadow group should always be worked out by the gamemaster, even if the ultimate leaders of the shadow group never choose to reveal themselves to their members. Most will pursue multiple goals at once, all of which are pieces of a larger puzzle. Still others may actually be operating at the behest of an even larger organization.

Characters who are not In For Life with a shadow group nonetheless may easily find themselves under such a group's sway, as Special Contacts or Special Enemies within such groups can pull strings or make demands that the characters must abide by or suffer the consequences. Indeed, the player characters' reaction to these individuals may ultimately prove to be their initial rite of passage into the shadow group, and their "success" may result in becoming In For Life with an organization that chose them rather than the other way around.

Shadow Groups and Spheres of Influence

To clarify how the various shadow groups operate, the Expanded Shadow Groups Table below provides a general description of each group's primary political and social spheres of influence, plus any special rules regarding membership and activities within the organization beyond those previously discussed, and the maximum attainable Influence Rating its members may reach. Gamemasters may feel free to modify these tables as they see fit, as the very nature of most organizations makes them hard to easily quantify.

For Political Spheres of Influence, each group has an entry of Home, Neighbor or All, reflecting how far their reach extends relative to their base of operations. An entry of Home means the group primarily works within the political boundaries of its own state or local region, while an entry of Neighbor indicates a group that is equally active at home and within neighboring realms or states. An entry of All means that operatives of this group may be at large anywhere in the Inner Sphere, Periphery and even Clan

space (though some organizations may have "blind spots," such as Interstellar Expeditions, which has no significant contacts in the Clan homeworlds).

For Social Spheres of Influence, each group is rated as Underworld, Political, Religious, Corporate, Military, All or Renegade. Underworld spheres mainly encompass the realms of organized crime and the black market, and blatantly operate outside the law. Political spheres primarily cover state intelligence agencies and political conspiracies, which may not always operate outside the law, but may involve some degree of "ethical flexibility." Religious spheres are those that focus almost exclusively on spiritualism and inspire an often-fanatical following. Corporate groups revere the bottom line above all, and often operate legally but with the cold and calculating methodology of a machine. Military spheres can range from armed rebel sects and militias to a grouping of like-minded soldiers dutifully serving their state, but are universally armed for bear. All spheres can reach into many aspects of society, groups so pervasive their influence can be felt everywhere. The final classification, Renegade, represents "none of the above," reflecting those groups that are small and personal, such as mercenary commands and bounty hunters.

Special membership requirements may vary wildly, but most come in the form of required combat training (with more restrictive groups specifying the state that does the training), rites of passage (which vary from group to group, and can range from massive donations to illegal acts such as destruction of property and even murder). Some are even hereditary, with most members born into the group and new recruits from outside almost unheard of. Still others may have minimum Attribute or trait requirements. For those that have a minimum Influence Rating to enter, members already In For Life with the group may not use their Influence Trait until they attain a certain level of Influence within the organization. After that, however, the trait functions normally.

INTERSTELLAR PLAYER NPCS

The Ancients (Belters), Chandrasekhar Kurita and the Thuggee-Manei Domini hybrids (Phansigars) presented in this book are all special characters whose abilities can have an extraordinary—and potentially unbalancing—effect on roleplaying campaigns. These characters should never be allowed in campaign play as player characters, and so they lack Life Paths for character creation. All three of these character groups are presented here exclusively for use as non-player characters (NPCs), each with special rules pertaining to their capabilities in roleplaying campaigns.

BELTERS IN GAME PLAY

In normal game play, Belters rarely appear beyond the confines of the Terran solar system and even then may not encounter other characters who choose to stay clear of the Terran asteroid belt and Oort Cloud regions. Though most Belters possess some form of

EXPANDED SHADOW GROUPS TABLE

Shadow Group Or Group Type (Examples)	Political Sphere of Influence	Social Sphere of Influence	Max Influence	Special Membership Requirements
Intelligence Agency, Military (DEST, DMI)	Neighbor	Military	16	Training by the state
Intelligence Agency, State (LIC, ISF)	Neighbor	Political	16	Training by the state
Major Corporation (Irian, Interconnectedness)	Home	Corporate	15	None
Organized Crime (Yakuza, Mafia)	Home	Underworld	12	None
Rebel/Terrorist Group (Pirates, Black Dragon)	Home	Military	12	Combat Training
Religious Cult (One Star Faith, Exituri)	Home	Religious	14	*
The "Ancients"/Belters	Home	Renegade	9	Hereditary Membership
Bounty Hunter	All	Renegade	8	*
Brotherhood of Cincinnatus	Home	Military	14	*
Brotherhood of Randis	Neighbor	Military	12	Combat Training*
Chandrasekhar Kurita	Neighbor	Corporate	14	None
Clan Scientists' Cabal	Home	Political	14	Min. INT 6+; Clan Scientist Caste only*
Coterie/Cult of St. Cameron	All	Military	12	Combat Training*
Davion Warriors' Cabal	Home	Military	14	Min. SOC 5+*
Devlin Stone	All	Renegade	10	None
Far Lookers	Neighbor	Political	12	None
Genecaste/Void Children	Neighbor	Renegade	20	Hereditary Membership
The Hidden	All	Political	20	*
Illuminati	All	All	35	Min. Influence 10+*
Interstellar Expeditions	All	Renegade	12	None
Järnfölk/Tanites	Neighbor	Renegade	12	Hereditary Membership
Manei Domini	All	Military	20	Ally: The Hidden*
Saurimat	Home	Religious	14	Combat Training*
Scourge of Death/Thuggees	Home	Military	12	*
Sixth of June	All	Political	16	Combat Training*

*Character must also complete appropriate Rites of Passage to join/remain in this group

genetic and surgical modifications, by far the majority of Belter encounters will consist of Belter civilians whose light modifications and so-called "genetic vaccines" offer little more game play effect than most existing *CBT: RPG* traits. Even more rarely seen are the Belter militias, police SWAT personnel and security agency strike teams, whose enhancements tend toward more extreme augmentations.

Belters do not share their genetic engineering techniques or technologies with outsiders, meaning that player characters may not benefit from Belter genetic modifications.

Average Belters

Most Belters differ little from any other human. Their "genetic vaccines" produce trivial effects below the scope of *CBT: RPG* rules, such as good teeth, clear skin and the elimination of most inherited diseases. It is highly unusual for any Belter to have Attributes (other than CHA, EDG and SOC) below 3, but all Belter Attributes are purchased as normal during NPC creation.

Many Belters, however, do benefit from more significant

enhancements. These common Belter enhancements are mostly covered by existing *CBT: RPG* traits: Ambidextrous, Attractive, Combat Sense, Exceptional Attribute, Fast Learner, G-Tolerance, Good Hearing/Vision, Night Vision, Pain Resistance, Poison Resistance and Toughness. While many Belters invest in such enhancements for their children, Belters generally cannot afford too many enhancements, as even a common enhancement exceeds the annual income for a Belter family. To reflect their greater access to these enhancements, however, Belter NPCs may choose any two of the above-listed traits at a cost of 1 point less than normal (to a minimum of 0 points).

Better Belters

Genetic vaccines and enhancements are not enough for every Belter. The somewhat rarer augmentation packages used by the so-called "Better Belters" are described below (see *Belter Augmentations*).

Combat Belters: On the off-chance a campaign runs into conflict with Belters, genetic engineering will have less impact



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than generations of experience in a unique environment. When a fighter pilot gets a zero-G scooter at age three and spends the rest of her life operating spacecraft, raised by family and friends with a similar background, she tends to make a fine pilot regardless of modifications. An entire culture that only screens the best of the best for militia piloting duty will thus have truly fearsome space combat abilities. Belters exemplify this logic, with Green-rated fighter and DropShip units starting at what most Inner Sphere militaries consider Veteran status, and getting better from there. The same applies to Belter militia infantry and battle armor units, but only when fighting on asteroids or in habitats.

To reflect these capabilities, Combat Belter NPCs may choose the Infantry, Pilot or Vacuum Resistance modification packages as traits (the costs of which are listed in their descriptions). Combat Belters may select up to two such packages per character (but may add additional standard traits with any remaining trait points), with all modifiers considered cumulative. In addition, Belter pilots or infantry operating in vacuum and/or microgravity conditions receive a +3 RPG skill bonus to all Piloting, Gunnery and combat actions in such environments. (In CBT game play, this equates to a -1 modifier to the Belter's base Gunnery skill, and a -2 modifier to his base Piloting skill.) If a Combat Belter must act in a planetary atmosphere, however, these bonuses are lost.

Non-Combat Belters: More radically altered civilian Belters do exist, though encounters with them can be extremely rare. Also taking advantage of advanced genetic engineering or even surgical/cybernetic implantation, these NPCs may take the Extensive Cosmetic, Pilot or Vacuum Resistance augmentation packages listed below as a trait (the cost of which is listed in each description). Other modification packages are also possible (see *Other Modifications*, below), at an additional cost of trait points, but Non-Combat Belters may select only one augmentation package. However, they may pick up additional standard traits with any remaining points.

BELTER AUGMENTATIONS

The following augmentations reflect complex "trait packages" available only to Belter characters, developed by a combination of genetic therapy and surgical enhancements such as cybernetic implants. Combat Belters may select up to two augmentation packages per character, while Non-Combat Belters may select only one.

Extreme Cosmetic Modifications

Trait Point Cost: 2

When Belters want more radical changes to their appearance than standard enhancements allow, they turn to cosmetic augmentations. Cosmetic augmentations allow recipients to look like aliens, anthropomorphic animals, or simply bizarre. Additional prehensile limbs tend not to work well due to the human brain's difficulty in coordinating the new limbs, but other minor benefits are possible (like claws and fangs).

RPG Rules: Non-Belters tend to react to recipients of these radical cosmetic augmentations as though they had the Unattractive trait. Gamemasters may grant -1 or -2 TN bonuses for Intimidation and Interrogation checks by Belters with Extreme Cosmetics. Belters who cosmetically add limbs may not effectively use them in the same turn where they are also using their natural arms.

CBT Rules: Cosmetic augmentations have no impact on CBT game play.

Infantry Modifications

Trait Point Cost: 4

Belter soldiers, paramilitary police officers and government security personnel are often augmented with speed, strength and durability in mind. The exact augmentation varies between Belter governments, but the end result is similar to dermal myomer implants. The augmentation is rarely obvious; the recipient simply looks athletic.

RPG Rules: +2 BOD, +2 STR, AV: 3/3/3, Pain Resistance

CBT Rules: Each Belter infantryman with this augmentation may sustain 1 additional point of damage per trooper, whether in battle armor or out of it. Also, conventional Belter Infantry may reduce any burst fire damage sustained (see pp. 215-217, *TW*) by 1D6 (to a minimum of 1 point), and do not sustain double damage when attacked in the open (but only as long as the entire platoon features this modification).

Pilot Modifications

Trait Point Cost: 4

Belter fighter pilots are good even without genetic augmentation, but this standard augmentation—which reinforces visual acuity, circulatory systems, bones and joints—makes them exceptional. Belter pilots also usually get the vacuum augmentation, listed below.

RPG Rules: +1 BOD, +2 REF, G-Tolerance, Good Vision, Night Vision

CBT Rules: Each fighter pilot applies a -1 modifier to randomly rolled Piloting skill results. Belter fighter formations receive a +2 initiative modifier as long as the entire squadron features pilots with this modification package.

Vacuum Resistance

Trait Point Cost: 3

This augmentation is a battery of tissue reinforcements: some artificial sphincters, oxygen-storing tissues, nitrogen-scavenging marrow and transparent inner eyelids that combine to protect a Belter from vacuum exposure. Vacuum resistance takes a minimalist approach, and so radical changes in appearance and internal organs are unnecessary. With the modifications, internal pressure (without injury) is kept low (though sudden decompressions necessitate immediate exhalation to avoid lung embolisms). The vacuum of space provides good thermal insulation, though

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CHANDRASEKHAR KURITA CONTRACT TERMS TABLE

Payment Multiplier	Length Multiplier	Command Multiplier	Overhead Multiplier	Salvage Multiplier	Support Multiplier	Transport Multiplier
1.1	0.7	-1	+0	+2	+2	+2

protective clothing is needed to avoid injury during longer exposures or from contact with sun-heated and shadow-cooled external surfaces.

RPG Rules: The recipient is effectively immune to the worst vacuum effects, can hold his breath for up to 10 minutes' worth of moderate activity, and is immune to the "bends" and nitrogen narcosis. Bare skin contact with exterior surfaces still causes burns or frostbite (treated as an incendiary weapon attack to the contact body location with an RPG damage value of 1+2D6).

CBT Rules: Infantry with this augmentation may ignore the damage doubling effect of vacuum, but only so long as all members of the infantry unit possess this modification.

Other Modifications

Trait Point Cost: Variable

Gamemasters should feel free to create other genetic augmentations. It is recommended that gamemasters in a creative mood reference *Manei Domini* cybernetics for inspiration (see pp. 120-131 *Jihad Hot Spots: 3072* or pp. 131-134, *Interstellar Players*) rather than the radical Genecaste modifications (pp. 128-131, *IP*); Belters have yet to produce anything so extreme as the Genecaste.

The Trait Point cost of other Belter modifications is up to the gamemaster, but should equal at least the value of the highest comparable RPG character trait, plus 1.

NEW MERCENARY EMPLOYER: UNCLE CHANDY

As a character, Chandrasekhar Kurita is a corporate power broker active on the interstellar scene, best known for his flamboyant lifestyle, which contrasts sharply with his brilliant intellect and curious sense of ruthlessness and honor. Though he is not averse to hostile corporate takeovers, his overriding ambitions have always been toward the betterment of his native Draconis Combine and—on the larger stage of the Jihad—the ultimate defeat of the Word of Blake.

Though he lacks direct clout in Combine politics, and has eschewed a personal military (beyond certain unlisted corporate security assets that amount to a private conventional militia), "Uncle Chandy" has become one of the Inner Sphere's biggest private employers of mercenary commands, particularly since the onset of the Jihad.

With his corporate facilities often marked for Word of Blake attack, Chandrasekhar Kurita's base of operations remains mobile—indeed, the player characters may never encounter him directly, if he deems it too risky. Most contact for mercenary operations will come through intermediaries, and most will occur outside of MRBC channels (a curious thing, considering how Kurita prefers MRBC-rated mercs to unregistered commands).

Typical mercenary contracts offered by Chandrasekhar Kurita may include security duty for his corporate facilities—such as the Hachiman Taro Electronics central offices on Hachiman (still under reconstruction as of 3073)—or affiliated facilities like the StarCorp Industries plants on Son Hoa. Other missions may include pirate hunting (much of it in the Terran Corridor/Word of Blake Protectorate), or even special operations similar to those offered by Interstellar Expeditions.

Game Rules: When using the rules from *Field Manual: Mercenaries (Revised)* to find contracts and such, mercenary commands from 1 company to 1 regiment in size that are not classified as Rogue or Wanted may easily find themselves offered missions by Uncle Chandy. If the player characters' mercenary command qualifies, any Draconis Combine or Corporation employer rolled up after the start of the Jihad in 3067 may actually reflect a contract from Kurita and HTE. To determine if that is the case, roll 2D6 after finding the Combine or Corporation employer result. On a result of 8+ for this roll, the employer is actually Chandrasekhar Kurita.

As an employer, Uncle Chandy offers different terms than most. To determine the starting terms for one of Chandrasekhar's missions, consult the Chandrasekhar Kurita Contract Terms Table below and use them in place of the standard employer contract term modifiers. However, as Chandrasekhar does not trust the major mercenary hubs to do his recruiting for him, modifiers for Hiring Hall may not be applied to any contract terms or negotiations.

THUGGEE-MANEI DOMINI (PHANSIGAR) HYBRIDS

Shortly before the onset of the Jihad, unconfirmed reports described the existence of the Manei Domini—the Word of Blake's bionics-enhanced elite warriors—throughout the Chaos March and beyond. When full-blown war erupted in 3068, entire legions of these self-described "Hands of the Master" were unveiled, their so-called "Shadow Divisions" often spearheading assaults against the most entrenched targets in the Inner Sphere.

Yet as shocking as the hyper-elite cyborgs of the Manei Domini are, their Thuggee counterparts—born of a secret alliance between Kali Liao and Cameron St. Jamais—take the concept of man-machine hybrid warriors to terrifying new heights.

Unique to the Thuggee cult led by Kali Liao, the so-called Thuggee Manei Domini combine Word-provided cybernetics technologies with the inhuman imagination of the bloodthirsty fanatics who view Kali as the Death Goddess incarnate. Also known among themselves as "Phansigars" (a corrupted Thuggee term that roughly translates to "stranglers" or "noose operators"), these warriors are both a psychological weapon and a deadly



UNCLE CHANDY CONTRACTS

CONTRACT #172115**Type:** Security Duty**Unit Size:** Up to Reinforced Company**Location:** Masamori, Hachiman**Duration:** 12 months**Payment Multiplier:** 1.1**Command Rights:** Liaison**Overhead Compensation:** 10%**Support Rights:** Full**Salvage Rights:** Full**Transport Rights:** None

Background: Heavily damaged by Word of Blake raiders in 3070, the Hachiman Taro Electronics Ltd. compound is now being repaired. However, Chandrasekhar Kurita is concerned that the Blakists will attempt to disrupt the reconstruction of his corporate headquarters and strike at Hachiman once more.

Gamemaster Notes: Chandrasekhar Kurita has guessed correctly. The Word of Blake is indeed planning to attack. Each month that the players are on station, there is a chance that the Word of Blake will mount a raid. Roll 2D6 and add 1 for each month the mercenaries have served under the contract. On a modified result of 10+, Blakist raiders attack.

The Blakist force size will be approximately 75 percent of the defenders' force and will consist primarily of BattleMechs and battle armor. Fighting will take place in the streets of Masamori or (at the discretion of the gamemaster, based on the player characters' preparedness or lack thereof) within the walls of the HTE compound. The WoB force is more interested in inflicting damage to the HTE compound (represented by a minimum of 18 Medium CF buildings) than in eliminating the player characters. The Blakists will withdraw if they suffer greater than 25 percent casualties. The cost of damage caused during the attack (by either side) can be calculated at 5,000 C-bills per CF of the HTE buildings. If this value exceeds three million C-bills, the Word of Blake can claim victory, regardless of their own losses.

Following an attack, continue to check for additional raids, but restart the modifier count from 1.

CONTRACT #172182**Type:** Pirate Hunting**Unit Size:** Up to Reinforced Company**Location:** Lyran Alliance, Terran Corridor**Duration:** 3 months**Payment Multiplier:** 1.5**Command Rights:** Independent**Overhead Compensation:** 25%**Support Rights:** 75%**Salvage Rights:** Full**Transport Rights:** Full

Background: Isesaki Shipping concerns in the Lyran Alliance have come under attack by unidentified raiders. Chandrasekhar Kurita is seeking mercenary commands to sweep the Terran

Corridor end of the Alliance to locate and eliminate the raiders.

Gamemaster Notes: The size and mix of forces should be tailored to match that of the players' force in overall size and skill. While some attacks have been directed against Isesaki DropShips and JumpShips, the raiders have been concentrating much of their efforts on planet-bound warehouses used to ship cargo.

This particular group has been operating from a base located on an uninhabited moon in the Soilihull system in Bolan Province. Sources inside the Bolan government have tipped them off that a shipment of new Clan tech weapons is being moved through Isesaki to StarCorp for study at the Loburg factory. The gamemaster should provide sufficient clues to allow the players to narrow their search to Soilihull. Additional adventure opportunities present themselves in the search for the corrupt Bolan official and the true source and nature of the Clan technology allegedly being supplied to StarCorp.

CONTRACT #172245**Type:** Special**Unit Size:** Combined Arms Company**Location:** Draconis Combine**Duration:** 8 months**Payment Multiplier:** 2.0**Command Rights:** Integrated**Overhead Compensation:** 20%**Support Rights:** Full**Salvage Rights:** None**Transport Rights:** Employer Supplied

Background: Chandrasekhar Kurita is funding a group from Interstellar Expeditions who are searching for a forgotten SLDF base thought to be located somewhere between Unity and Hassi'R'mel. The expedition requires additional security in light of continuing hostilities with the Word of Blake.

Gamemaster Notes: The contract includes a generous pay and support package in compensation for the restriction that the mercenaries will receive no share in anything the expedition finds.

The expedition consists of two *Invader*-class JumpShips refitted with lithium-fusion batteries (at the expense of some DropShip-carrying capacity) and a pair of *Mule*-class DropShips. The security force answers directly to Dr. Klaus Monahan, head of the expedition. In addition to the ship crews, Monahan has a team of eight engineers, archeologists and historians. The gamemaster should generate whatever encounters he deems appropriate, including options such as encounters with other tech hunters, Word of Blake forces, pirates, decedents of stranded JumpShip crews and so forth, before the expedition ultimately discovers its goal.

The base has been stripped by General Kerensky's troops, but the team recovers a coded memory core. Dr. Monahan takes great pains to keep the player characters away from the core; should they succeed in copying or stealing it, the players can expect Chandrasekhar Kurita to dispatch the infamous Bounty Hunter to recover it before they can crack the encryption.

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fusion of technology and humanity. The Phansigars are built to incite panic with their very appearance, but also represent Kali's most devoted and capable followers. In *Classic BattleTech* games, Phansigars—regardless of their type—are always considered Veteran or Elite-rated warriors, and may only be fielded by forces with Capellan or Word of Blake affiliation.

The following rules expand on the base Manei Domini rules provided on pp. 120-131 of *Jihad Hot Spots: 3072*. As the Phansigars are effectively based on the Word of Blake Manei Domini, many of the implants and basic game rules for Word of Blake Manei Domini also apply to them. Players interested in creating and using these Thuggee-Manei Domini hybrids will need the rules in *JHS3072* to recreate the full effect.

Phansigar Overview

Like their Word of Blake counterparts, Thuggee Manei Domini should be used *only* as non-player characters in standard role-playing settings (though player characters with a deep and proven loyalty to Kali Liao may—through the course of a roleplaying adventure—be inducted into their ranks, thereby becoming NPCs). Phansigars are almost never seen outside of Kali Liao's special "Warrior Houses," except as part of a security detail for the self-described Death Goddess (usually between four and seven troopers). There are no female Thuggees, and so there are no female Phansigars (any seen in their ranks are actually Word of Blake Domini assigned as chaperones or advisors).

The Thuggee Manei Domini Character Creation Table details the alternative form of the Manei Domini system used by the Word as described in *JHS3072*. When creating Phansigars using the base Manei Domini rules in *JHS3072*, these values apply in place of those used by their Word of Blake equivalents.

As with the Word of Blake version, the Thuggee table lists Phansigars in order of their "level" within the organization, and provides both the Thuggee rank (based loosely on ancient Teran Indian military ranks), the equivalent Capellan Warrior House rank, and character point values distributed as appropriate among the Phansigar NPC's Attributes, traits and skills, respectively. Finally, as with Word of Blake Manei Domini, Phansigars receive values indicating the minimum number of cybernetic implants they may acquire, the maximum level of such implants, and the minimum number of implants they must receive for their rank. While Thuggee-style Manei Domini have fewer ranks than their Word of Blake counterparts, they tend to have a higher requirement for cybernetic implantation, reflecting their even more radical nature.

Attributes: Phansigars assign Attribute points in the same fashion as their Word of Blake counterparts (see p. 120, *JHS3072*). To reflect their greater emphasis on physical prowess and self-mutilation, these Thuggee Manei Domini may not assign more than 5 Attribute points to Charisma and must place at least 5 points each in Strength and Body.

Traits: Phansigars spend points on traits under the same rules and with the same restrictions as their Word of Blake counterparts (see p. 120, *JHS3072*). However, in place of the Word of Blake automatic traits (In For Life/Manei Domini, Quirk [3]/Loyalty to Master, Quirk [2]/Hatred of Clans and Quirk/Hatred of Nobility), Phansigars automatically receive: In For Life/Thuggee Manei Domini, Quirk (3)/Loyalty to Kali Liao and Quirk (2)/Bloodlust. No trait may be taken that will clash with these free traits.

Skills: Phansigars spend points on skills under the same rules and with the same restrictions as their Word of Blake counterparts (see p. 120, *JHS3072*). The recommended skill sets for Phansigar operatives may vary with their function, but unlike the Word of Blake Domini, they do not formalize their functions using secondary designations. Instead, they are simply classified by combat function. See *Thuggee Manei Domini Classes*, below.

Implants: Phansigars assign implants under the same basic rules and with the same restrictions as their Word of Blake counterparts (see p. 120-121, *JHS3072*). As with Word of Blake Manei Domini, Thuggee cybernetic implants receive self-destruct components that may be triggered remotely, by fellow Phansigars or by the operative himself. Thuggee self-destruct modules also activate if the NPC is killed or incapacitated by Head or Torso wounds, and are typically explosive or incendiary-explosive in nature. Explosive self-destruct implants produce an RPG Damage of 8 x 5D6 (Type X, Blast [Quarter radius]), or a CBT Damage of 0.4 per trooper to enemy units at Range 0 at the time of death. Incendiary-explosive implants cause 2 x 3D6 RPG Damage (Type E, Blast with a 6-turn effect duration and incendiary effects), or 0.15 CBT Damage per exploding trooper at Range 0 (to enemy units only). All Phansigar implants may also be cosmetically enhanced, either to resemble human flesh or—more commonly—to produce a more nightmarish and intimidating effect.

In addition to the implants shown in *JHS3072*, Thuggee-Manei Domini hybrids may also choose from the implants described below for RPG settings and CBT game play.

Thuggee Manei Domini Classes: In addition to levels of implantation and experience, Phansigars also fall into several distinct classes, which define their primary function in combat. Unlike the Word, the Thuggees provide no special nomenclature for these classes; they are simply used by the gamemaster at the time of NPC creation to help guide the skills, implants and other characteristics of the Phansigar warrior. Despite this difference, Thuggee classes may be used in NPC creation in the same fashion as Word of Blake Manei Domini classes (see pp. 121, *JHS3072*), with the notable exception being that the Thuggees do not make use of infiltrators.

Creating Phansigars for CBT Game Play

In CBT game play, Thuggee Manei Domini forces—like their Word of Blake equivalents—are always fielded as combat units, be they conventional infantry, battle armor, combat vehicles, fighters



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or BattleMechs. These units do not require full character creation, and so only the implant levels and combinations need be determined for each Phansigar unit (by platoon, where applicable, for the sake of simplicity). Because they do not integrate well with any forces (allied or otherwise), Thuggee units must always roll for Initiative separately.

For base Gunnery and Targeting skills (before any implant augmentations are applied), Phansigar units are always considered Veteran or Elite (roll for skill level as normal, but reroll any result of Green or Regular). Phansigar warriors also receive a +1 roll modifier when determining random Gunnery and Piloting skills.

For vehicle, battle armor, fighter and BattleMech selections, Phansigars may use any units fielded by the Capellan Confederation or the Word of Blake (B column). If operating as part of an occupation force within another realm, these Thuggee Manei Domini may instead field 1D6 – 1 units for every two lances, chosen from the faction tables (B or C columns, where applicable) of the occupied world's native realm. For example, on a roll result of 4, a pair of Phansigar lances operating on Chesterton would roll 3 units from the FedSuns Random Assignment Tables instead of the Capellan or Word of Blake tables (4 – 1 = 3).

When constructing Phansigar infantry units, note that the Thuggees use standard Inner Sphere formation sizes, rather than those of ComStar/Word of Blake.

As with their Blakist equivalents, the CBT capabilities of all Thuggee Domini implants are cumulative unless otherwise noted (so long as any applicable conditions noted in their rules descriptions are met). These effects apply as indicated to all 'Mech, fighter and vehicle units (but not particularly large units, such as Large-sized Support Vehicles, Rail Support Vehicles, DropShips, JumpShips, Space Stations or WarShips), and to infantry units in accordance with the same rules described for Word of Blake Domini troops (see p. 121, *JHS3072*).

Battle Value: Thuggee Manei Domini units compute their Battle Values in the same way as their Word of Blake equivalents (see pp. 121-122, *JHS3072*).

Thuggee Manei Domini in Action

In roleplaying settings, Phansigars of most classes may be encountered only in battle (typically along the Capellan borders), and then only against objectives that Kali herself has an eye on. Special operative Thuggees may appear anywhere, often operating independently, while command Thuggees rarely appear far from their own field commands.

Frequency of Encounters: Phansigars should be used even more sparingly than Word of Blake Domini, as they represent Kali's hyper-elite and rarely venture far from the Capellan sphere of influence. Their nature makes them ideal for leaders of major offensives, key combat actions, highly dangerous covert missions and such, often performing independently of other allied forces. Unlike Blakist Domini (some of whom may appear normal, even

attractive), Thuggee Domini almost never appear normal, as most undertake extreme modifications and favor personal mutilation as a means of "purifying the soul."

Players interested in pre-Jihad games should note that the Thuggee Manei Domini did not publicly surface prior to their first appearance on Chesterton in 3071. Gamemasters therefore should avoid using Phansigar characters in events prior to that date.

Thuggee Manei Domini Attitude: The Thuggees' singular devotion to Kali Liao, whom they revere as the incarnation of the Death Goddess, makes their Phansigars seem far more intense and bloodthirsty than even the Word's Domini. These people pride themselves on becoming the monsters into which they have transformed their bodies, and see as their mortal enemy anyone their mistress deems to be so. Thus, unlike the Word's Domini, the Thuggees are more ambivalent about the Clans than about traditional Capellan enemies such as the Federated Suns and the Free Worlds League. To them, all that matters is the glory of killing and dying in the name of Kali. This also means that Phansigars rarely take prisoners (if ever). Indeed, most captives taken by Thuggee Manei Domini can expect a gruesome execution in the field as a sacrifice to the Death Goddess.

Among other (non-Domini) allied forces, the Phansigars strive to intimidate, affecting an air of imminent physical violence. This attitude can cause friction between regular Blakist forces or even Blakist Domini assigned to work with the Thuggees (though Blakist Domini personally do not regard the Thuggees as a true threat). This attitude is so pronounced, however, that Thuggee Domini simply cannot function under any form of integrated command with non-Thuggee troops, and so campaign commanders generally keep Thuggee forces well separated from other allied commands.

Thuggee Manei Domini Interaction: In confrontations, Phansigars are utterly void of fear, mercy or remorse. They are more likely to end a debate with a gunshot or a knifing than with words. Their indoctrination makes it impossible to talk them out of anything they set their minds to, or to turn them against one another. These warriors implicitly trust one another and harbor few ambitions beyond serving their Death Goddess. To reflect these realities, CHA-based skills such as Negotiation and Fast Talk automatically suffer a +10 TN modifier when attempting to sway or bribe a Thuggee Domini, unless the speaker can manage to appeal to the warrior's belief in his Goddess' will.

In ceremonial occasions—shrouded in intense secrecy, where only other Manei Domini (preferably Thuggee Domini) may be in attendance—Phansigars interlace their normal speech with a harsh blend of Hindi and Han Chinese. This language is used to intone specific greetings or chants that appear to have intense meaning to the Thuggees, but which often confound outsiders (requiring a Linguistics Action Check at a +2 TN modifier to decipher).

Thuggee Manei Domini in Combat: In combat, Phansigars are swift and completely ruthless. To maximize their potential,

THUGGEE MANEI DOMINI CHARACTER CREATION TABLE

Thuggee Ranking	Corresponding Warrior House Rank	Attributes	Traits	Skills (Points)	Maximum Cyber Implant Limit/Level	Minimum Implants
Sepoy	Zhangsi-si	57	9	13-17 (49)	3/3	3
Naik	Ban-zhang	59	10	14-18 (59)	3/4	3
Havildar	Pai-zhang	61	11	15-19 (79)	3/4	3
Subedar	Lien-zhang	63	12	16-20 (89)	4/4	4
Jemadar	Ying-zhang	65	13	17-21 (96)	5/5	4
Risaldar	Shiao-zhang	67	14	18-22 (106)	6/5	5

THUGGEE MANEI DOMINI CLASSES

Primary Function	Requisite Implants	Recommended Skills
Reconnaissance	Cybernetic Eye or Ear*	Blades, Comms/Any, Interrogation, Navigation/Any, Perception, Security Systems/Any, Stealth, Surveillance, Survival, Tracking
Defense	Full-Body Myomer*	Demolitions, Electronic Counter-Measures, Blade, Martial Arts/Any, Pistols, Rifles, Security Systems/Any, Sensor Operations, Support Weapons, Survival, Tactics/Any
Assault	Enhanced Prosthetic*	Blade, Martial Arts/Any, Intimidation, Pistols, Quickdraw, Rifles, Shotguns, Submachine Guns, Support Weapons, Tactics/Any
Vehicular Pilot	Vehicular DNI*	Comms/Conventional, Computers/Any, Gunnery/Any (3), Navigation/Any, Piloting/Any, Sensor Operations, Tactics/Any, Technician/Any
Command	Communications Implant	Administration, Bureaucracy, Communications/Any, Computers/Any, Cryptography, Intimidation, Interrogation, Leadership, Negotiation, Tactics/Any, Strategy
Special Operative	Any*	Acting, Blades, Computers/Any, Disguise, Deception, Fast-Talk, Interrogation, Negotiation, Perception, Protocol/Any, Security Systems/Any, Seduction, Stealth, Surveillance, Streetwise/Any, Survival

*Any type

they—like their Word of Blake equivalents—strive to take out multiple targets as quickly as possible, but also pride themselves on maximizing the gore factor, preferring a host of bladed weapons in an effort to spill as much blood as possible. Thuggee Domini *never* retreat from battle out of personal fear, but may make strategic withdrawals if ordered to do so by a recognized representative of their Goddess. When cornered—with no apparent avenue of escape—Phansigars tend to go berserk, and will often hurl themselves at the enemy, where their suicide implants can cause maximum effect.

Thuggee Manei Domini Nomenclature: Phansigar characters bear names similar to most citizens in the Inner Sphere. Unlike the Word of Blake Domini, they have little use for “ascended” names, and do not always stand on ceremony with ranks and titles, unless

in the presence of superior officers (or their Goddess). However, it is not unheard of for Kali Liao to bestow upon a “worthy” Thuggee Domini a “rebirth name” (often one taken from legends of Hindu mythology). This “rebirth name” is roughly equivalent to a Word of Blake Manei Domini’s “ascended” name, but unlike the Word’s Domini, “reborn” Phansigars may use their birth names and their “rebirth names” interchangeably.

Becoming Thuggee Manei Domini: The Thuggee cult in the Confederation very rarely recruits from the outside, but it remains possible—through roleplaying—for player characters with a Capellan Confederation affiliation (and a demonstrated devotion to the Death Goddess Kali) to be inducted into the ranks of the Thuggees and their Phansigar elite. Doing so, however, not only requires a demonstrated fanatical and unquestioning



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devotion to the Death Goddess, but also the sacrifice of flesh in such service. Extremely selective, Kali Liao chooses only the most devoted to join her Warrior Houses' ranks, and then only after the applicant has already suffered injuries severe enough to require implantation.

As with those who become Word of Blake Domini, player characters who become Phansigars should be "retired" to NPC status.

Prosthetic Jaw/Fangs (Level: 1)

Replacing the jaw and all teeth with metal and myomer prosthetics is a common enough cosmetic enhancement for Manei Domini, approximating the function of the real thing while producing a fearsome look. Some operatives take the process a step farther by reinforcing the musculature and jaw and adding fangs, resulting in a prosthetic mouth that can deliver real damage in personal combat.

RPG Rules: The prosthetic jaw and fangs can only be used in melee combat against a subject who has been successfully grappled by the operative. Delivering the attack is then a simple action rolled as a melee attack with a TN modifier of -3; determine hit locations based on what body parts are closest to the operative's mouth. The bite itself has a base damage of 2•3D6 (3•4D6 if the operative also has triple-strength full-body implants; see p. 130, *JHS3072*), plus the operative's STR.

Prosthetic jaws and fangs automatically count as a "Horror" cosmetic implant as well, providing the operative with the Unattractive Trait, a +1 modifier to CHA and a -2 TN modifier for Interrogation and Intimidation checks.

CBT Rules: Prosthetic jaws have no impact in CBT game play.

Enhanced Prosthetic Jaw/Incisor Injectors (Level: 3)

A variation on the Prosthetic Jaw/Fangs, the Enhanced Prosthetic Jaw/Incisor Injectors is more deadly because these "fangs" incorporate special cartridges that can be used to inject toxins, fluids or even air into a target's bloodstream.

RPG Rules: The Enhanced Prosthetic Jaw/Incisor Injectors functions in the same way as the standard Prosthetic Jaw/Fangs, but can—in addition to delivering normal bite damage—also deliver a single dose of toxin (per incisor, to a maximum of 2 per operative).

Typical toxins can deliver poison damage with an AP of 2 or 3 and up to 3D6 damage dice, and may include a continuous effect—lasting up to six turns—that can be either lethal or subduing in nature. If an air cartridge is used instead of toxins, the target must roll a BOD check after a successful injection. Failure indicates that an air bubble has entered the victim's bloodstream, which is fatal in 3D6 turns.

Enhanced Prosthetic Jaws/Incisor Injectors automatically count as a "Horror" cosmetic implant as well, providing the operative with the Unattractive Trait, a +1 modifier to CHA and a -2 TN modifier for Interrogation and Intimidation checks.

CBT Rules: Enhanced Prosthetic Jaw/Incisor Injectors has no impact in CBT game play.

Prosthetic Tail (Level: 1)

A peculiar outgrowth of cosmetic (horror) prosthetics favored by some Thuggee Manei Domini, the Prosthetic Tail is a 1- to 1.5-meter long combination of metal, plastic and myomers intended to mimic the look of an animal's (or demon's) tail. While far from prehensile, this implant can aid in balance and even makes for an improvised weapon in melee combat, but must be detached before the operative can use all-encompassing armor or operate most vehicles.

RPG Rules: The Prosthetic Tail can be used to enhance acrobatic maneuvers (applying a -2 TN modifier to Acrobatics and Free-Fall skill checks), or as a rear-facing whip in combat (in which case, the reinforced tail has a base damage of 1•2D6 plus the operative's BOD; triple-strength full-body implants do not enhance this damage). A tail-whip attack in melee combat is delivered in the same fashion as a standard melee attack, except the target must be one meter or less behind the attacker.

The tail is considered to have its own Armor Values in combat (2/2/2/2), and may not be clothed, as doing so impedes its functionality. Operatives who wish to use their tails must therefore wear altered clothing and armor that allows the tail to extend outside their attire. (This also means that tails may not be used if the operative is wearing battle armor, an exoskeleton or environment gear, nor if he or she is operating any kind of vehicle; a Complex Action is required to detach a tail before using such gear.)

Though the tail is not considered a limb per se, hits to the operative's abdomen location from the back may strike the tail on a separate 1D10 roll of 6+, in which case, the tail is considered disabled if it sustains more than 2 Wound Points.

CBT Rules: Prosthetic Tails have no impact in CBT game play.

Enhanced Prosthetic Tail (Level: 2)

A deadlier version of the Prosthetic Tail, the Enhanced Tail adds length, armor, triple-strength myomers and retractable blades. Less flexible, this prosthetic is not as useful in aiding balance, and makes it impossible to operate vehicles or battle armor of any kind while attached, but the result is a far deadlier and effective weapon in melee combat.

RPG Rules: The Enhanced Prosthetic Tail can be used to aid acrobatic maneuvers (applying a -1 TN modifier to Acrobatics and Free-Fall skill checks), or as a whip in combat (in which case, the tail and its retractable blades have a base damage of 3•4D6 plus the operative's BOD). A tail-whip attack in melee combat is delivered in the same fashion as a special melee attack, but can reach targets up to 1.5 meters away.

The Enhanced Tail is considered to have its own Armor Values in combat (4/4/3/3), and may not be clothed. Unlike the standard Prosthetic Tail, the enhanced version is too bulky to be tucked in, and so

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operatives must always wear altered clothing and armor to allow for the tail's extension. This also means that Enhanced Tails may not be used if the operative is wearing battle armor, an exoskeleton or environment gear, nor if he or she is operating any kind of vehicle; the tail would have to be detached first (a Complex Action).

While not a limb per se, hits to an operative's abdomen location from the back will strike the Enhanced Tail on a separate 1D10 roll of 5+, in which case, the tail is considered disabled if it sustains more than 4 Wound Points.

CBT Rules: Conventional infantry units using the Enhanced Prosthetic Tail add 0.21 damage per trooper against any target at point-blank range (same hex). To deliver this damage, however, requires a successful attack roll with the usual +2 to-hit modifier for infantry melee weapons.

Additional Prosthetic Limbs (Arm/Leg) (Level: 3)

Some Thuggee Manei Domini, inspired by certain depictions of Hindi deities and demons, have voluntarily opted not only for replacement limbs, but also for the experimental addition of extra limbs (usually based on Type 4 or 5 prosthetics). These added arms and legs enhance not only the Thuggee's terror factor, but also their battlefield prowess. The only limitation to this technology appears to be based on the brain's ability to coordinate the extra limbs, which forces the operative to consciously choose which arms and legs are acting at any given time, while the others either lock in place or—in the case of natural limbs—simply go limp.

RPG Rules: A Phansigar operative can add up to four limbs, which may be any combination of arms or legs (each such limb counts as a separate implant). All such limbs are grafted onto the torso, as symmetrically as possible (odd-numbered limbs will extend from the back). The addition of extra limbs precludes the ability to wear normal armor and clothing without extensive modification, and battle armor use is impossible without removing the extra prosthetics first (a Complex Action per limb).

Each additional prosthetic limb functions as its nearest "natural" limb would (right-side mounted extra arms function as right arms, while left-side mounted extra legs are treated as left legs). If hit location rules are used, the attacker determines randomly which extra limb is hit based on the equivalent "natural" hit location rolled (for example, if an operative with two left arms is hit in the left arm location, the attacker randomly determines *which* left arm is hit).

Extra limbs have one key limitation: the human brain can only effectively coordinate four limbs at any given time. This means that an operative who chooses to add extra limbs (even if natural ones have been replaced with prosthetics) must decide which limbs to use in each round. The combination of limbs is up to the operative, though legs must always operate in matched pairs if walking, running or jumping is intended.

Arms and legs *not* used in a turn will either lock in place (if they are prosthetic) or hang limp (if natural). Natural legs that "go

limp" in this fashion cannot support the character's weight, and he will fall if not already lying or sitting down. Prosthetic legs that are locked in place bring the operative to a standstill (though he is not considered immobile). Prosthetic arms that lock in place can still hold objects—and may even lock in place while holding the triggers for automatic weapons—but may not release them, manipulate them or aim with any reliability; attempts to use such "frozen" limbs to deliver attacks apply a +6 TN modifier, but are counted as an Incidental Action. Prosthetic legs can be "locked" into a Walking or Running movement mode, enabling an operative to move as an Incidental Action, but this works only to proceed forward or backward in a straight line and makes the operative easier to hit (a -2 TN modifier applies for the attacker). Evading or Sprinting is not possible, as both require more concentration.

For example, if an operative has two extra arms in addition to his natural two arms and prosthetic legs, he can spend a turn using his legs to walk or run while two of his four arms use weapons or operate equipment. In a following turn, he can stop moving (locking his legs in place), and use all four arms to operate equipment or weapons. In the turn after that, he could opt to lock his two prosthetic arms in place (so that they continue to hold items or weapons), while using his legs for movement again and his natural arms for other equipment.

CBT Rules: Additional Prosthetic Limbs have no impact on CBT game play.

Enhanced Additional Prosthetic Limbs (Arm/Leg) (Level: 5)

A logical extension of the experimental additional prosthetic limbs, the enhanced versions are designed to incorporate weapons and other items in the same manner as standard enhanced prosthetics. The Thuggees make use of many of the same enhanced prosthetic weapons as other operatives, but have also demonstrated a fondness for a specialized, monowire-laced scarf, which they use as a garrote in a modern adaptation of their favored strangulation weapon, the rumal.

RPG Rules: Enhanced Additional Prosthetic Limbs function in the same fashion as their standard counterparts referenced above, but may also incorporate a single weapon or tool per limb (which may be used only while the limb is in active operation). The Prosthetic Limb Weapons Table below provides statistics on prosthetic limb-mounted weapons, while the capabilities of other tools mountable within a cybernetic limb are listed under Other Prosthetic Upgrades. Beyond carrying these devices, enhanced limbs function as described on p. 145 of *CBT: RPG*. Additional rules for the tools and weapons appear on pp. 108-115 of *A Guide to Covert Ops*. Weapons and items with a single-shot firing rate cannot be "locked on" in Enhanced Additional Prosthetic Limbs, and so will cease operation if the operative locks the respective limbs into a position.

CBT Rules: Conventional infantrymen equipped with Enhanced Additional Prosthetic Limbs that include weapons may



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add the CBT damage value of the weapon to the platoon's damage value for any Standard weapons (listed in parentheses beside the weapon's RPG damage). The limited range and punch of such weapons means that this bonus damage may only be applied against other units that the platoon engages in its own hex, and that the sum of the damage for all prosthetic weapons used must be rounded normally (rounding 0.5 up) before it may be applied against a target.

Prosthetics with Grapppler or Magnet enhancements may provide an infantry platoon with a -2 modifier for any Anti-Mech Leg or Swarm attacks made by the platoon, but *only* if a significant portion of the troopers in the platoon possess this enhancement.

The additional listed prosthetic enhancements have no impact in CBT game play.

Glide Wings (Level: 3)

An unusual modification for Manei Domini, glide wings consist of a collapsible framework grafted onto the operative's back and made of a flexible, yet sturdy material. At full extension, these wings—most commonly formed to resemble angel, bird or bat wings—may be used to assist in free-fall operations or even provide unpowered, short-range flight when air currents are good. However, as the wings are developed for "hands-free" operation (unlike a hang glider or parafoil), the control systems effectively interfere with the operative's normal motor control in the same way that additional limb prosthetics do. While gliding, this typically means that the operative's legs are "shut off."

RPG Rules: Glide Wings provide a -4 TN modifier for Free-Fall and Jump Pack action checks made within any atmosphere rated Thin or thicker. While in use, they also provide the character with an air movement rate of 10 meters per turn, plus 1 meter for each level of atmospheric thickness above Thin (in order, these levels are: Standard, Thick and Very Thick). However, as the wings do not provide for true flight, glide wings can only gain altitude at half the rate they can travel horizontally or downward. While in the air, using the Glide Wings counts as a Simple Action that replaces walking (as the operative's legs are effectively deactivated in flight). Landing—which requires the deactivation of the wings in favor of the operative's legs—counts as a Complex Action.

Glide Wings do not function underwater, and may not be clothed if they are to be used. Operatives intending to use fully enclosed battle armor, exoskeletons or environment suits, or operate vehicles, must detach these prosthetic wings first.

Glide Wings (which have Armor Values of 2/2/2/1) lose all functionality if they suffer sufficient damage in combat. When collapsed, they can be struck by any successful torso or abdomen hit to the operative's rear. When extended, all attacks against the operative receive a -2 TN, and any attack hitting the operative's torso, abdomen or arm locations from the rear automatically passes through the wings. From the front, only hits to the operative's arm locations will strike the wings, and then only

on a separate 1D10 roll of 4+. When resolving damage against an operative using Glide Wings (after factoring in the wings' armor value), any damage that passes through the wings to strike the operative subtracts 1 Wound Point from the result; damage that passes through the wings or that hits *only* the wings will inflict a maximum of 1 Wound Point per hit. Glide Wings are considered destroyed if they suffer more than 3 Wound Points.

CBT Rules: Conventional infantry units comprised entirely of operatives using Glide Wings may dismount from VTOL units (and DropShips hovering over the ground map) as a jump infantry platoon (see p. 225, *TW*), so long as they are not operating in vacuum or very thin atmospheres. Such platoons also do not suffer any damage from falls, whether from their own actions (walking off terrain 2 or more elevation levels high, including buildings) or by displacement (see p. 151, *TW*).

Flight Wings (Level: 5)

A far more radical variation on the Glide Wings prosthetic, the powered Flight Wings prosthetic is an integrated system that combines a much more elaborate wing design—complete with the ability to flap and angle for better wind management—with a series of chemical jets and reinforced cybernetic "launch legs." The result is a combination of gliding and vectored thrust system that enables an operative to literally fly for short durations.

RPG Rules: Flight Wings provide a -6 TN modifier for Free-Fall and Jump Pack action checks made within any atmosphere rated Very Thin or thicker. They may be used in either an unpowered "glide mode" (per standard Glide Wings rules, including movement rates), or to achieve true flight for short durations. When used in true flight, they provide the operative with an Air movement rate of 20 meters per turn, plus 2 meters for each level of atmospheric thickness above Very Thin (in order, these levels are: Thin, Standard, Thick and Very Thick). Unlike Glide Wings, Flight Wings in true flight mode can increase altitude at the same rate as they can travel horizontally or downward (or they can glide per the standard Glide Wings rules). During true flight or gliding modes (both of which count as Simple Actions), the operative may not use his legs, but the integrated linkage between the wings and the legs (which are used to provide an extra boost to lift-off) make landing a Simple Action as well.

Flight Wings do not function underwater, and may not be clothed if they are to be used. Operatives using Flight Wings may not use fully enclosed battle armor, exoskeletons or environment suits, or operate vehicles, as the wings may not be detached. Flight wings use chemical thrusters that provide up to 5 minutes of true flight before they must be recharged.

Flight Wings are reinforced and so have Armor Values of 4/4/3/3, and will lose all functionality if they suffer sufficient damage in combat. When collapsed, they can be struck by any successful torso or abdomen hit to the operative's rear. When extended, all attacks against the operative receive a -3 TN, and

PROSTHETIC ENHANCEMENT TABLE

ITEM TYPE	ENHANCEMENT SKILL	AP • DAMAGE [CBT DAMAGE]	RANGE TYPE	S/M/L/E	SHOTS*	RPG GAME PLAY NOTES
Weapons						
Laser	PIS	3•2D6 [0.07(E)]	E	5/11/25/60	3 pps	Obvious Port (power)
Ballistic	PIS	2•2D6 [0.01(B)]	B	1/3/5/10	2	—
Dart Gun	PIS	1•1D6 [0(B)N]	B	1/2/3/5	1	May use Tranquilizer darts
Needler	PIS	1•3D6 [0.02(B)N]	B	1/3/6/10	5	Splash, AP o vs. barriers
Shotgun	SHT	1•4D6 [0.01(B)]	B	1/3/6/8	1	Splash, +1 TN (recoil)
Sonic Stun	PIS	0•3D6 [0.01(E)N]	S	1/2/3/5	2 pps	Subduing
Sub-Gun	SMG	2•1D6 [0.05(B)]	B	2/5/10/20	20	Burst (4/2), Jam on fumble
Laser Sight	—	—	—	90 (max)	0.05 pps	–2 to weapon attack TNs
Blade	BLA	1•1D6 [0.02(P)]	M	—	—	—
Needle	BLA	0•1D6 [0(P)N]	M	—	1	Effect as poison or medication**
Shocker	BLA	0•3D6 [0.04(P)N]	E	—	3 pps	—
Vibroblade	BLA	4•2D6 [0.14(P)]	M	—	1 pps	—
Rumal/Garrote	WHP	2•4D6 [0.14(P)]	M	—	1 pps	Requires successful hit to Head in melee
Non-Weapons						
Climbing Claws	†	1•1D6 [0.02(P)N]	M	—	—	–1 TN to Climb (per limb)
Electromagnet	†	—	—	1/2/3/5	2 ppm	15 kg max; –1 TN to Climb (magnetic, per limb)
Grappler	†	—	—	2/5/8/12	—	150 kg max; –4 TN to ensnare or Climb
Holster/Cargo	†	—	—	—	—	–3 TN to Quickdraw (holster only)
Lockpick	†	—	—	—	—	–1 TN to Security Systems
MicroComp	†	—	—	—	0.005 ppm	–2 TN to Computers; no Electromagnets
PL-MASC	†	—	—	—	—	2x Sprint (once per 2 turns); +5 to other actions

*Energy-based equipment uses HC micro power packs only; ammo is in power per shot (pps) or per minute (ppm) of sustained use.

**Capabilities of poison needles (one injected dose) are discussed in the rules for poisons and antidotes (see pp. 114–117, *Lostech*).

†The RPG Skill for such items varies with the item's use.

CBT Damage Key: E = Energy; B = Ballistic; P = Point-Blank Damage (+2 to-hit target at hex 0); N = Damage vs other conventional infantry only.

any attack hitting the operative's torso, abdomen or arm locations from the rear automatically passes through the wings. From the front, only hits to the operative's arm locations will strike the wings, and then only on a separate 1D10 roll of 5+. When resolving damage against an operative using Flight Wings (after factoring in the wings' armor value), any damage that passes through the wings to strike the operative subtracts 1 Wound Point from the result; damage that passes through the wings or that hits *only* the wings will inflict a maximum of 1 Wound Point per hit. Flight Wings are considered destroyed if they suffer more than 5 Wound Points.

CBT Rules: Conventional infantry units comprised entirely of operatives using Flight Wings receive 2 VTOL MPs as long as they are not operating in vacuum, and may disembark from VTOL units (and DropShips hovering over the ground map) as a jump infantry platoon (see p. 225, *TW*) in such environments. Such units also do not suffer any damage from falls, whether from their own actions (walking off terrain 2 or more elevation levels high, including buildings) or by displacement (see p. 151, *TW*).

Dermal Camouflage (Level: 5)

An extreme variation on dermal armor that also incorporates electronic "sneak suit" technology, Dermal Camouflage is a full-

body myomer implant that overlays the operative's skin with sheets of photosensitive electronic webbing—akin to a permanent head-to-toe bodysuit that provides basic protection from the elements (and human modesty). Using sensors arrayed along the operative's body, this dermal camouflage creates a mimetic armor effect, blending the operative into the colors of his surroundings. The limitation, of course, is that the operative may not effectively use this implant while carrying bulky items (which cannot be so camouflaged), nor can he wear any exterior clothing or armor for additional protection.

RPG Rules: As long as an operative does not wear any additional armor or clothing, and does not carry more than 5 kilograms' worth of additional gear, his Dermal Camouflage applies a +6 TN camo modifier to visual-based Perception and Sensor Operations checks against him when it is active. (Activation is considered an Incidental Action.)

Dermal Camouflage also provides the operative with a 1-point increase to STR and BOD, a 1-point decrease in CHA and the following Armor Values: 2/3/3/2. As a full-body implant, heavy scarring—coupled with the full body covering and the armor's tendency to create odd optical effects even when not activated—also adds the Unattractive Trait.

All the stealth benefits of Dermal Camouflage are lost if the

CYBERNETIC UPGRADES TABLE

ITEM	RPG GAME PLAY NOTES
Cybernetic Eye (IR)	No darkness TN modifiers
Cybernetic Eye (EM)	May detect electronic/magnetic targets as a Radar Sensor (p. 108, LT); Range: 2 km
Cybernetic Eye (Telescopic)	-2 TN modifier to M/L/E when used with weapons or surveillance skills
Cybernetic Eye (Laser Sight)	-4 TN modifier to M/L/E when used with weapons or surveillance skills
Cybernetic Ear (Enhanced)	-3 TN modifier to surveillance skills; +2 TN to stealth against the user
Cybernetic Ear (Signal Pickup)	100 meter range
Cybernetic Speech (Variable)	—
Cybernetic Speech (Ultrasonic)	—
Recorder Unit	Duration: 6 hours, looping
Boosted Recorder Unit	Duration: 24 hours, looping
Transmitter or Receiver Unit	Range: 100 meters
Boosted Transmitter or Receiver Unit	Range: 1 kilometer
Communications Unit	Range: 100 meters
Boosted Communications Unit	Range: 1 kilometer
Filtration Liver	Poison Resistance Trait; When sweating: +1 TN to CHA skills, +1 to +3 TN to Stealth
Filtration Lung	AV 1 vs. gas weapons
Vehicular Direct Neural Interface (VDNI)	-1 to Piloting, half all Aimed Shot, Attacker Movement and Target Movement modifiers
Buffered VDNI	Ignore Small Cockpit penalty; half all Aimed Shot, Attacker and Target Movement modifiers
Dermal Myomer Armor Implant	+2 BOD, +2 STR, +1 REF, AV Increase: 3/3/3/3, Pain Resistance, -1 CHA, Unattractive
Triple-Strength Myomer (TSM) Implant	+4 STR, +2 REF, Toughness, -1 CHA, Unattractive
Dermal Camouflage Armor Implant	+1 BOD, +1 STR, AV Increase: 2/3/3/2, -1 CHA, Unattractive
Pain Shunt	Pain Resistance Trait and +1 TN to DEX (permanent); Clumsy Trait (1 year)
Pheromone Effuser	Range: 3m; 10 doses; -4 TN to Seduction and related for 1D6-1 hours (min 1)*
Toxin Effuser	Range: 3m; 10 doses; "Manei Mortis": [6D6 (-1D6/meter); Lethal; Duration 4 (-1/meter); Inhaled; Speed: 1 (+1/meter); Detection Difficulty +3]
Secondary Power Supply	80 points per supply; rechargeable; reduce pain med needs for myomer use to 1/24 hr
Cosmetic Beauty Enhancements	Attractive Trait; +1 CHA; -1 TN to Seduction and Negotiation
Cosmetic Horror Enhancements	Unattractive Trait; +1 CHA; -2 TN to Intimidation and Interrogation
Prosthetic Jaw/Fangs	Bite: 2-3D6 (3-4D6 w/ TSM)+STR**
Enhanced Jaw/Incisor Injectors	Bite: 2-3D6 (3-4D6 w/ TSM)+STR; Toxin: [2-3D6 or 3-3D6; Lethal; Duration 4; Injected; Speed: 1; Detection Difficulty: +1] (1 dose per injector; max 2)**
Prosthetic Tail	-2 TN to Acrobatics and Free-Fall; Whip Damage: 1-2D6+BOD; Tail AV: 2/2/2/2
Enhanced Prosthetic Tail	-1 TN to Acrobatics and Free-Fall; Whip Damage: 3-4D6+BOD; Tail AV: 4/4/3/3
Additional Prosthetic Leg/Arm	Add 1 extra prosthetic limb (max. 4); Action Limit: 4 limbs per turn
Enhanced Additional Prosthetic Leg/Arm	Add 1 extra enhanced prosthetic limb (max. 4); Action Limit: 4 limbs per turn
Glide Wings	Glide in atmosphere (see rules); -2 TN to Free-Fall/Jump Pack; Wing AV: 2/2/2/1
Flight Wings	Glide or fly in atmosphere (see rules); -2 TN to Free-Fall/Jump Pack; Wing AV: 4/4/3/3

Note: For additional rules and descriptions on prosthetic enhancements and cybernetic upgrades, consult *A Guide to Covert Ops* (pp. 108-115).

*Half TN modifier and duration for subjects of same gender or hostile to operative. See description for additional rules.

**Other mods apply per Cosmetic Horror Enhancements

operative wears any outer clothing or armor, carries items in excess of 5 kilograms in weight, or deactivates the system (implants are not counted against the effects of Dermal Camouflage; even "skinless" prosthetics and such are modified to incorporate the mimetic technologies). A Serious Wound to the torso will also deactivate the Dermal Camouflage, as many of the sensors and camouflage control systems are heavily clustered there.

CBT Rules: Attacks against conventional foot or jump infantry units comprised entirely of operatives using Dermal Camouflage

receive an additional to-hit modifier based on the number of hexes moved by the target unit in the same turn as the attack: +3 for 0 hexes moved, +2 for 1 hex moved, +1 for 2 hexes moved, and no modifier for 3+ hexes moved. In addition, because the Dermal Camouflage forces the operatives to go without armor, all damage from non-infantry weapons against infantry using Dermal Camouflage is doubled (for burst-fire damage, this translates to twice the number of damage dice; see pp. 215-217, *TW*).

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CLASSIC BATTLETECH RULES

The following rules are compatible for use with *Classic BattleTech Total Warfare (TW)*.

**NEW VEHICLE EQUIPMENT:
SMART ROBOTIC CONTROL SYSTEMS**

Introduced: Early spaceflight

Just one step removed from the fully autonomous robotic control systems used by the Star League's *Caspar*-class drones, robotic control systems are actually a rare, automated form of the basic remote drone control systems that are still used in the 31st century. Using sophisticated "smart" programming to simulate artificial intelligence, but designed for simple tasks, robotic control systems completely lack a human component, and rely entirely on their own on-board sensors for input. This makes them susceptible to ECM, while their rigid programming often leaves them unable to adapt to changing environments. Despite this, many firms still produce robotic control systems for the civilian and industrial sectors, but few military commands employ robotics when remote-controlled drones are cheaper and easier to deploy.

Smart Robotic Control System

Rules Level: Advanced

Available To: IndustrialMechs (Four-legged only), BattleMechs (Four-legged only), Combat Vehicles, Support Vehicles, Conventional Fighters, Aerospace Fighters and Small Craft.

Tech Base (Ratings): Both (D/E-F-F)

Game Rules (CBT): Units using a robotic operating system are automatically considered to have a Crew of 0, regardless of the construction rules for said unit, and may not use crew-served equipment beyond weapons, communications, sensors and piloting/maneuvering controls. A robotic unit's Piloting or Gunnery skills may be determined by consulting the Random Skills Table (see p. 273, *Total Warfare*), using the skill rating of the programmer (Green, Regular, Veteran or Elite). However, these random skill rolls suffer an automatic -3 modifier (to a minimum result of 1). Furthermore, regardless of the result, if the robotic-controlled unit is a 'Mech, apply an additional +1 to the unit's base Piloting skill (in place of the standard -2 for quad designs), to reflect their relative lack of balance in the absence of a pilot.

In CBT game play, robotic units operate with their own Initiative roll, which receives a -4 roll modifier. Even if allied non-robotic units are present, the robotic units operate on their own initiative, and are not counted as part of their allied non-robotic player's force. Allied human-controlled units may be designated as controllers for friendly robotic units prior to the start of a scenario and may—in place of their normal Weapon Attack Phase—activate or deactivate any single friendly robotic unit within the controller's line of sight. A deactivated robotic unit

will become an immobile target and may take no actions until reactivated. (Airborne robotic units that are deactivated within a planet's gravity well automatically crash, while units in space drift along their last vector and speed.)

Because they lack crews and pilots, critical hits against robotic vehicles that would normally stun, wound or kill a driver, pilot or crew do not inflict crew-loss effects. Likewise, fighter and 'Mech cockpit location hits do not force the robotic unit to make Consciousness rolls. However, critical hits to the vehicle commander (or those that destroy the cockpit/life support of a robotic 'Mech, or the crew of a robotic aerospace unit) destroy the robotic unit's operating systems, effectively deactivating it for the remainder of the game (as described above). Robotic-controlled aerospace units suffer no pilot damage effects for high-G maneuvers (see p. 78, *TW*), nor will they suffer pilot damage effects from overheating or hazardous environments.

In addition to the above, robotic-controlled units operate within certain predefined limits intended to maximize their survivability. Robotic units that track heat will not deliberately exceed their heat management systems, and will not use any equipment that generates heat in excess of their heat sinks—though heat from external sources (such as fire, flamers and plasma weapons) may drive a robotic unit into higher heat levels. A robotic unit that passes a heat level of 14 points can perform no other action beyond basic movement at a Walk/Cruise/Safe Thrust rate. Robotic-controlled units also cannot perform charging, ramming or Death From Above physical attacks. Robotic-controlled units cannot clear weapon or turret jams in combat.

If a robotic unit is exposed to a hostile ECM field, EM Pulse or a Haywire Pod, the unit's sensors will be overwhelmed and the controlling player should roll 1D6. On a result of 4 or less, the robotic unit acts as though deactivated for 3 turns (see rules above regarding deactivation), at the end of which—if it remains under an ECM effect—the robotic unit reactivates and moves immediately toward its home edge as if it were a crippled unit under the Forced Withdrawal rules (see p. 258, *TW*). (Even if the unit escapes the ECM effect while withdrawing, it continues to retreat, and remains out of play for the remainder of the scenario, but can "reinitialize" for later scenarios.) On a result of 5, the robotic unit continues to move (or accelerate) in the direction it was headed at the time, but takes no other actions for 3 turns (though, if any other unit lies in its path, the controlling player should treat the effect as a charge or ramming attack with a +4 to-hit modifier). On a result of 6, the robotic unit goes berserk and attacks the nearest active unit of any type with any on-board weapons as long as it remains within the area of ECM effects (if unarmed, the robotic unit simply charges at the nearest unit instead).

Robotic units move in accordance with the standard rules for their vehicle type, and may make sensor sweeps and use



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unmanned communications systems (akin to unmanned satellites). They may also operate any and all mounted weapons per normal rules for the robot unit's type (regardless of crew needs; for targeting purposes, robotic units ignore modifiers for operating with insufficient crew), but they cannot make secondary attacks. Robotic units may carry any other equipment that requires crew to operate (such as MASH units, field kitchens and so forth), but may not use these items (or conduct field repairs) without human crewmen.

Aside from the above rules, robotic units function per the rules for their applicable vehicle type, including other critical hit effects and all effects due to heat.

Construction Rules: For units weighing less than 10 tons in total mass, the robotic control system adds no weight beyond that of the unit's existing control systems. For units 10 tons and over, however, robotic controls add an extra 5 percent of the unit's total weight to the tonnage of any basic cockpit or control systems already employed by the unit. (Larger aerospace units such as Space Stations and WarShips have been known to employ robotic operating systems as well, but these larger systems are not covered under these rules.) 'Mech-based robotic control systems are unavailable to bipedal (humanoid) 'Mech designs.

A unit using a robotic operating system is always considered to have a Crew of 0 (regardless of its normal needs under the vehicle's construction rules). In all other respects, the unit follows its standard construction rules. (Note: if the robotic unit requires weight to be spent on life-support systems, the robotic unit is *not* exempt from this requirement.)

Game Rules (RPG): Robotic-controlled units in RPG game play use the standard CBT game play rules, but such units make Sensor Operations Checks in any situation where a human character might make a Perception Check. The respective skill bonuses for a robotic unit are equivalent to its CBT Piloting and Gunnery skills, multiplied by 1.5 (rounded down). A robotic unit's Sensor Operations skill is the same as its Gunnery, while its Martial Arts skill is the same as its Piloting.

Robotic units are immune to any actions involving SOC, CHA or WIL. Robotic units are presumed to have the following RPG stats: STR (10 x Unit Tonnage, rounded up to a minimum of 1), BOD (10 x Unit Tonnage, rounded up to a minimum of 1), DEX (10), RFL (10), INT (4), WIL (1), CHA (1), EDG (0), and SOC (0). Gamemasters, however, may modify these statistics based on the robotic unit's role.

NEW PROTOMECH EQUIPMENT

Some Watch reports have indicated that Clans Fire Mandrill, Cloud Cobra and Snow Raven have been testing some interesting prototype equipment on their ProtoMech designs. Observation

indicates two systems apparently in the final stages of development; the Fire Mandrills' Magnetic Clamp System (MCS), and the Ravens' Extended Jump Jet system (XJJ).

Magnetic Clamp System (MCS)

R&D Start Date: Unknown (Clan Fire Mandrill)

Prototype Design and Production: Circa 3070 (Clan Fire Mandrill)

Hoping to get slower ProtoMech designs into battle quickly, Mandrill scientists and technicians strove to come up with a streamlined transport system to allow the heavier ProtoMechs to ride on BattleMechs the way battle armor can be carried by OmniMechs. After multiple attempts, the Clan nearly gave up the idea until they obtained a working Fa Shih battlesuit sample from Diamond Shark traders. While the acquisition was politically charged—leading to Kindraa Kline's severe decimation and loss of power—the Mandrills' Council changed their tune after watching a *Predator* easily transport two heavy *Roc* ProtoMechs across the testing field. Realizing the increased battlefield potential, the Clan authorized continuation of the program, despite the current design's flaws.

Rules Level: Experimental

Available To: ProtoMechs

Tech Base (Ratings): Clan (F/X-X-F)

Game Rules (CBT): When functional, ProtoMechs may use the Magnetic Clamp System to mount any Clan BattleMech (Omni or otherwise) per the Mechanized Battle Armor rules (see pp. 226-227, *TW*). However, a BattleMech may carry no more than two ProtoMechs in this fashion, with the ProtoMech occupying the front or rear Center Torso locations only. If the 'Mech receives damage to a location mounting a ProtoMech, the Proto is immediately dismounted, but sustains half the attack damage (rounded up) to a random location.

While transporting ProtoMechs, a BattleMech's speed is reduced in accordance with the standard rules for carrying unprotected external cargo (see p. 261, *TW*), using the total weight of the ProtoMechs being carried to compute the change in MPs. OmniMechs and OmniVehicles—which can accommodate up to six battle-armored troopers without affecting their speed—may subtract 3 tons from the weight of each ProtoMech carried in this fashion when computing the external cargo weight (to a minimum of 0 tons per Proto). ProtoMechs may not be transported by aerospace units in this fashion, even if said units are Omnis.

Any critical hits to a ProtoMech's torso automatically destroy the MCS.

Construction Rules: The Magnetic Clamp System weighs 250 kilograms for ProtoMechs under 6 tons, and 500 kilograms for Protos 6 to 9 tons in total mass. The MCS occupies one weapon slot in the ProtoMech's torso.

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Extended Jump Jet System**R&D Start Date:** Unknown (Clan Cloud Cobra)**Prototype Design and Production:** Circa 3071 (Clan Snow Raven)

Fascinated with the development of the Sylph battle armor's VTOL capability, Clan Snow Raven attempted to mount a similar system on their newly attained ProtoMech technology. While true VTOL capability remains more theory than fact, Raven scientists managed to develop a longer-firing jump jet system that effectively increased the range of jump-capable ProtoMechs.

Rules Level: Experimental**Available To:** ProtoMechs**Tech Base (Ratings):** Clan (F/X-X-F)

Game Rules (CBT): ProtoMech Jump Jets are the effective analogue to BattleMech Improved Jump Jets, offering a maximum jump distance equal to the unit's Running MPs, rather than its Walking MPs.

Construction Rules: Extended Jump Jet systems weigh twice as much as the standard ProtoMech Jump Jet weights (100 kilograms per Jump MP for ProtoMechs under 6 tons, 200 kilograms per Jump MP for Protos 6 to 9 tons in total mass). Unlike standard jump jets, ProtoMechs may mount as many XJJs as they have Running MPs.

NEW AEROSPACE EQUIPMENT: SUPER-JUMP DRIVES

During the Jihad, the Word of Blake reportedly demonstrated an amazing ability to deploy troops to all corners of the Inner Sphere in a fraction of the expected time even when using a command circuit of lithium-fusion equipped JumpShips. Allegedly, this feat entailed the use of a so-called "super-jump" technique that may in fact have been partly developed by Interconnectedness Unlimited years earlier.

Word of Blake Super-Jump System**R&D Start Date:** Unknown (ComStar?)**Prototype Design and Production:** Unknown (Word of Blake)

Less a piece of equipment than a series of shunts, bypasses and computers, this technology simply requires a jump-capable vessel that also features a functional lithium-fusion battery.

Rules Level: Experimental**Available To:** JumpShips, WarShips**Tech Base (Ratings):** Inner Sphere (F/X-X-F)

Game Rules (CBT): The Word of Blake's "super-jump" technology simply requires a pre-existing K-F drive and a lithium-fusion battery to function, and adds to this mix a few components of inconsequential weight and bulk that override certain safety protocols and such within the jump drive systems. When engaged, the jumping vessel initiates a normal K-F jump sequence with the charge stored in the drive core and then—nanoseconds later—begins a second jump sequence that magnifies the jump by several orders of magnitude, effectively creating a "jump within a jump."

An incoming super-jumper has an unmistakable emergence wave. What first appears as a massive burst of thermal radiation

dissolves into a group of smaller signals, creating the impression of a massive JumpShip or WarShip coming in with an escort group in tight formation. Even more remarkable is the range of the Word of Blake super-jumps, which appears to be effectively unlimited.

The technique is dangerous, and applies a +3 target modifier when computing jumps and executing them (dramatically increasing the chance of a misjump). More devastating, however, is the fact that the very act of jumping automatically destroys the jumping vessel's K-F drive *and* its lithium-fusion batteries. A vessel that executes a Word of Blake super-jump is therefore making a one-way trip unless it can get to a friendly space dock where its drive and battery can be replaced.

Construction Rules: Word of Blake super-jump technology takes up no significant weight or space in JumpShip or WarShip, but may only be installed on vessels that include both a K-F drive and a lithium-fusion battery system.

Interconnectedness Unlimited Super-Jump Drive**R&D Start Date:** Circa 2980 (Interconnectedness Unlimited)**Prototype Design and Production:** Circa 3000 (Interconnectedness Unlimited)

IU's own alleged super-jump technology supposedly explored the same approach the Word of Blake may be using in the Jihad, but retained numerous safety measures and cut-offs that deliberately reduced the range of their super-jumps and made it much more likely for vessels to survive the trip with cores and batteries intact. Unfortunately, it remains unclear how successful the project ultimately was, as IU never produced a super-jump capable vessel for sale, or unveiled the techniques and technology it might have employed.

Rules Level: Experimental**Available To:** JumpShips**Tech Base (Ratings):** Inner Sphere (F/X-X-X)

Game Rules (CBT): Interconnectedness Unlimited's super-jump technology worked in the same fashion as the Word of Blake variation, but had a maximum jump radius of 120 light-years, and doubled the requisite time to plot a jump. Though its inbound jump signature would match that of a Word of Blake jump, the IU super-jump system was far less likely to cause K-F or battery damage; rather than such an event being automatic upon arrival, the controlling player of a vessel undergoing an IU-style super-jump rolls 2D6. On a result of 8+, the K-F drive loses 1 point of integrity from damage.

Construction Rules: IU's super-jump technology makes extensive changes to the K-F drive that result in a 2 percent increase in the drive's total weight (rounded up to the nearest ton). It also multiplies the K-F drive's total cost by a factor of 10, rendering super-jump capable drives prohibitively expensive.

The Lucretia

Starting off as a *Tramp* with two *Mule DropShips* permanently



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attached, the IU-owned JumpShip *Lucretia* was heavily modified over the decades to resemble a flying habitat, filled to the brim with laboratories, workshops, hydroponics bays and think tanks. The *Lucretia* was home away from home to hundreds of IU scientists and researchers, and—before her fiery end in the star of an unnamed system—was supposedly fitted with an experimental IU-made super-jump assembly.

**NEW VEHICLE EQUIPMENT:
CENTURION WEAPON SYSTEMS**

R&D Start Date: Circa 2760 (Star League)

Prototype Design and Production: Circa 2762 (Star League)

In the late 28th century, Generals Kerensky and DeChevalier tasked SLDF researchers with developing non-lethal weapons to disable the advanced technologies that had proliferated throughout the Inner Sphere and Periphery. A few concepts were tested and met with limited success, but practical testing and combat simulations soon showed that even a modicum of electronics hardening, coupled with combat maneuvering, would still render a 'Mech, vehicle, fighter or other piece of combat equipment virtually invulnerable to what the SLDF Science and Technology Bureau had designated Centurion weapon systems.

Research into the Centurion project continued nonetheless, with some systems reaching operational capability. Unfortunately, against all but the oldest and most distressed equipment still in the field, the prototype system had little to no operational range.

During trials, engineers fitted test units with a special transponder that would automatically shut down those units when struck by the weapon's beam, just to be sure. Thanks to those transponders, initial trials went well enough for the SLDF to order an extended test. Even with the transponders, however, the weapon ultimately proved unreliable, with a limited arc of effectiveness and widely varying range. The Centurion weapon itself was shelved, but the transponders were modified to allow the remote shutdown of 'Mechs and vehicles in the case of unauthorized use or theft.

The transponders were put into limited use, with the codes necessary to shut down the parent unit supposedly entrusted only to SLDF field commanders, the colonels and generals who led the Star League's armies. In reality, the codes quickly found their way into the hands of just about anyone in the SLDF that wanted them. Among some MechWarriors, it became a practical joke to shut down each other's 'Mechs. Not long thereafter, the codes began to fall into the wrong hands, leading to several disasters, including the loss of

nearly two battalions of brand-new SLDF Battle-Mechs and the destruc-

tion of several more companies by pirates on the world of Zebeneschamali. The entire Centurion system was shelved at that point, but thousands of transponders remained in service, while thousands more that were supposedly destroyed may have been stockpiled as a part of integrated communications systems in SLDF depots across the Inner Sphere.

Though the system remained undeveloped for more than five centuries, evidence exists that some groups may either have dug up ancient prototypes of this weapon or developed their own from plans discovered in the Helm Star League Memory Core.

Rules Level: Experimental

Available To: IndustrialMechs, BattleMechs, Combat Vehicles, Support Vehicles, Conventional Fighters, Aerospace Fighters and Small Craft.

Tech Base (Ratings): Inner Sphere (E/F-F-F)

Game Rules (CBT): The Centurion uses a directed electromagnetic pulse to overload the electronic systems on the target unit, though the weapon's effective range is minimal in this mode. Against units with the Centurion transponder, or that either have unshielded electronics or lost that shielding, the Centurion weapon has a much greater range. Prior to the start of a game, the game-master (or the players) must determine which units (BattleMech, vehicle, ProtoMech, battle armor, fighter or aerospace fighter) are susceptible to the Centurion weapon.

Units equipped with a Centurion use it like any other direct-fire energy weapon. Though it delivers no damage or heat to its target, the weapon does inflict heat on the firing unit as normal. Against targets susceptible to it, the Centurion weapon has the range profile of an Inner Sphere Light PPC; against units not susceptible to the weapon, the Centurion's effective ranges are reduced to that of a standard Inner Sphere Small Laser. The Centurion does not work with a targeting computer.

Upon a successful hit, the player controlling the targeted unit immediately makes a shutdown roll as if the targeted unit's heat were 14 points higher than its current level (though this "heat" is *not* added to the unit's heat level). If the roll is successful, the unit continues to operate normally. If the roll fails, the unit immediately shuts down. If the weapon successfully targets a unit that is already shut down (for whatever reason) the unit remains shut down for the next turn.

Construction Rules: A unit may mount any number of Centurion weapons.

CENTURION WEAPON SYSTEM

Type	Heat	Damage	Minimum Range	Short Range	Medium Range	Long Range	Tons	Critical Slots	Ammo Per Ton
Centurion	4	0*	0	6 (1)	12 (2)	18 (3)	5	2	—

*The Centurion deals no damage; instead, a unit successfully targeted by this weapon makes an immediate shutdown roll as if its current heat level were 14 points higher than it truly is.

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NEW BATTLEMECH: RMP-5G RAMPAGE**Mass:** 85 tons**Chassis:** Stanwhich 850**Power Plant:** AMC 340 XL**Cruising Speed:** 43 kph**Maximum Speed:** 64 kph, 86 kph w/ MASC**Jump Jets:** None**Jump Capacity:** None**Armor:** PanzerSlab Type 9**Armament:**

- 2 Maxell DT Medium Lasers
- 1 Luballin LB 10-X Autocannon
- 1 Buzzsaw Anti-Missile System
- 1 Zippo Mark X Anti-Personnel Flamer
- 1 Jackson Dart LRM-10 Missile Rack
- 3 Marklin Mini SRM-2 Missile Packs
- 1 Tronel XIII Large Pulse Laser

Manufacturer: Weigel Armory and Munitions**Primary Factory:** Kwangjong-ni (destroyed 2767)**Communications System:** Transcom Alpha**Targeting and Tracking System:** KBC Starsight Model 3**Overview**

Originally designed as a standard heavy line 'Mech for the Rim Worlds Republic, the *Rampage* served its role adequately. With Amaris' takeover of the Terran Hegemony, he finally had access to all the advanced Star League technology. Knowing he would likely have to fight at least some parts of the SLDF, he had Hegemony engineers design a modern upgrade for the *Rampage*. Rather than leave it a simple assault 'Mech, the engineers enhanced its speed as well as its firepower, producing a fast assault unit that would give the Star League forces fits in the years to come.

Capabilities

The redesigned *Rampage* was built to be fast for its size. Though some designers pushed for a top speed in the 80-kph range, they debated whether to accomplish this by lightening the entire design or by employing an experimental extra-light engine design. As a more economical compromise, they opted for an XL engine augmented by a MASC system, enabling the *Rampage* to reach almost 90 kilometers per hour for short bursts. Meanwhile, to enhance the 'Mech's firepower, designers installed an LB 10-X autocannon and an Artemis-enhanced LRM-10, coupled with a trio of Streak two-packs and a large pulse laser for heavy and accurate punch. For even more power up close, the *Rampage* rounded out its weapons load with a pair of medium lasers and a flamer, while adding the defensive feature of an anti-missile system.

Deployment

The *Rampage* was assigned to the elite Republican Guards, though some—mostly older chassis—were also shipped to the

rebellious Periphery realms from which Amaris sought to retain support. *Rampages* were assigned to units that could keep up with their speed, either as a fast strike unit or as heavy support for a medium unit. More than one opponent thought they could use a heavy medium to outmaneuver the *Rampage* and found themselves facing its formidable firepower.

Variants

The *Rampage-2G*, produced for decades in the Rim Worlds Republic, was twenty-five percent slower than the 5G. It also lacked the Streak launchers and Artemis IV fire control systems. Its standard class-10 autocannon had two tons of ammo, but so did the LRM. Instead of the 5G's antimissile system, the 2G used a single machine gun with a full ton of ammo, while a standard large laser replaced the advanced pulse laser. Though this older model boasted ten more heat sinks than the 5G, these standard sinks lacked the efficiency of the 5G's heat management system.

Another progenitor to the 5G was the 4G, which was produced in limited numbers. This variant removed all of the 'Mech's missile systems, a medium laser, three heat sinks and half a ton of armor (mostly from the legs) in exchange for a powerful gauss rifle.

Infamous MechWarriors

Captain Bernard "Ogre" Critchly: A captain in the Greenhaven Gestapo, one of the few non-Republican mercenaries to receive the new *Rampage*, Critchly earned the nickname "Ogre" for his poor hygiene and brutal disposition. After having his portrait spray-painted on the Sistine Chapel, Critchly was quickly frustrated by the protests that followed. While the Gestapo managed to control the first outbursts, additional protests mounted in response to the Gestapo's ruthlessness. During one, Critchly blocked in 750 monks who were staging a hunger strike in John Paul II Square, and killed more than six hundred of them with his *Rampage* alone. During the Liberation of Terra, both Critchly and his *Rampage* disappeared; neither the warrior nor his machine were ever reportedly seen again.

Ivan "Ranger" Chekov: Known as "Ranger" for his ability to track down SLDF forces gone guerrilla, Ivan was not only a great stalker, but a formidable foe on the battlefield. Using his *Rampage*'s superior speed, his favored tactic involved gaining the most advantageous positions as quickly as possible before unleashing a torrent of firepower on one side of his foe—then maintaining the same relative position to exploit the weakened flank almost exclusively. Chekov took down more than twenty-five opponents this way. But while he was deadly to SLDF units, Chekov allegedly opposed mistreatment of the local population and prisoners on New Earth. After the war, he was one of the few Republican officers to be cleared of war crimes charges, but soon after retiring to New Earth, he was lynched by the local populace.

RULES ADDENDUM

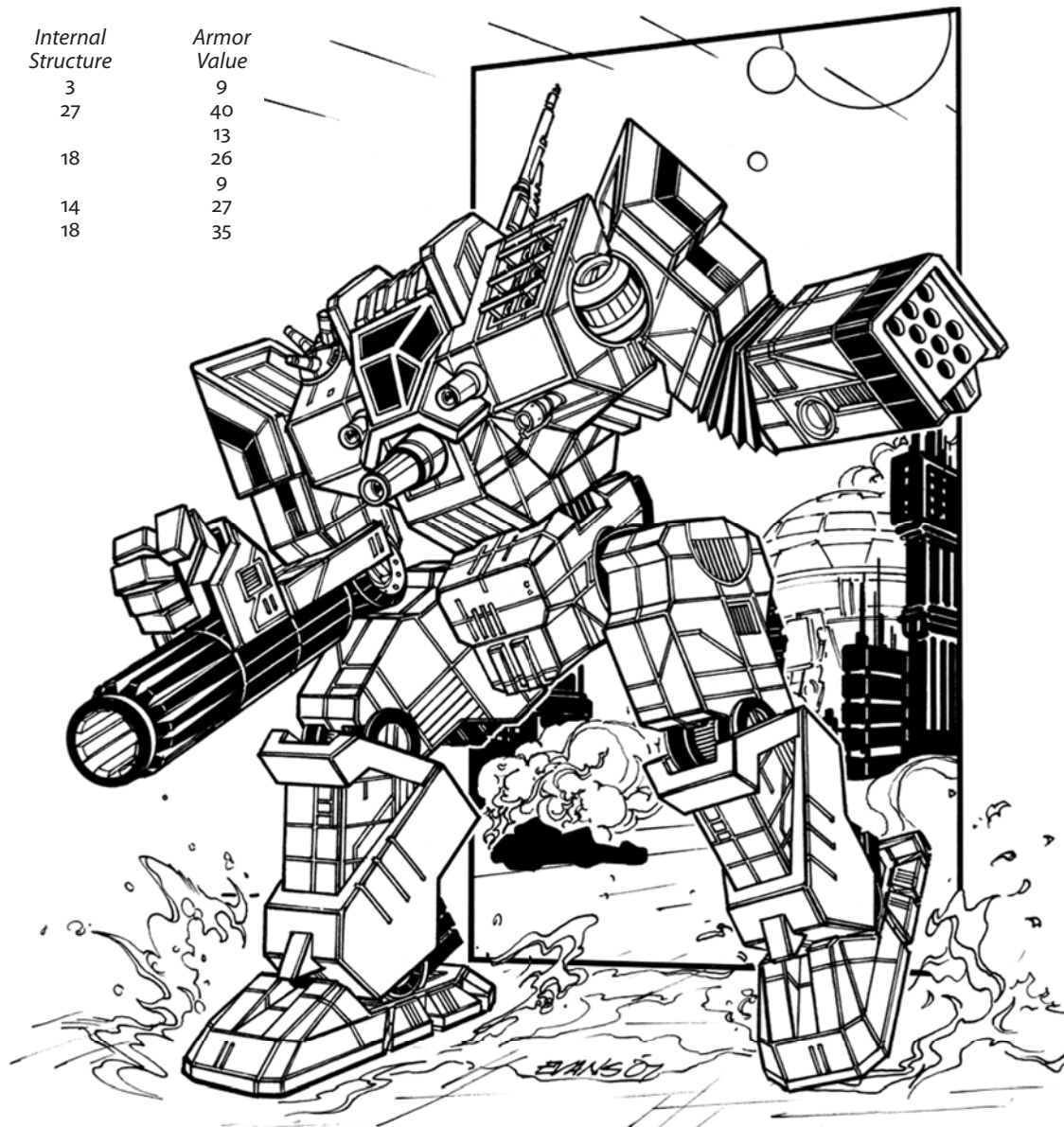
Type: Rampage
Technology Base: Inner Sphere
Tonnage: 85
Battle Value: 1,842
Cost (C-bills): 23,069,439

Equipment

		Mass
Internal Structure:	Endo Steel	4.5
Engine:	340 XL	13.5
Walking MP:	4	
Running MP:	6 [8]	
Jumping MP:	0	
Heat Sinks:	13 [26]	3
Gyro:		4
Cockpit:		3
Armor Factor:	256	16

	Internal Structure	Armor Value
Head	3	9
Center Torso:	27	40
Center Torso (Rear):		13
L/R Side Torso:	18	26
L/R Side Torso (Rear):		9
L/R Arm:	14	27
L/R Leg:	18	35

Weapons and Ammo	Location	Critical	Tonnage
LB 10-X AC	RA	6	11
Ammo (LB-X) 20	RT	2	2
LRM 10	LA	2	5
Artemis IV	LA	1	1
Ammo (LRM) 12	LT	1	1
Anti-Missile System	RT	1	0.5
Ammo (AMS) 12	RT	1	1
Medium Laser	RT	1	1
MASC	RT	4	4
Medium Laser	LT	1	1
3 Streak SRM 2s	LT	3	4.5
Ammo (Streak) 50	LT	1	1
Flamer	LT	1	1
Large Pulse Laser	CT	2	7



RULES ADDENDUM

**NEW AEROSPACE FIGHTER: MK. 30
"BLACKWASP" ROBOTIC INTERCEPTOR**

Mass: 50 tons
Chassis: X-5,90,30
Power Plant: VOX 250
Armor: SearWeave
Armament:
 2 Hellion Prime ER Large Lasers
 1 Maxell Medium Laser
Manufacturer: Allied Aerospace, Inc.
Primary Factory: Pollux (destroyed 2767)
Communications System: Ulsop WaspWave X100
Targeting and Tracking System: Ulsop Inquisitor K37

Type: Mk. 30 "BlackWasp"
Technology Base: Inner Sphere
Tonnage: 50
Battle Value: N/A

Equipment		Mass
Engine:	250	12.5
Safe Thrust:	7	
Max Thrust:	11	
Structural Integrity:	7	
Heat Sinks:	14 [28]	4
Fuel:	480	6
Cockpit (Robotic):		3 + 2.5
Armor Factor:	176	11

Overview

The Mk. 30 "BlackWasp" was one of the Terran Hegemony's first fully robotic interceptor fighters exclusively intended to back up the might of their elaborate automated planetary defense networks. This companion to the *Caspar* class of drone WarShips debuted in the late 2720s and was widely distributed among various outlying Hegemony outposts to bolster defenses against invaders, but was rendered obsolete by the Mk. 39 "VoidSeeker" series almost forty years later, thanks to the latter craft's improved shielding against hostile ECM. Nonetheless, many Hegemony SDS networks continued to rely on *BlackWasps* even into the Star League's final days.

Capabilities

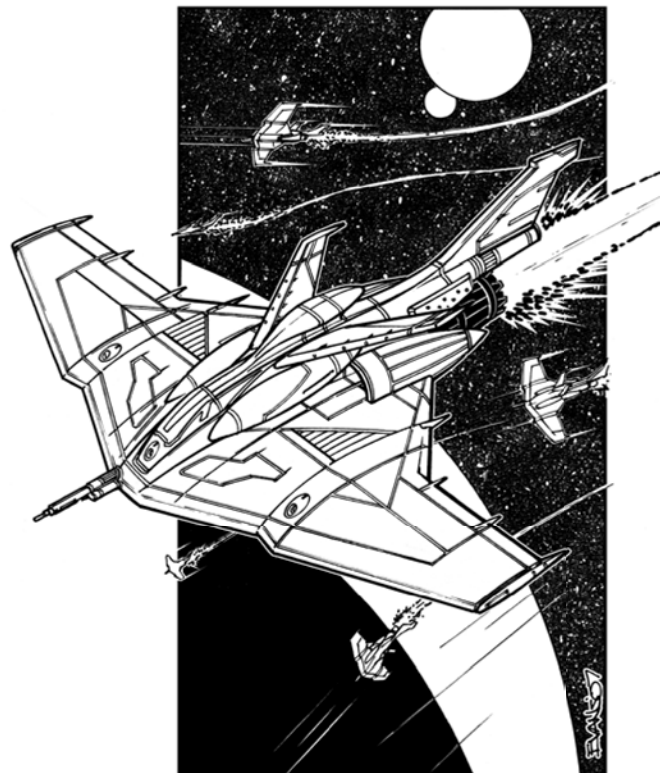
Highly maneuverable and powered by a smart robotics system perfected by Ulsop Robotics, the Mk. 30 could outfly most human pilots and relied on a cutting-edge combination of extended-range lasers and double-strength heat sinks for maximum offensive potential without need for resupply. Designed to operate exclusively in space, in squadrons of no less than six such fighters, most *BlackWasps* were carrier-launched by *Caspars*, specially built drone DropShips, or dedicated carrier satellites placed in planetary orbit. Their smart robotics control systems enabled Mk. 30s to react to changing combat situations on the fly, without constant human supervision, but over time many *BlackWasp* squadrons began to lose effectiveness in protracted battles. Often, these failures occurred due to severe electronic interference or a programming glitch that allowed many to be drawn too far from their carriers for refueling.

Deployment

BlackWasps were originally deployed exclusively by forces of the Terran Hegemony as part of the Hegemony's own planetary defense networks, but as they were displaced by the newer Mk. 39s, many turned up in outlying SLDF outposts as far from Terra as the frontier world of Antallos. Throughout the centuries since the Star League's collapse, traders and prospectors across the Inner Sphere have reported contact with ancient squadrons of what many believe are rogue Mk. 30s—still carrying out their ancient defensive missions around long-forgotten outposts.

	Armor Value
Nose	46
Wings	45 / 45
Aft	40

Weapons and Ammo	Location	Tonnage	Heat	SRV	MRV	LRV	ERV
Medium Laser	Nose	1	3	5	—	—	—
ER Large Laser	RW	5	12	8	8	8	—
ER Large Laser	LW	5	12	8	8	8	—



RULES ADDENDUM 

NEW FORCE RULES: THE SAURIMAT

Classic BattleTech Rules

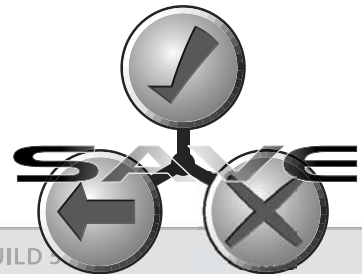
As they are not a military unit per se, the Saurimat's alleged BattleMech battalion only loosely follows the standard Inner Sphere organizational order of companies and lances, putting more emphasis on the training of the individual pilot.

Their technology is never top-of-the-line, and mostly consists of hand-me-downs from the associated Arkab Legions. For unit determination, Saurimat 'Mechs use the "D" or "F" columns (at the player's discretion) of the Draconis Combine Random Assignment Tables. Reroll any units that lack hand actuators (including quads). The Saurimat never employ vehicles or fighters.

Saurimat warriors cover the whole spectrum of experience, but their MechWarriors have in common a natural affinity for 'Mech piloting. To reflect this, a Saurimat MechWarrior's Gunnery skill may never exceed his Piloting skill. (If randomly determining skills, swap the Piloting and Gunnery skills for any Saurimat warrior whose Gunnery exceeds his Piloting.)

Furthermore, to reflect their expertise in close combat, Saurimat MechWarriors may execute one extra physical attack during the Physical Attack Phase, so long as the attack does not use the same limb or limbs. This bonus attack may even include a charge, Death From Above or push attack (treat charge attacks as using the torso, while push attacks use both arms and Death From Above attacks use both legs). However, because they combine movement and attacking, only one charge, Death From Above or push attack may be made per turn (they cannot be combined with each other for the bonus attack), and must be resolved before the second bonus attack.

Finally, to reflect Saurimat fanaticism, all Saurimat BattleMechs are exempt from Forced Withdrawal rules (see p. 258, *TW*), and always operate with their auto-ejection systems disengaged.



KIRI-J(F) SYSTEM SECURITY SCANNER (12.3.89 BUILD 5) 



SECURITY LEVEL AMBER

CLASSIC BATTLETECH

'MECH RECORD SHEET

'MECH DATA

Type: RMP-5G RAMPAGE

Movement Points: **Walking:** 4 **Running:** 6 [8] **Jumping:** 0
Tonnage: 85 **Tech Base:** Inner Sphere 2767

Weapons & Equipment Inventory (hexes)

Qty	Type	Loc	Ht	Dmg	Min	Sht	Med	Lng
1	LB 10-X AC	RA	2	10	-	6	12	18
				(DB,C/S/F)				
1	Anti-Missile System	RT	1	(PD)	-	-	-	-
1	Medium Laser	RT	3	5 (DE)	-	3	6	9
1	Large Pulse Laser	CT	10	9 (P)	-	3	7	10
1	Medium Laser	LT	3	5 (DE)	-	3	6	9
3	Streak SRM 2	LT	2	2/Msl (M,C)	-	3	6	9
1	Flamer	LT	3	2 (DE,H,AI)	-	1	2	3
1	LRM 10 w/Artemis IV	LA	4	1/Msl (M,C,S)	6	7	14	21

Cost: 23,069,439 C-bills **BV:** 1,842

WARRIOR DATA

Name: _____
Gunnery Skill: _____ **Piloting Skill:** _____
Hits Taken

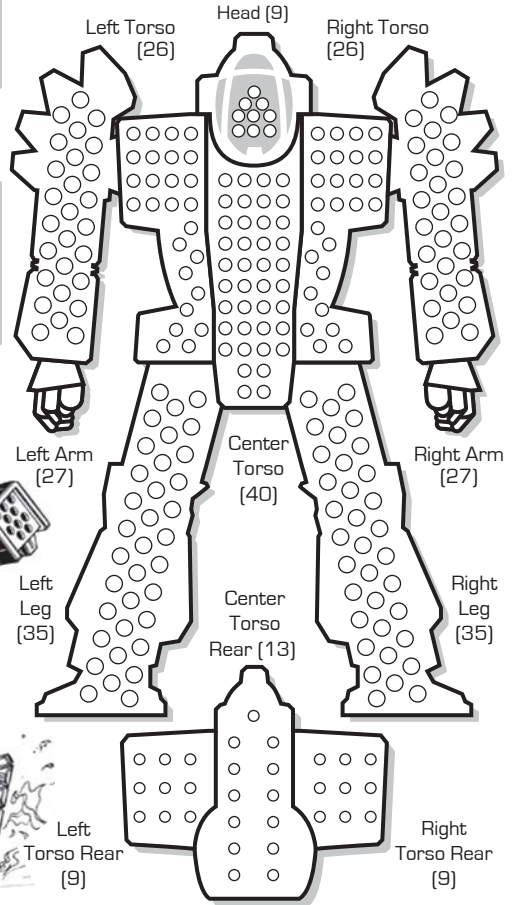
1	2	3	4	5	6
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Consciousness#

3	5	7	10	11	Dead
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ARMOR DIAGRAM



CRITICAL HIT TABLE

Left Arm

- Shoulder
- Upper Arm Actuator
- Lower Arm Actuator
- LRM 10
- LRM 10
- Artemis IV FC

1-3

- Endo Steel
- Endo Steel
- Endo Steel
- Endo Steel
- Endo Steel
- Roll Again

4-6

Left Torso

- XL Fusion Engine
- XL Fusion Engine
- XL Fusion Engine
- Medium Laser
- Flamer
- Streak SRM 2

1-3

- Streak SRM 2
- Streak SRM 2
- Ammo (Streak) 50
- Ammo (LRM) 12
- Endo Steel
- Endo Steel

4-6

Left Leg

- Hip
- Upper Leg Actuator
- Lower Leg Actuator
- Foot Actuator
- Endo Steel
- Endo Steel

Head

- Life Support
- Sensors
- Cockpit
- Endo Steel
- Sensors
- Life Support

Center Torso

- XL Fusion Engine
- XL Fusion Engine
- XL Fusion Engine
- Gyro
- Gyro
- Gyro

1-3

4-6

- Gyro
- XL Fusion Engine
- XL Fusion Engine
- XL Fusion Engine
- Large Pulse Laser
- Large Pulse Laser

Right Arm

- Shoulder
- Upper Arm Actuator
- Lower Arm Actuator
- Hand
- LB 10-X AC
- LB 10-X AC

1-3

4-6

- LB 10-X AC
- LB 10-X AC
- LB 10-X AC
- LB 10-X AC
- Endo Steel
- Endo Steel

Right Torso

- XL Fusion Engine
- XL Fusion Engine
- XL Fusion Engine
- Medium Laser
- Anti-Missile System
- MASC

1-3

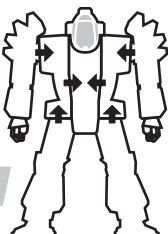
4-6

- MASC
- MASC
- MASC
- Ammo (LB-X) 10
- Ammo (LB-X) 10
- Ammo (AMS) 12

Right Leg

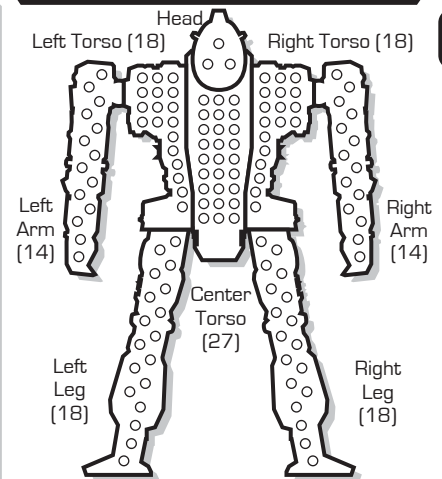
- Hip
- Upper Leg Actuator
- Lower Leg Actuator
- Foot Actuator
- Endo Steel
- Endo Steel

Engine Hits ○○○○
 Gyro Hits ○○
 Sensor Hits ○○
 Life Support ○



Damage Transfer Diagram

INTERNAL STRUCTURE DIAGRAM



Heat Scale

Heat Level	Effects
30*	Shutdown
29	
28*	Ammo Exp. avoid on 8+
27	
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+
21	-4 Movement Points
20*	Ammo Exp. avoid on 4+
19*	Shutdown, avoid on 6+
18*	+3 Modifier to Fire
17*	-3 Movement Points
16	Shutdown, avoid on 4+
15*	+2 Modifier to Fire
14*	-2 Movement Points
13*	+1 Modifier to Fire
12	-1 Movement Points
11	
10*	
9	
8*	
7	
6	
5*	
4	
3	
2	
1	
0	

HEAT DATA

Heat Level*	Effects	Heat Sinks: 13 [26]
30	Shutdown	Double ○○○○
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	

CLASSIC BATTLETECH

'MECH RECORD SHEET

'MECH DATA

Type: RMP-2G RAMPAGE

Movement Points: **Tonnage:** 85
 Walking: 3 **Tech Base:** Inner Sphere
 Running: 5 2735
 Jumping: 0

Weapons & Equipment Inventory

Qty	Type	Loc	Ht	Dmg	Min	Sht	Med	Lng
1	Autocannon/10	RA	3	10 (DB)	-	5	10	15
1	Medium Laser	RT	3	5 (DE)	-	3	6	9
1	Large Laser	CT	8	8 (DE)	-	5	10	15
1	Medium Laser	LT	3	5 (DE)	-	3	6	9
1	Machine Gun	RT	0	2 (DB,AI)	-	1	2	3
1	Flamer	LT	3	2 (DE,H,AI)	-	1	2	3
1	LRM 10	LA	4	1/Msl (M,C,S)	6	7	14	21

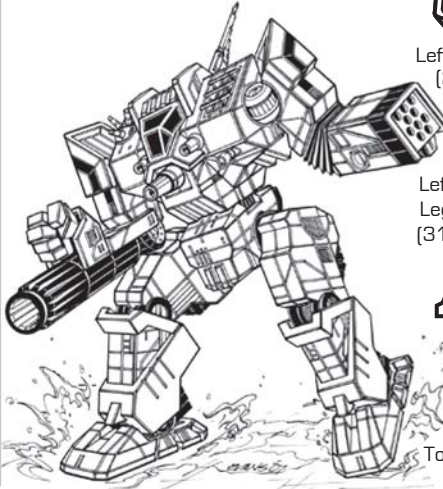
Cost: 7,015,755 C-bills **BV:** 1,444

WARRIOR DATA

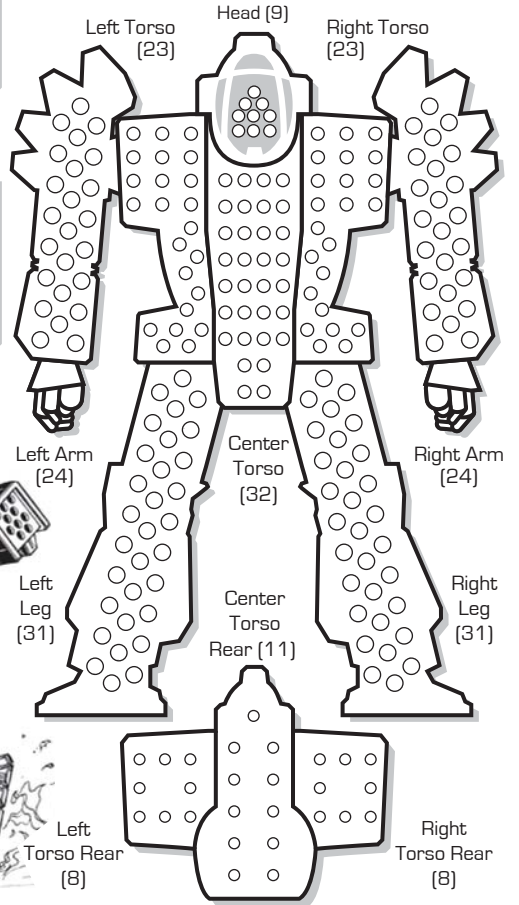
Name: _____

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

- Shoulder
- Upper Arm Actuator
- Lower Arm Actuator
- LRM 10
- LRM 10
- Roll Again

- Roll Again
- Roll Again
- Roll Again
- Roll Again
- Roll Again
- Roll Again

Left Torso

- Medium Laser
- Flamer
- Ammo (LRM) 12
- Ammo (LRM) 12
- Single Heat Sink
- Single Heat Sink

- Single Heat Sink
- Single Heat Sink
- Single Heat Sink
- Roll Again
- Roll Again
- Roll Again

Left Leg

- Hip
- Upper Leg Actuator
- Lower Leg Actuator
- Foot Actuator
- Single Heat Sink
- Single Heat Sink

Head

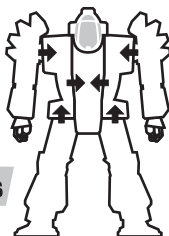
- Life Support
- Sensors
- Cockpit
- Roll Again
- Sensors
- Life Support

Center Torso

- Fusion Engine
- Fusion Engine
- Fusion Engine
- Gyro
- Gyro
- Gyro

- Gyro
- Fusion Engine
- Fusion Engine
- Fusion Engine
- Large Laser
- Large Laser

Engine Hits ○○○○
 Gyro Hits ○○
 Sensor Hits ○○
 Life Support ○



Damage Transfer Diagram

Right Arm

- Shoulder
- Upper Arm Actuator
- Lower Arm Actuator
- Hand
- Autocannon/10
- Autocannon/10

- Autocannon/10
- Autocannon/10
- Autocannon/10
- Autocannon/10
- Autocannon/10
- Roll Again

Right Torso

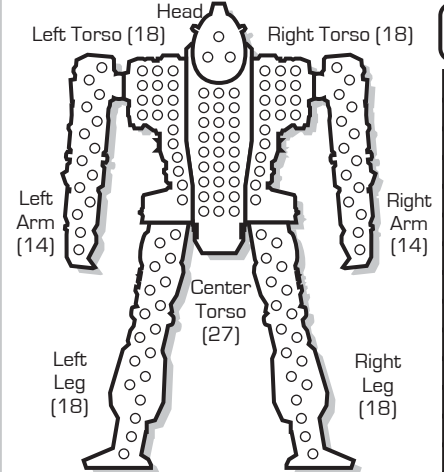
- Machine Gun
- Medium Laser
- Ammo (AC/10) 10
- Ammo (AC/10) 10
- Ammo (MG) 200
- Single Heat Sink

- Single Heat Sink
- Single Heat Sink
- Single Heat Sink
- Roll Again
- Roll Again
- Roll Again

Right Leg

- Hip
- Upper Leg Actuator
- Lower Leg Actuator
- Foot Actuator
- Single Heat Sink
- Single Heat Sink

INTERNAL STRUCTURE DIAGRAM



Heat Scale

Heat Level	Effects
30*	Shutdown
29	
28*	Ammo Exp. avoid on 8+
27	Shutdown, avoid on 10+
26*	-5 Movement Points
25*	+4 Modifier to Fire
24*	Ammo Exp. avoid on 6+
23*	Shutdown, avoid on 8+
22*	-4 Movement Points
21	Ammo Exp. avoid on 4+
20*	Shutdown, avoid on 6+
19*	+3 Modifier to Fire
18*	-3 Movement Points
17*	Shutdown, avoid on 4+
16	+2 Modifier to Fire
15*	-2 Movement Points
14*	+1 Modifier to Fire
13*	-1 Movement Points
12	
11	
10*	
9	
8*	
7	
6	
5*	
4	
3	
2	
1	
0	

HEAT DATA

Heat Level*	Effects	Heat Sinks: 23
30	Shutdown	Single
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	○○○○○

CLASSIC BATTLETECH

'MECH RECORD SHEET

'MECH DATA

Type: RMP-4G RAMPAGE

Movement Points: **Walking:** 4 **Running:** 6 [8] **Jumping:** 0
Tonnage: 85 **Tech Base:** Inner Sphere 2750

Weapons & Equipment Inventory (hexes)

Qty	Type	Loc	Ht	Dmg	Min	Sht	Med	Lng
1	LB 10-X AC	RA	2	10	-	6	12	18
				(DB,C/S/F)				
1	Anti-Missile System	RT	1	(PD)	-	-	-	-
1	Medium Laser	RT	3	5 (DE)	-	3	6	9
1	Large Pulse Laser	CT	10	9 (P)	-	3	7	10
1	Flamer	LT	3	2	-	1	2	3
				(DE,H,AI)				
1	Gauss Rifle	LA	1	15 (DB)	2	7	15	22

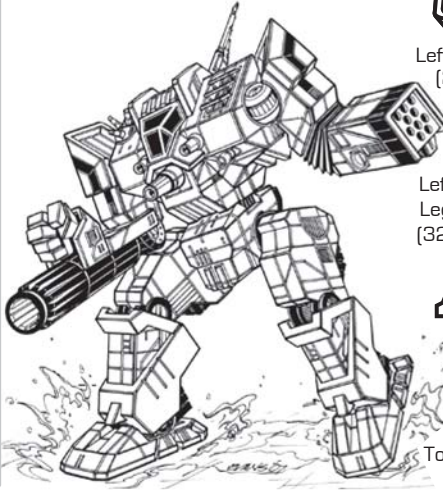
Cost: 22,917,739 C-bills BV: 2,020

WARRIOR DATA

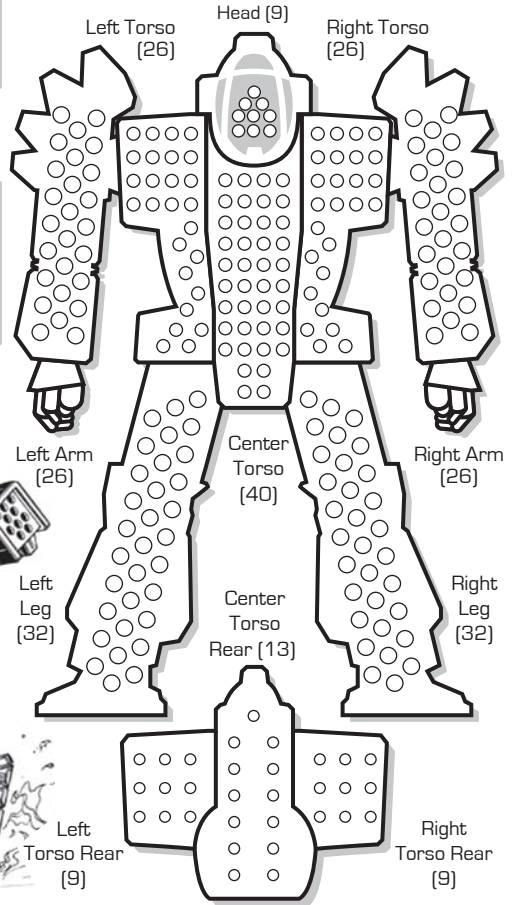
Name: _____

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

- Shoulder
 - Upper Arm Actuator
 - Lower Arm Actuator
 - 1-3 Gauss Rifle
 - 5 Gauss Rifle
 - 6 Gauss Rifle
- Gauss Rifle
 - Gauss Rifle
 - Gauss Rifle
 - 4-6 Gauss Rifle
 - Endo Steel
 - Roll Again

Left Torso

- XL Fusion Engine
 - XL Fusion Engine
 - XL Fusion Engine
 - 1-3 Ammo (Gauss) 8
 - 5 Ammo (Gauss) 8
 - 6 Flamer
- Endo Steel
 - Endo Steel
 - 3 Endo Steel
 - 4-6 Endo Steel
 - 5 Endo Steel
 - 6 Endo Steel

Left Leg

- Hip
- Upper Leg Actuator
- Lower Leg Actuator
- Foot Actuator
- Endo Steel
- 6 Endo Steel

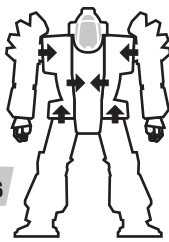
Head

- Life Support
- Sensors
- Cockpit
- Endo Steel
- 5 Sensors
- 6 Life Support

Center Torso

- XL Fusion Engine
 - XL Fusion Engine
 - 3 XL Fusion Engine
 - 1-3 Gyro
 - 5 Gyro
 - 6 Gyro
- Gyro
 - XL Fusion Engine
 - XL Fusion Engine
 - 4-6 XL Fusion Engine
 - 5 Large Pulse Laser
 - 6 Large Pulse Laser

Engine Hits ○○○○
 Gyro Hits ○○
 Sensor Hits ○○
 Life Support ○



Damage Transfer Diagram

Right Arm

- Shoulder
 - Upper Arm Actuator
 - Lower Arm Actuator
 - 1-3 Hand
 - 5 LB 10-X AC
 - 6 LB 10-X AC
- LB 10-X AC
 - 2 LB 10-X AC
 - 3 LB 10-X AC
 - 4-6 LB 10-X AC
 - 5 Endo Steel
 - 6 Endo Steel

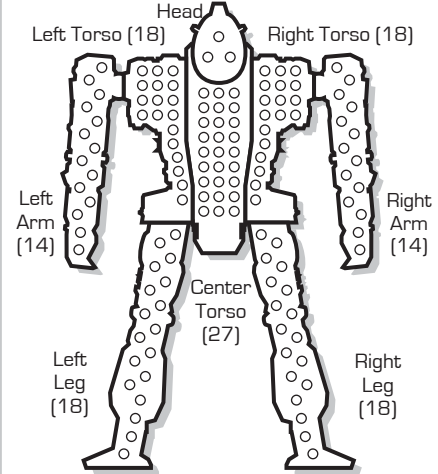
Right Torso

- XL Fusion Engine
 - XL Fusion Engine
 - XL Fusion Engine
 - 1-3 Medium Laser
 - 5 Anti-Missile System
 - 6 MASC
- MASC
 - MASC
 - 3 MASC
 - 4-6 Ammo (LB-X) 10
 - 5 Ammo (LB-X) 10
 - 6 Ammo (AMS) 12

Right Leg

- Hip
- Upper Leg Actuator
- Lower Leg Actuator
- Foot Actuator
- 5 Endo Steel
- 6 Endo Steel

INTERNAL STRUCTURE DIAGRAM



HEAT DATA

Heat Level*	Effects	Heat Sinks: 10 [20] 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

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	

CLASSIC BATTLETECH

EXTERNAL STORES/BOMBS

AEROSPACE FIGHTER RECORD SHEET

FIGHTER DATA

Type: Mk.30 BLACKWASP

Thrust: Tonnage: 50
 Safe Thrust: 7 Tech Base: Inner Sphere
 Maximum Thrust: 11 2750

Weapons & Equipment Inventory

Standard Scale Qty	Type	Loc.	Ht	SRV (0-6)	MRV (6-12)	LRV (13-20)	ERV (21-25)
1	Medium Laser	N	3	5	—	—	—
1	ER Large Laser	LW	12	8	8	8	—
1	ER Large Laser	RW	12	8	8	8	—
1	Robotic Control	—	—	—	—	—	—

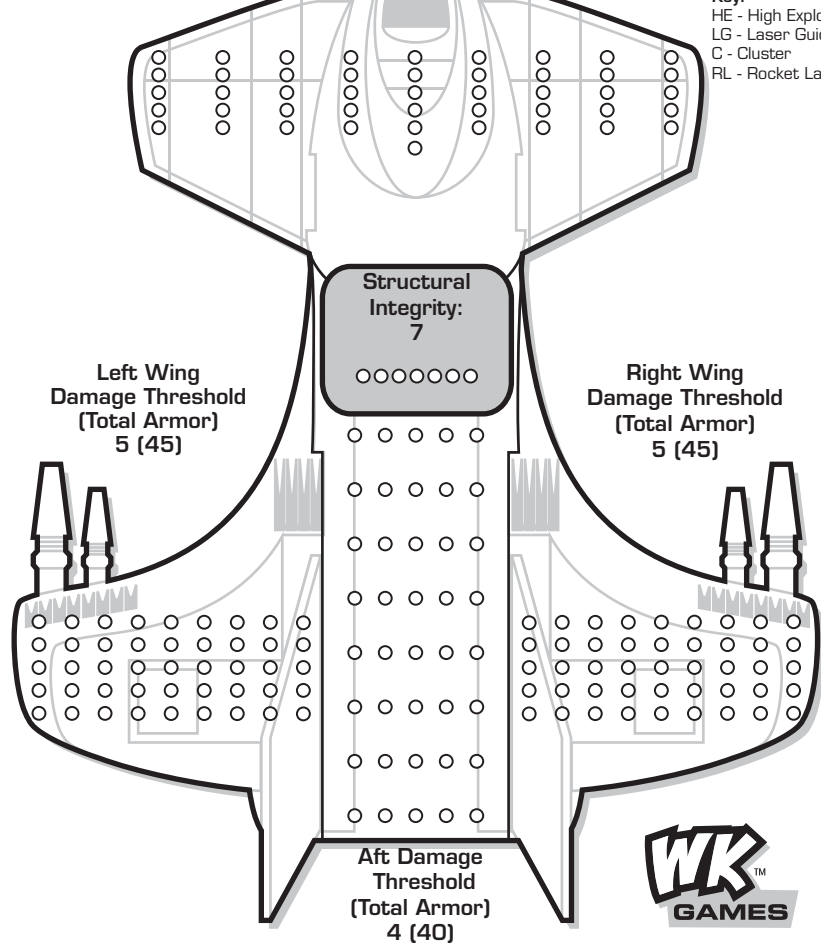
Fuel: 480 Points

Cost: N/A

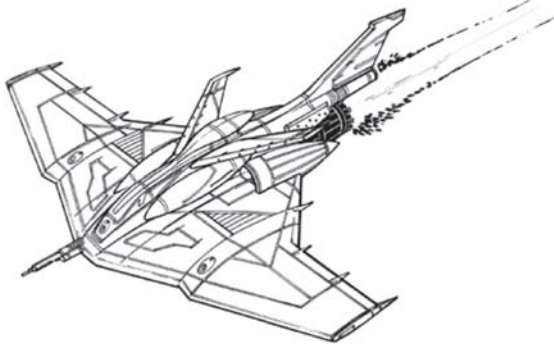
BV: N/A

ARMOR DIAGRAM

Nose Damage Threshold (Total Armor) 5 (46)



Key:-
 HE - High Explosive
 LG - Laser Guided
 C - Cluster
 RL - Rocket Launcher



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

CRITICAL DAMAGE

Avionics	+1	+2	+5	Engine	2	4	D
FCS	+2	+4	D	Gear	+5		
Sensors	+1	+2	+5	Life Support	+2		

PILOT DATA

Name: _____

Gunnery Skill: _____ Piloting Skill: _____

Hits Taken	1	2	3	4	5	6
Consciousness #	3	5	7	10	11	Dead
Modifier	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5	

HEAT DATA

Heat Level*	Effects	Heat Sinks:
30	Shutdown	14 (28)
28	Ammo Exp. avoid on 8+	Double
27	Pilot Damage, avoid on 9+	○ ○
26	Shutdown, avoid on 10+	○ ○ ○ ○
25	Random Movement, avoid on 10+	○ ○ ○ ○
24	+4 Modifier to Fire	○ ○ ○ ○
23	Ammo Exp. avoid on 6+	○ ○ ○ ○
22	Shutdown, avoid on 8+	○ ○ ○ ○
21	Pilot Damage, avoid on 6+	○ ○ ○ ○
20	Random Movement, avoid on 8+	○ ○ ○ ○
19	Ammo, Exp. avoid on 4+	○ ○ ○ ○
18	Shutdown, avoid on 6+	○ ○ ○ ○
17	+3 Modifier to Fire	○ ○ ○ ○
15	Random Movement, avoid on 7+	○ ○ ○ ○
14	Shutdown, avoid on 4+	○ ○ ○ ○
13	+2 Modifier to Fire	○ ○ ○ ○
10	Random Movement, avoid on 6+	○ ○ ○ ○
8	+1 Modifier to Fire	○ ○ ○ ○
5	Random Movement, avoid on 5+	○ ○ ○ ○

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										

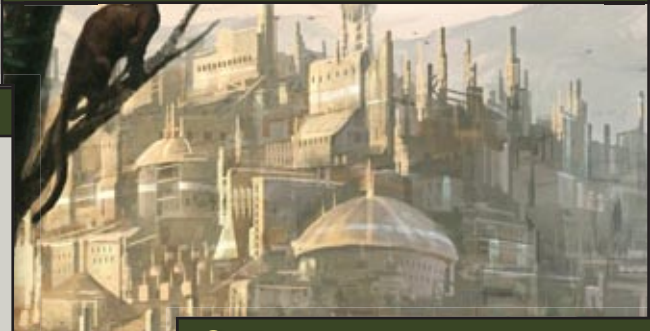
● ■ EVEN THE SHADOWS HAVE SECRETS ⓘ

On October 25, 3068, the Word of Blake flooded the Inner Sphere HPG networks with “White Noise”, a stream of gibberish and propaganda that made communications virtually impossible. Amid the noise, stunning secrets were revealed: Anastasius Focht was once Frederick Steiner; ComStar Primus Sharilar Mori was a Kurita spy.

Yet along with the secrets revealed and the spreading fires of the Jihad, the Blakists unveiled terrible new weapons and an army the size of which the intelligence agencies of the Inner Sphere had scarcely dreamed, spawning a darker, new wave of mysteries, and whispers of shadowy cabals. Hidden worlds, cults of assassins, ancient societies and even the mysteries of hyperspace—all emerged as possible sources for the Word of Blake’s newfound power. Once more spanning all of human space from ancient Terra to the far-flung Clan homeworlds, the conspiracies behind the Jihad could be the key to unraveling the greatest war since the days of Amaris.

Jihad Conspiracies: Interstellar Players 2 describes several of the most powerful and influential people, organizations, and entities at work behind the scenes of the Word of Blake Jihad. Some of these conspiracies are firmly grounded in *Classic BattleTech* lore, but shown here in ways never before seen; others have only recently emerged from their own shadows. Gamemasters and players can decide which of these power brokers are real and which are paranoid fantasies spawned by the chaos and fear of the Blakist Holy War!

● ■ A LOST WORLD, A LOST CITY ⓘ



● ■ AN ANCIENT GLADIATOR ⓘ



● ■ A TABIRANTH WARRIOR ⓘ



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