

CLASSIC BATTLETECH[®]

DAWN OF THE JUHAD[™]



FANPRO

WKGAMES

PANDORA'S BOX OPENED!

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

When the Star League self-destructs, a shadowy power behind the fanatical Word of Blake pulls the strings taunt in righteous anger, launching a war to bring humanity to its knees.

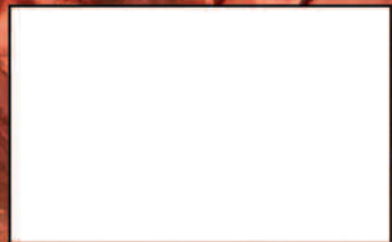
But amidst the chaos and confusion swirling across a thousand light years, all it not as it appears. Friend becomes foe and today's truth is the lie of tomorrow. Can the Inner Sphere survive the opening of ComStar's box of secrets?

Dawn of the Jihad shakes the *Classic BattleTech*® universe to its foundation, documenting the opening year in a decades-long struggle for the very survival of humanity. The series of events presented in this book unfold in a rolling format, allowing readers to immerse themselves more directly into the action than ever before. Players of both *Classic BattleTech* and *Classic BattleTech RPG*™ will also find framework rules to run almost any type of campaign set in this chaotic time.

WARGAMES

FANPRO

FOR USE WITH
CLASSIC
BATTLETECH & BATTLETECH RPG



INN NEWS UPDATE...

Dawn of the Jihad

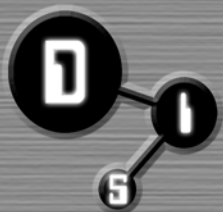


TABLE OF CONTENTS

THE DEVELOPER'S SAY	4	"Cowardice!"	67
SHADOWS OF FAITH	6	Doctors: Coordinator III, Recovering	67
INTRODUCTION	16	"Who Among Us Shall Rule?"	68
How to Use This Book	17	The Widening Conflicts	68
AND IT CAME TO PASS	18	Dieron Under Quarantine	70
War Engulfs Inner Sphere	19	Death to Mercenaries!	70
Decade of Tumult	19	Borders on Alert	71
Opening Shots	23	THE EAGLE SCREAMS	72
FILTHY MONEY	27	Winds of Change	73
War Strikes Mercenaries!	28	The Star League Failure: What Happened?	73
The Gathering Storm	28	Mercenary Assault on Mars Fails!	74
Where the Money Trail Ends	29	Tharkad: Was It or Wasn't It?	74
Northwind Highlanders Returning Home	29	Assassins Gun Down Head of Sirian Concordance	75
Death of a Legend	30	Outreach Nuked!	75
Harlech City Under Siege!	31	Day of the Hawk	76
Counterstrike	31	War!	76
Dragoons Break Contract	31	Bolan Declares War	77
Northwind Blockade	33	Captain-General Condemns "Lyran Aggression"	77
Mars: What Happened?	34	Steiners Launch Second Wave	78
Fall of Outreach	35	The Quagmire of the Alliance	80
Mercenary Treachery	35	At Last!	81
Outreach Bombarded!	35	Jeremy Brett: Usurper in a Hero's Clothing?	82
Outreach: A Survivor's Account	36	Knights Recalled	82
Legacy of Distrust	37	ENEMY BROTHERS	83
"Divine Retribution!"	37	Tumbling Downward	84
Mercenaries Under Fire	38	Word of Blake Declares War as Star League Dies	84
Running the Blockade	38	Heretics and Traitors!	84
BURNING FIST	39	Slaughter!	85
Tharkad Burns	41	Com Guards Shattered	86
Star League Disbanded!	42	Tide of Fire	87
Horror Unleashed	43	Tukayyid Hit, Heavy Casualties Reported	87
Chaos and Confusion	44	Dow Vows "Swift Retribution"	88
The Archon Dead?	44	Case White	88
The Greater War	45	Precentor Martial Victor Steiner-Davion Speaks	88
Skye Assaulted!	45	Case White Underway!	89
Long Odds for Duke Robert	47	"Devastation"	91
Wave Two?	47	Mopping Up	92
An Appeal for Unity	48	"The Bringers of Truth"	92
Skye-League War Forces Archon's Hand	49	The Holy Light of Blake Comes to Demeter	93
Alliance Under Siege—Day 115	50	TRIALS OF VICTORY	94
BROKEN SWORDS	52	Silent Runnings	95
Sunset Over the Sword	54	Whispers and Rumors I	95
Who Is In Charge?	54	Whispers and Rumors II	97
Marshal of the Armies Speaks	55	Awaiting Orders	98
The Forgotten Fronts	56	Borrowed Time	99
The Pleiades Question	56	On the Precipice	99
Lest We Forget	58	Whispers and Rumors III	101
The Taurian Problem	58	Time of Deliberation	101
Marches at War	58	Whispers and Rumors IV	102
Operation Sovereign Justice Underway	58	Outreach Survivors?	102
Sovereign Justice Strikes Deep	60	Guarding the Flank	103
TEARS OF THE DRAGON	62	Righteous Rage	104
Dreams Torn Asunder	63	Showing Restraint	104
Leaders Gather for Whitting 3067	63	Watching and Waiting	104
Star League Disbands	64	Cry Havoc	105
The Dragon Speaks	65	CELESTIAL CRISES	106
Black Dragon Rising	66	Gathering Shadows	107
Uprising on Luthien!	66	Celestial Wisdom Dedicates Memorial	107
Betrayal at the Dragon's Heart	66	Blake's Wrath Targets Capellan People	108



TABLE OF CONTENTS

St. Ives Struck	108	Warchest Point System	136
Royal Family Kidnapping!	109	Getting Started	136
Flashing Swords	110	Warchest Points Between Tracks	137
Capellans, Unite!	110	Skill Advancement	138
Luck or Foresight?	111	Ending the Campaign	138
Reclaim Your Destiny	111	Chaos Unbound: The Setup	138
Victorious They Vanquish!	112	Look Who's Coming to Dinner	139
Fortress of Determination	112	Another Day, Another C-bill	140
Davions Sue for Peace	113	FUBAR!	142
Falling Skies	113	Payback	144
Sian Struck!	113	Vacationing in the Wasteland	146
Not Again!	114	The Skye Is Falling!	148
Union of Sword and Spirit	115	Running From the Devil	150
Too Far!	115	Game On!	152
AFTERSHOCKS	117	Golden Goose	153
CHAOS UNBOUND	132	Full Metal Press	155
Chaos Unbound: Dawn of the Jihad	133	Falcon Ptomaine	157
How to Use This Section	134	Final Curtain?	159
Tracks	134		
Campaign Special Rules	135		

CREDITS

Writing

Herbert A. Beas II
 Randall N. Bills
 Loren L. Coleman
 Warner Doles
 Chris Hartford
 Ken Horner
 Kevin Killiany
 Nick "Gunslinger" Marsala
 David L. McCulloch
 Ben Rome
 Paul Sjardijn
 Christoffer "Bones" Trossen
 Øystein Tvedten
 Phaedra Weldon

Shadows of Faith

Loren L. Coleman

Chaos Unbound

Ben Rome
 Paul Sjardijn

Product Development

Herbert A. Beas II
 Randall N. Bills

Product Editing

Diane Piron-Gelman

BattleTech Line Developer

Randall N. Bills

Production Staff

Art Direction

Randall N. Bills

Cover Art

Klaus Scherwinski

Cover Design

Jason Vargas

Header Design

Jim Nelson

Layout

David M. Stansel-Garner

Illustrations

Gerhard Mozi

Additional Graphic Elements

Chris Lewis

Special Thanks

To... Everyone!

Playtesters and Fact-Checkers

Raymond Arrastia, Daniel M. Ball, Ron "Steel Hawke" Barter, Charles Borner, Paul "Blackhorse" Bowman, Rich Cencarik, John Danovich, Brent Dill, Tim DuPertuis, John "Quentil" Dzieniszewski, David Fanjoy, Bruce Ford, Jon Frideres, Aaron Gregory, Anthony "Shadhawk" Hardenburgh, Ross Hines, Glenn Hopkins, Peter La Casse, Rodney Klatt, Camille Klien, Edward "TenakaFurey" Lafferty, Edward Lott, Mike Miller, Jeff "Highlander" Morgan, Darrell "Flailing Death" Myers, Louis "Nukeloader" Myers, Michael Nelson, Andrew T. Norris, Keith "Vang" Oberschulte, Nathaniel Olsen, Aaron Pollyea, "Medron Pryde", Rick Raisley, Rick Remer, Christopher K. Searls, Chris "Chunga(lomeningitis!)" Smith, Joel Steverson, Rob Strathmann, Geoff Swift, Scott "Clutch" Taylor, Roland "Ruger" Thigpen, Todd Thrash, Jason "Panzerfaust 150" Weiser, Chris "Chinless" Wheeler, Aaron Williams, Charles Wilson, Andreas Zuber.

Proofcheckers

Mike Miller and Peter LaCasse

©2005 WizKids, Inc. All Rights Reserved. Dawn of the Jihad, Classic BattleTech, BattleTech, 'Mech, BattleMech, MechWarrior, Classic BattleTech RPG, AeroTech 2, and WK Games are registered trademarks and/or trademarks of WizKids, Inc. in the United States and/or other countries. No part of this work may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, without the prior permission in writing of the Copyright Owner, nor be otherwise circulated in any form other than that in which it is published. Printed in the USA.

Version 1.0 (June 2005)

Published by FanPro LLC

1608 N. Milwaukee • Suite 1005 • Chicago, IL 60647

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.fanprogames.com>
 (FanPro web pages)
<http://www.mwdarkage.com>
 (official MechWarrior: Dark Age web pages)
<http://www.wizkidsgames.com>
 (WizKids web pages)
<http://www.studio2publishing.com>
 (online ordering, sales and distribution)
<http://www.battlecorps.com>
 (official Classic BattleTech fiction)

THE DEVELOPER'S SAY



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

THE DEVELOPER'S SAY 

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

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

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

I made this decision for several reasons.

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

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

As FanPro has grown over the past three years and increased the quality, size and scope of its products in preparation for fully accepting the *BattleTech* mantle and moving the timeline forward once more, BattleCorps has grown as well. While able to explore numerous aspects of the *BattleTech* universe—including historical fiction—I believe BattleCorps' true contribution to the *BattleTech* property and more importantly to the community will be felt during the Jihad. In what has already generated a huge buzz of online

excitement, "Shadows of Faith"—the first of many stories supporting, fleshing out and weaving through the various future FanPro Jihad sourcebooks—appears at the front of this product.

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

So now comes the test.

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

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

Only you can judge whether or not we succeeded.

Thank you.

Randall N. Bills
Classic BattleTech Line Developer

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

Herbert A. Beas II
Classic BattleTech Assistant Line Developer



SHADOWS OF FAITH - PROLOGUE

NOTES

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

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

World Cathedral
Hilton Head, Terra
12 September 3067

"Something must be done!"

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

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

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

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

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

Inside, such devotion to "militant aestheticism" was just as complete. Walls of the nave and chancel paneled with holographic plates, able to dissolve into the illusion of a woodland setting, a

star-lit spacescape, or battle-scarred plains (among many other choices) at a command from any one of the Conclave leaders. An eight-bay transept, each station fully shielded and capable of assuming full local control over Terra's hyperpulse generators and—with careful coordination—the HPGs of several neighboring star systems as well.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Too many days spent fasting? Or too little sleep?

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

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

And Tharkad.

SHADOWS OF FAITH - PROLOGUE

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

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

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

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

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

What was Chang hiding?

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

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

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

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

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

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

Especially by the heretics.

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

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

They'd forgotten the strength of true faith.

They'd forgotten how to keep the real secrets.

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

"We could have done better."

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

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

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

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

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

SHADOWS OF FAITH - PROLOGUE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Was that blood Cameron smelled? A vulnerability?

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

He would seem to be capitulating to Blane, and scoring fresh blood against the leader of his own faction at the same time. But

if the True Believers' leader saw it coming, he had the sudden steel to not let it show on his face.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"We seem to have settled on two."

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

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

It worked nicely.

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

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

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

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



SHADOWS OF FAITH - PROLOGUE

Darkness.

Falling.

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

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

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

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

The ultimate in telecommuting.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Two doors led from this room. A double-wide sliding door of brushed steel. And a much smaller personnel access hatch re-

cessed in the back wall of the lab. Not secret, the smaller hatch, but definitely not for just anyone's use. Cameron paused near the hatch, and thumbed his DNA onto the small control panel. The hatch irised open and he activated the communications circuit as well.

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

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

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

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

"There was a problem?"

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

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

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

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

"Circles within circles," the bodiless voice said.

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

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

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

"And Kernoff?" asked the voice.

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

SHADOWS OF FAITH - PROLOGUE



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

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

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

But it was different. Oh yes.

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

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

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

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

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

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

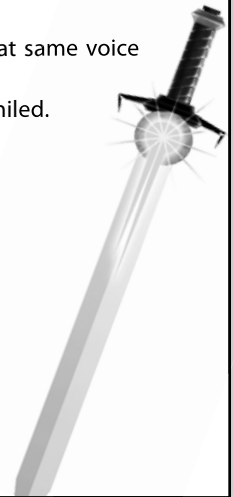
No way to detect his master's presence at all, until the shadows parted and a man shuffled forward. Not a giant of a man. Not even a great deal of physical strength in the way he moved, or stood, or occasionally shifted from side to side as if he might change his mind at any moment to return to his all-encompassing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

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

Someone, after all, must bring order.

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

And raising his head, Cameron St. Jamais smiled.



SHADOWS OF FAITH - CHAPTER 1

Harlech
Outreach
 18 October 3067

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

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

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

Another commander lost.

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

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

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

Leaning forward, putting his own balance to the test, Jason dug in with throttle and foot pedals to lever his *Glas* back into

the fight. Large hands wrenched at the BattleMech's control sticks. Already his finger tightened down on the main trigger.

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

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

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

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

Jason had just cut that particular cord.

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

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

Condition Feral.

Elgin.

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



SHADOWS OF FAITH - CHAPTER 1

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

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

"On your right, Captain!"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Wolf Actual is down!

Saw the crosshairs burn with a deep golden tone.

Set Condition Feral.

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

Elgin.

And again.

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

He had little but a guess that his first PPC blast might have cut into some of the struts which helped support the *Thunderbolt's*

massive gyro. He knew that his first combination of scarlet lances and flurry of emerald darts cooked away at least a ton...ton and a half of armor spread all across the back and legs of the *T-Bolt*.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Not anymore.

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

SHADOWS OF FAITH - CHAPTER 1



SHADOWS OF FAITH - CHAPTER 1



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Heading there, and not wanting to look.

At least Jason had company. A lance of Kestrel attack VTOL's which had taken up station above and to his left. Then a pair

of struggling Partisans. A lone *War Dog* limped along with Beta Regiment's insignia still visible on the left shoulder.

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

A *Vulture*. A *Highlander IIC*.

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

There was no call for mercy.

No thought of giving quarter.

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

To meet all resistance with overwhelming and deadly force.

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

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

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

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

It was gone.

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

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

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

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



SHADOWS OF FAITH - CHAPTER 1

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

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

Jason saw the *BattleMaster*, as well.

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

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

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

The classic *Archer* profile.

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

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

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

Because it was true. And no mistake.

Jaime Wolf was dead.

WWW.BATTLECORPS.COM

Shadows of Faith is continued on:

WWW.BATTLECORPS.COM



INTRODUCTION

One year.

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

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

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

Of that I have no doubt.

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

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

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

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

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

Working for a news agency like INN provides access to an unending stream of information. Some of that information is accurate, some worthless. Most of it falls somewhere in between. Unfortunately, we cannot know just how accurate each piece of in-

formation is when we first see it. One piece that seems completely trustworthy may turn out to be a complete fabrication, while the bits dismissed as ludicrous may be the keys to the whole puzzle.

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

That is why we launched this project.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



INTRODUCTION

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

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

INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

connection/DAWN OF THE JIHAD/section04: AND IT CAME TO PASS

AND IT CAME TO PASS





AND IT CAME TO PASS

**WAR ENGULFS
INNER SPHERE**

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

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

—Michael Bosworth, INN Special Correspondent

DECADE OF TUMULT

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

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

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

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

First Lord Betrays Star League

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

STAR LEAGUE REBORN

(21 November 3058)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

member-states as *de facto* occupation forces under the guise of peacekeepers.

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

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

CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY

(7 October 3062)

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

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

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

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

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

Destined Since Birth

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

When that happened, all hell broke loose.

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

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

THE WEDDING IS OFF

(12 November 3062)

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

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

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

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

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



AND IT CAME

CIVIL WAR ENDS

(24 April 3067)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

After five years and millions of casualties, the war ground to a halt with bloody final stands on the capital worlds of both nations—battles that unseated the Archon from her power bases, but also ground the militaries and economies of the former Federated

ALLIANCE IN TURMOIL

(30 August 3067)

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

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

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

Commonwealth to a pulp. The war has officially been over for less than a year, but the ultimate costs have yet to be computed and will likely never truly be known. Indeed, we still hear reports of scattered fighting on remote worlds between citizens and soldiers claiming loyalty to one or other of the two sides.

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

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

AND IT CAME TO PASS



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

Resting Dragon Threatened

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

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

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

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

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

And All the Rest

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

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

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

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

**PROFITS SOARING IN DEFENSE SECTOR**

(2 September 3067)

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

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

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

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

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

OPENING SHOTS

With the Inner Sphere and most of the Periphery already engulfed in war or its immediate after-effects, humanity was looking for someone or something to end the strife and once again bring peace and prosperity. The devoutly cult-like Word of Blake, with Jerome Blake as their supreme prophet and questionable individuals like Conrad Toyama and Myndo Waterly as "saints," saw

AND IT CAME TO PASS

themselves as that savior. Indeed, they believed that the so-called prophesies of Blake had foretold their ascent to power throughout the Inner Sphere, and saw the Star League Conference of 3067 as the time and place of that occurrence.

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

Prelude to Destiny

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

XIN SHENG: UNQUALIFIED SUCCESS

(20 November 3067)

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

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

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

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

XIN SHENG! XIN SHENG! XIN SHENG!

AND IT CAME TO PASS

WORD OF BLAKE PROTECTORATE

(18 February 3066)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In the wake of the Capellan-Free Worlds League invasion of the FedCom's Sarna March, and as Clan Jade Falcon streamed across the

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

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

Before the Blakists could complete their plans, Fate intervened.

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

DRAGOONS FORM AMC

(7 March 3066)

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

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

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

AND IT CAME TO PASS

OPTIMISM AND DREAD

(1 November 3067)

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

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

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

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

Fall of the Star League

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

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

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

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

Words of God, Swords of Providence

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

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

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

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

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

AND IT CAME TO PASS

HASEK: CAPELLAN MARCH THREATENED

(7 November 3067)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Dawn of the Jihad

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

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

NEWS DOWNLOADER v3.7



DATE & TITLE

SERVICE

STATUS

(01-SEP-67)

"HIGHLANDER DEATHS: ACCIDENT OR CONSPIRACY?"

[MERCNET]

COMPLETED

(30-SEP-67)

"AMC FORCES ATTACK KEID, HUNDREDS DEAD"

[VOICE OF TRUTH]

DOWNLOADING

(13-OCT-67)

"BARANOV STILL MISSING, PRESUMED DEAD"

[MERCNET]

ACCESSING

A SERVICE OF IRIAN NEWS INTERSTELLAR



FILTHY MONEY

**WAR STRIKES MERCENARIES!
MERCENARIES TARGETED BY COMRADES IN OPENING WAVES**

(5 April 3068)

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

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

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

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

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

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

Dragoons and any units that came to their aid, devastating the city of Harlech and causing incalculable damage and loss of life before falling prey to the Dragoons' fury.

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

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

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

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

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

THE GATHERING STORM

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

—Michael Bosworth, INN Special Correspondent

HALL JOINS FREE WORLDS LEAGUE

[Tamblyn]: I'm Amy Tamblyn here with Lieutenant Maribel DeYoung of Baranov's Guard, the defenders of Hall. How are you tonight, Lieutenant?

[DeYoung]: Good, thank you, Amy.

[Tamblyn]: So, can you give us any information on the recent fighting near South Harney?

[DeYoung]: I'd be glad to. The people of Hall deserve to know what's going on near their homes. I'm happy to report that the AMC forces that invaded our world have been driven back into the Margaard Highlands, away from the capital city and its surrounding villages. We've broken the mercenaries' back and expect they'll be pulling back to their DropShips and leaving soon.

[Tamblyn]: How has the death of Emperor Baranov affected your unit's morale?

[DeYoung]: The Emperor is not dead. He suffered bodily injury during a freak ammo explosion.

[Tamblyn]: Then can we talk to him?

[DeYoung]: No, I'm afraid not.

[Tamblyn]: Where is he being treated?

[DeYoung]: At a base camp not far from here.

[Tamblyn]: What is the extent of his—

[DeYoung]: Amy, when the Emperor is available for comment, we'll let you know. Now can we change the subject?

[Tamblyn]: Sure, Lieutenant. Um, what about the reports of attacks on some of the mercenaries' dependents?

[DeYoung]: The claims by the Third Disinherited about shooting their transports and civilian DropShips? False. The Fourth Oriente Hussars had no such orders and I can personally vouch for their commander. The guncam footage being bandied about by the press has been doctored to support false claims.

[Tamblyn]: Really? We've not heard...

[DeYoung]: I can put you in contact with the Hall Intelligence Division. They'll verify that for you.

[Tamblyn]: Ok, we'll do that. So what are your plans now?

MONEY

HALL JOINS FREE WORLDS LEAGUE - CONT.

[DeYoung]: I'll be addressing the planetary Senate tomorrow about some things, then I expect to make a major announcement that will protect Hall further from AMC predation.

[Tamblyn]: You heard it here, folks. Any hints, Lieutenant?

(DeYoung smiles)

[Tamblyn]: (giggles) Well, we tried. So will the mercenaries be allowed to leave Hall now?

[DeYoung]: Maybe. It depends on whether they release Force Commander Bobum from their custody. Otherwise, I'm sure the Hussars will pursue the AMC units to free their commander.

[Tamblyn]: So you won't vouch for their safe retreat?

[DeYoung]: Absolutely not. You've seen the carnage the AMC inflicted on the farms and villages in South Harney.

[Tamblyn]: Yes, we have.

[DeYoung]: Then you know we must either capture them and bring them to justice, or eliminate the problem.

[Tamblyn]: Eliminate?

[DeYoung]: No more questions. All will be explained tomorrow at the Senate building. This interview is over.

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

WHERE THE MONEY TRAIL ENDS

(14 October 3067)

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

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

Two operations I found suspect—Grantham Distributing and Xanadu Import and Exports—proved to be mere front companies. Neither provided a physical address, only a post office box. Looking at the Ministry of Commerce turned up the two compa-

nies' registered tax IDs. Both shared the same number, and had been registered by yet another company, Jamaison Interstellar.

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

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

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

NORTHWIND HIGHLANDERS RETURNING HOME

(8 September 3067)

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

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

FILTHY MONEY

HIGHLANDER ACCIDENT

(1 September 3067)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Highlanders back into bondage. Mark my words! Once a Death Commando, always a Death Commando."

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

DEATH OF A LEGEND

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

FIGHTING IN THE STREETS

(16 October 3067)

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

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

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

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

**FIGHTING IN THE STREETS -CONT.**

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

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

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

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

HARLECH CITY UNDER SIEGE!

(20 October 3067)

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

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

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

MONEY

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

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

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

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

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

COUNTERSTRIKE

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

DRAGOONS BREAK CONTRACT

(23 November 3067)

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

A LEGEND FALLS



A Legend Falls

Jaime Wolf

Jan. 24, 2980

Oct. 18, 3067

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

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

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

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

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

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

[Clavell]: "Status, Pollack?"

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

[Spider Four]: "Bastards."

[Clavell]: "Quiet, Ahmed."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

[Cameron]: "Neg, Spider One."

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

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

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

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

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

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

[Cameron]: "Report."

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

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

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

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

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

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

[Silence for several minutes]

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

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

[Shadd]: "Unresponsive?"

[Cameron]: "Life signs, Trooper?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



FILTHY MONEY

HARLECH CITY UNDER SIEGE, SUPPLEMENTAL REPORT

(18 November 3067)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Speculation is fierce over who was responsible for the Harlech attack. The simple answer is to blame Colonel Wayne Waco. Colonel Waco's famous feud with Wolf's Dragoons dates back to 3008, when his only son died fighting Zeta Battalion on New Aragon. The

colonel also held the Dragoons responsible for the near-total annihilation of Waco's Rangers on Coventry, though no evidence exists to support Waco's claims that Colonel Brubaker abandoned his troops to the Jade Falcons. But even though the late Colonel Waco had a motive, it seems improbable that he could have funded the operation alone.

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

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

NORTHWIND BLOCKADE

(23 December 3067)

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

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

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

FILTHY MONEY

DEBACLE OVER MARS

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

Colonel Shadd:

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

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

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

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

Major Benjiro Dixon, AMC, Keid

>>file opened<<

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

"...*Shivas* and *Thunderbirds* on your nine o'clock, angle three-five! Missile away! Evasive action!"

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

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

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

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

"...like damn demons from Hades..."

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

>>File ends<<

MARS: WHAT HAPPENED?

(15 December 3067)

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

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

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

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

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

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

FALL OF OUTREACH

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

FIRE IN THE VOID

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

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

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

[Voice off-camera mumbles urgently.]

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

MONEY

MERCENARY TREACHERY

(2 January 3068)

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

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

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

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

OUTREACH BOMBARDED!

(31 December 3067)

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

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

FILTHY MONEY

All that is over now.

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

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

OUTREACH: A SURVIVOR'S ACCOUNT

(31 January 3068)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

MRBC ADVISORY: UPDATES TO ROGUE/WANTED LIST

(31 March 3068)

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

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

Broadsword Legion

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

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

Last known whereabouts: Outreach

Bronson's Horde

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

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

Last known whereabouts: Epsilon Eridani

FILTHY MONEY

LEGACY OF DISTRUST

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

“DIVINE RETRIBUTION!”

(6 January 3068)

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

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

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

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

MORGAN KELL SPEAKS

(7 January 3068)

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

“These are dark days for the Inner Sphere.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

FILTHY MONEY

MERCENARIES UNDER FIRE

(20 January 3068)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

RUNNING THE BLOCKADE

(23 March 3068)

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

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

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

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

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



موزی

BURNING FIST



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

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

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

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

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

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

Before long, exactly that happened.

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

Many of those same survivors often ask if somehow all of this could have been prevented. If our leaders had retained the Second Star League, would the Word of Blake have come to us as allies, presenting the long-lost *Invincible* as a gift rather than an instrument of mass destruction? Would a few more years in an alliance with ancient enemies—at the expense of our precious na-

ON THE RED CARPET



(27 November 3067)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

tional resources in the wake of a destructive civil war—have been worth seeing Blake's “divine light” guarding our planets with the ferocity of the zealot?

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



BURNING FIST

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

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

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

THARKAD BURNS

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

DEATH FROM ABOVE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

[*Alliance Naval Command*]: "Damn it, Blake *McKenna*! Please disengage

your targeting systems and stand down now! ...*Dream*, this is Alliance Naval Command. Give those ships a wide berth. Change your vector by three-five degrees starboard, by—"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

[hisssssssssssssssss]

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

—Intercepted space traffic transmissions over Tharkad,

5 December 3067

BURNING FIST



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

STAR LEAGUE DISBANDS!

(30 November 3067)

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

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

“The withdrawal of these three states from the League came amid protests from representatives of the Draconis Combine, Free

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

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

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

RIGHTEOUS FIRE



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

<<<Transmission Begins>>>

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

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

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

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

<<<Transmission Interrupted>>>

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

<<<Interruption Ends>>>

[Ferranno]: “What the hell was tha—?”

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

[Ferranno]: “What the hell was that? The earth is shaking, and there’s been some kind of... some kind of explosion to the north—”

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

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

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

[Ferranno]: “Mother of God! Behind you!”

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

<<<Transmission Ends>>>

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

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

BURNING FIST

HORROR UNLEASHED

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

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

<<uplink connected>>

[Camera snap-fades up]

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

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

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

SUCCOR

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

Dear Illya,

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

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

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

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

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

All my love,

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

BURNING FIST



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

<<uplink disconnected>>

CHAOS AND CONFUSION

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

THE ARCHON DEAD?

(6 December 3067)

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

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

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



BURNING FIST

"SUMMIT OF LIGHT"

<<TBC broadcast file report 30671231>>

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

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

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

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

[Camera pans back to Majors.]

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

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

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

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

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

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

THE GREATER WAR

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

SKYE ASSAULTED!

(6 February 3068)

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

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

RACING TO THE SOURCE

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

To: Denise Heinrich, producer / TBC:Donegal

Date: 12 January 3068

Denise,

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

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

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

Danke!

Derek Majors

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

BURNING FIST

"WE WILL FIGHT ON!"

<<<signal uplink:established>>>

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

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

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

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

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

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

<<<signal uplink:terminated>>>

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

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

Thwarted, the Mariks turned to desperation tactics. The *Percival* took up station above our world and launched a devastating orbital bombardment against New Glasgow and the positions of the Fourth Skye Rangers, one of the largest defending formations on the planet. The assault inflicted massive damage, leveling

the New Rouken Glen Park, the CI-119 APC plant due south of that, and most of the suburbs in between.

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

"HOSTILE INTERCEPT"

<<<system recording: tempfile.30680220>>

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

[Muffled explosion in background]

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

[A sealed pressure door opens as camera approaches]

[Majors]: "Admiral! Precentor Martial! Can you tell us what's going on?" [Admiral Alain Beresick and Precentor Martial Victor Steiner Davion turn toward the camera]

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

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

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

[A hand covers the camera lens]

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

[Muffled explosion heard]

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

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

[Shuffling noises, sound of snaps being engaged]

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

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

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

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

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

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

<<<tempsave:terminated at source>>>

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



RETRACTION

This is Edgar Phoebus Jr. for SBC News.

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

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

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

<<<Transmission Interrupted>>>

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

<<<Interruption Ends>>>

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

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

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

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

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

BURNING FIST

LONG ODDS FOR DUKE ROBERT

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

WAVE TWO?

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

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

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

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

"According to—"

BURNING FIST

VOICE FROM THE DARKNESS

Mom--

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"The Jaegers' initial attack against the *Redemption* failed to penetrate its fighter screen, though reportedly the *Redemption's* defenses were substantially weakened in the attempt. Since then,

the regiment has tried to make use of any fighters available at the Lockheed complex for a second assault. With the damage done to those facilities, however, Jaegers commander Colonel Amy Smith admits that dislodging the Blakist vessel will be difficult. Colonel Smith is recommending that everyone seek shelter away from major population areas or other potential Blakist targets.

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

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

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

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

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

AN APPEAL FOR UNITY

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

My friends, we are facing our darkest hour.

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

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



"DRAGOONS BREAK CONTRACT!"

[VOICE OF THE DRAGON] COMPLETED

(28-OCT-67)

"BLACKWELL VP TO HONOR 'MERCENARY HEROES'"

[INN]

DOWNLOADING

(1-DEC-67)

"MYSTERY SHIPS SPOTTED IN THARKAD SYSTEM"

[SBC]

ACCESSING



BURNING FIST

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

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

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

Though we face the darkness, we are the light.

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

(signed)

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

SKYE-LEAGUE WAR FORCES ARCHON'S HAND

(20 March 3068)

Europa, Melissia [DBC] – Margrave and General of the Armies
Adam Steiner released a statement today decrying the “rogue

activities” of Duke Kelswa-Steiner, whom he blames entirely for the recent incursion into the Free Worlds League (locally dubbed Operation Überschatten). The attacks, which struck worlds rimward of Bolan Province, were sanctioned by Duke Kelswa-Steiner, who did not receive prior approval from the Archon for his action.

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

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

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

THE FREE WORLDS LEAGUE: UNHOLY ALLIANCE OR UNWITTING PATSIES?

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

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

[Annie Reed (Editor, Coventry Clarion)]: “Civic Advisory!”

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

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

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

[Ahinga]: “If any of them are in fact misled.”

[Smith]: “Oh, yes. There’s probably huge disagreement over what should be done, which you’d expect from such a coalition. But none of them

allegedly question that the ‘root problem’ is *our* nation’s coming apart for no apparent reason and launching ‘unprovoked’ attacks against them? Sorry, a conspiracy among aggregate demi-nations simply would not have that uniformity. There’s got to be dissent.”

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

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

[Smith]: “Now—”

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

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

BURNING FIST

ALLIANCE UNDER SIEGE—DAY 115

(30 March 3068)

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

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

During the brief question-and-answer session, the duke once again reassured everyone that he had total authority to carry out this assault, citing the announcement from Bolan Province’s mem-

bers of the Estates General that effectively declared war on the League on the first of March. That announcement followed less than a month after Skye’s own declaration of war. He also admitted that he had not been in contact with Tharkad since the system was attacked with a nuclear weapon, but stated he was within his rights as the duke of Skye to safeguard his citizens and those of his liege “regardless of our Archon’s status.”

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

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

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

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

THE ARCHON HAS FAILED US!

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

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

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

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

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

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



SOLARIS ATTACKED!

ALLIANCE UNDER

Assault!

BREAKING NEWS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

connection/DAWN OF THE JIHAD/section07: BROKEN SWORDS

BROKEN SWORDS



موزی

BROKEN SWORDS

To all members of the Orestes AFFS military attaché office:

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

—Colonel Persephone Conrad, AFFS Commander

SECURE/SENSITIVE/HIGHEST PRIORITY
182321TOCT3068

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

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

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

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

4. NEW AVALON HAS BEEN ATTACKED BY WORD OF BLAKE SPACE AND GROUND FORCES. THOSE FORCES HAVE USED ORBITAL BOMBARDMENT AND PRECISION AEROSPACE STRIKES AGAINST NUMEROUS TARGETS BUT TO DATE HAVE NOT USED NUCLEAR, BIOLOGICAL OR CHEMICAL (NBC) WEAPONS. TWO WAVES OF GROUND FORCES HAVE LANDED BUT HAVE NOT GAINED MORE THAN LOCAL GROUND SUPERIORITY. CURRENT AFFS

AND OTHER MILITARY FORCES IN-SYSTEM ARE DEEMED ADEQUATE TO DEAL WITH THE WORD OF BLAKE THREAT TO NEW AVALON. DO NOT SEND COMBAT FORCES TO NEW AVALON UNLESS DIRECTED BY THE SCA.

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

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

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

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

SIGNED//MARSHAL OF THE ARMIES JACKSON DAVION

BROKEN SWORDS

**SUNSET OVER THE SWORD**

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

—Michael Bosworth, INN Special Correspondent

WHO IS IN CHARGE?**Leadership of the Federated Suns in Question**

(25 January 3068)

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

Princess Regent Yvonne Steiner-Davion was in attendance at the Tharkad Star League Council meeting, along with the minister

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

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

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

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

THARKAD ATTACKED!

**Nuclear Weapons Used to Level Capital City**

(2 February 3068)

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

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

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

THE BASTARDS WILL PAY!



(11 December 3067)

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

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

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

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

BROKEN SWORDS

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

So whom does that leave? Duke George Hasek.

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

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

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

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

MARSHAL OF THE ARMIES SPEAKS Reassures Nation in Face of War

(17 March 3068)

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

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

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

The Word of Blake's siege of New Avalon remains in place. Their initial strikes left much of Avalon City and eleven other major urban centers in ruins, while their follow-up invasion force has attempted to take and hold the capital city and several nearby military bases

and industrial centers. The First Davion Guards, the Second NAIS Cadre and a host of reserve and militia regiments have thus far prevented the Blakists from achieving their goals. Marshal Davion

"BROTHERS, UNITE!"

My Dear Augustus,

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

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

With great concern, loyally yours,
Constance

Salutations Constance,

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

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

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

Respectfully yours, with hope,
Augustus

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

BROKEN SWORDS



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

"AFTER THE RATS"



(6 January 3068)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

THE FORGOTTEN FRONTS

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

THE PLEIADES QUESTION

Concordat Remains "A Nuisance"

(13 March 3068)

New Syrtis [FSNS] – In light of the Word of Blake's expanding war on the entire Inner Sphere, many ill-informed people have been asking if there's any reason to stand fast in the face of the Taurian "victory" in the Pleiades Cluster. The power of the press to misinform once again rears its ugly head.

Though Duke George Hasek easily evicted the Taurians from the six worlds they struck, their mere presence in the Pleiades Cluster has required the greatest effort. Months after the Taurians entered the Cluster, our Second Ceti Hussars are still hunting down what remains of the invaders.

Mainstream press agencies throughout the Inner Sphere are calling this a triumph of will for the Taurian Pleiades Hussars, claiming that they are winning the war by appealing to centuries-old pangs of nationalism among the local population. Those reporters conveniently overlook the massive militia, police and civilian effort to root out the few Taurians still operating in the Cluster.

In the Federated Suns, the story is more about the supposed hopelessness of the situation—all because of a Kittery News Service report that featured a letter home "from the front" in which a young soldier complained that the "indigs" were all out to get

BLAKIST ASSAULT CONTINUES 

Federated Suns News Service



(20 February 3068)

New Avalon [FSNS] – The citizens and soldiers of New Avalon have taken up arms to defend their homes for the second time in as many years, this time to fight back the Word of Blake assault against what seems to be all of humanity.

Just as news spread that the Second Star League had permanently disbanded, Word of Blake WarShips arrived in orbit around New Avalon and Tharkad. These ships immediately loosed their destructive energies against both worlds in an attempt to cow the leaders of the Inner Sphere into re-forming the Star League. Instead, their wanton depravity was the first strike in what has become their own private “holy war” against all of humankind—a Jihad that began with New Avalon.

The first strikes against the FedSuns capital hit in the early morning hours of December fifth, shortly after the attacking vessels arrived in-system via a LaGrange point close to the planet. Before alarms could sound in the cities, the Blakist ships opened fire, striking Avalon City, Ranford and New Rennes with energy blasts and missile strikes that killed tens of thousands and ignited firestorms that swept through all three cities for most of the next day. The Blakist ships continued their rampage of destruction for hours, targeting city after city, before vengeful Federated Suns fighters, DropShips and WarShips finally intercepted the invaders.

The resulting battle cost the Word of Blake at least one WarShip and left the rest of their fleet seriously damaged. In the exchange, New Avalon’s defenders lost two WarShips, numerous DropShips and fighters, and thousands of brave men and women. Moreover, the orbital strikes, which were aimed not at military bases but at cities, took the lives of 2.3 million innocents, left at least five times as many homeless and cut utilities across a quarter of the planet. Yet instead of falling victim to panic, the people of New Avalon spoke as one and refused to capitulate.

The assault wasn’t over, however. Six days later, the Blakists dropped their invasion force, damaging what military bases they could with orbital strikes before landing troops outside the still-burning Avalon City. AFFS forces rushed from their mountain bunkers to stop the invaders, halting them within kilometers of the city and beginning almost four months of constant fighting.

At first, the Blakists seemed to have one goal: capturing Avalon City and the Davion palace. As the battle for New Avalon dragged on and more Federated Suns’ troops entered the fray, Blake’s crusaders launched a campaign of terror. When they failed to conquer the world by February, they brought in reinforcements.

Still the people of New Avalon continue to resist. Tens of thousands have taken up arms to defend their cities against random attacks, while millions more work to keep power and telecommunications operating, or to repair the damage, or to otherwise aid their fellow humans in surviving this dark time. As the fighting continues and hundreds, if not thousands, fall each day, the people have spoken: tyranny shall not prevail!

BROKEN SWORDS

them, that the chain of command gave his unit no support and that the Taurians were inflicting horrendous casualties on them. No one reported, however, that this young soldier was a constant discipline problem and faced a court-martial for desertion shortly thereafter.

True, the Taurians are doing everything they can to slip supplies and insurgents into the Pleiades Cluster, but the best estimates from military and civilian analysts say that less than a battalion of Taurians remains in the region. But it's going to take time to root them all out, even with a full RCT on the job. After all, there are hundreds—if not thousands—of places to hide in the Pleiades.

LEST WE FORGET

(12 August 3068)

Robinson [ROBINSON REPORTER] – With all the misery afflicting our proud nation, it is hard not to get distracted and mourn for all the countrymen who suffer. But the Draconis Combine can always be counted on to provide us with the proper perspective.

Last night, Governor Morris Harland-Davion of Bryceland was found dead, literally cut down by what police have called “machete-like instruments.” Harland-Davion, the fifth in a string of recent assassinations of border world governors, is likely the latest in these Kurita-sponsored hits. Add to that the recent raids against Errai and Murchison, and it's clear Victor's good friend Hohiro has his sights set on the Draconis March. Such raids are common precursors, and the assassinations further serve to destabilize the region in anticipation of an invasion.

And let us not forget our brothers and sisters we had to leave behind the last time. With the evidence presented to us by Narhal's Raiders, no one can doubt that the Dracs have pressed our soldiers into slave camps to effect “war reparations.” I'm sure you've seen some of the footage cleared for the public, or at least heard about it.

How much longer must we stand by before we act? The best defense is a good offense. That's been true almost as long as we've waged war as a species. The time to act is now.

THE TAURIAN PROBLEM

—Excerpted from a private blog by Ikonoklast on the Kathil InterWeb, 24 September 3068

You know what? I don't care about your inferior opinion, MattSlatt. Go engrave it on a slab of ferrocrete and shove it up your {CENSORED} colon sideways. Your constant whining about the Capellan people this, the Capellan people that, is not scoring any points with ANYONE this side of the border. In fact, at the rate you're going, I can't help but wonder whether your income includes any funds of Confederation origin? Maybe someone ought to point out your happy little page (needs a bit more green there, buddy!) to our good friends in the MIIO.

And while I'm talking about Crapellan-huggers, I'm also getting sick and tired of all those pansies whining about New Avalon! People, it's been {CENSORED} nine months already! If it could be liberated, it would've been. Those WoBblies have got the whole

system locked down with WarShips! WarShips, people! You know, those handy little economy-sinking bathtubs of doom that can vape any invading force? Heard of 'em? Until we crank out a few more of those Avalon-class ships from Kathil, we're stuck without a way to kick that door open. So let those posh butter-eaters on New Avalon cover a bit longer in their {CENSORED} bomb shelters.

Meanwhile, has anyone noticed that we're still experiencing another invasion? No, not the Clans, idiot, I'm talking about the damn Taurians. Yeah! Remember them? They hit a bunch of our worlds back in early 3067 before we kicked 'em back out. Oh, except they didn't quite leave. Nope. They're still in the Pleiades Cluster after all this time, for {CENSORED}'s sake! And Dukey Hasek couldn't get rid of 'em, 'cause he's WAY overfocused on the Crapellans. (Shut UP already, MattStatt!) And now with his FUBAR invasion, looks like we can forget about kicking those invaders back to their loser Periphery state. In fact, a little military birdie told me the Taurians recently reinforced the Cluster and may soon pacify it! How about THAT for disgraceful! Nine months on New Avalon, twenty-one months in the Pleiades, hey everybody, just {CENSORED} invade us already! Make {CENSORED} landfall and we can't {CENSORED} get {CENSORED} rid of you {CENSORED} {CENSORED}!

{Consumer Advisory: Censoring provided by MechaSoft Parental Programming (all rights reserved); The content of User: Ikonoklast's personal journal does not reflect the views of Kathil Online or any of its worldwide subsidiaries.}

MARCHES AT WAR

In a grim echo of the Lyran border crises, the collapse of central authority with the siege of New Avalon quickly became apparent on the FedSuns Marches closest to their ancient enemies in the Draconis Combine and Capellan Confederation. Duke Sandoval's attacks against the Combine would seem almost restrained, considering the strikes of the civil war, but the Capellan campaign waged by Duke Hasek would push the Federated Suns into full-scale war even as the Davion capital fought for its life.

OPERATION SOVEREIGN JUSTICE UNDERWAY

(4 July 3068)

New Syrtis [FSNS] – Five years after the signing of the Capellan Peace Accords, the worlds of the St. Ives Compact are once again fighting for their freedom—this time without interference from the Star League or indifference from the Federated Suns.

Today, Duke George Hasek released the following statement: “At the request of Duke Kai Allard-Liao and the St. Ives legislature, we are providing support to the freedom-loving people of the St. Ives Compact as they once again fight for independence from the tyrannical Capellan Confederation.” His statement provided no further details and he did not answer questions from

BROKEN SWORDS

the press. Nevertheless, we have obtained further information from sources in Duke Hasek's headquarters as well as correspondents in the Compact.

On 25 June, agents working for Hasek spirited Duke Kai Allard-Liao away from St. Ives. According to reports coming out of the Confederation, Allard-Liao was kidnapped by the infa-

"EVADING THE HOUNDS"

(6 January 3068)

Electra, Pleiades Cluster [TPB] – Michael, we're on the move, this time on yet another offensive operation. A company of Fedrats has been pursuing us for the past four months and our subaltern has finally begun striking back. This will be the third such operation since the Blake assault on New Avalon began last month. The Blakist attack seems to have sent massive shockwaves rippling through the Federated soldiers' ranks. They're on edge now, fearful that any concentration of troops or supplies will bring a Word of Blake fleet over their heads.

The subaltern has been relaying news of the New Avalon siege to all the other resistance groups, and the response has been overwhelming. Some now think the Word of Blake has taken sides in the crusade to reclaim our homelands, and believe we're over the hump. Nothing, it seems, will stop our Taurian soldiers from marching forward to reclaim the Pleiades Cluster.

I'm sitting here in the back seat of one of the lead *Cataphracts* as we approach the enemy's position, and we're relaying our telemetry to a battery of artillery we quietly moved into position three days ago. Michael, you need to understand, a month ago that accomplishment would have been inconceivable. The Davions would have detected the movement and intercepted our forces long before they made it to their designated spot. Now they've gotten so sloppy and distracted that we can advance and fall back wherever and whenever we want.

We've turned the last corner inside the canyon and can see the Davions' base camp up ahead. A lone Stealth seems to be protecting this area of the camp; we're getting ready to throw everything we have at it and anyone else who attempts to assist it. This time we're going for it all, to finally get rid of our pursuers while we have the chance. I think we may have caught most of them out of their ma—What's that?

Oh, all right. I'm being ordered to end my live transmission to clear the comm channels for the military chatter. So we're cutting this transmission short and I'll come back later with the results.

But before I go, I just want to say that the heavy LRM carriers have begun showering the Davion camp with missiles, and it looks simply marvelous.

For Taurian Public Broadcasting, I'm Richard Walker. Over and out.

—Filed by a reporter embedded with Concordat forces on Electra

OVERSTATEMENTS OR UNDERESTIMATIONS?

(23 September 3068)

Reisterstown [REISTERSTOWN GAZETTE] – I am confident that everyone has Operation Sovereign Justice on their minds almost as much as the ongoing siege of our capital. The latest reports suggest that Duke Hasek is making progress, taking some additional worlds, though those same reports also speak of terrible civil unrest on the planets already captured. Sun-Tzu Liao seems to be using the same ploys that worked so well in the Chaos March: seeding terrorist cells among captured populations, supplying any insurrectionist movements that might pop up and overall supporting subversive propaganda.

Duke Hasek states that his campaign is proceeding well and advancing toward Sian. Meanwhile, however, we've seen almost no reports on the St. Ives region—the reports that describe civilian unrest and insurrection. Sure, some St. Ives troops have joined us. Others still fight us. Who exactly are we liberating here? We come to give these people freedom, and instead they kill our troops? What is wrong with them? They fought for independence only a few years ago, and now they're willing to lay down their lives for Sun-Tzu's oppressive regime! Why do we bother?

Meanwhile, we continue to lose battles and take casualties. Did Duke Hasek underestimate the Capellans that much? Did we all? Or perhaps our troops are not as strong as we thought? I'm sure you've all seen the news reports suggesting far too few DropShips are being moved to transport all elements of a unit, almost as if many units are understrength. The duke has so far ignored such claims, but sheer numbers don't lie. You need more than an *Overlord* and three *Unions* to move a 'Mech regiment.

The prospect of an invasion collapsing on itself, with Capellan troops counterattacking, is grave; the suffering of the Capellan people in the war zone is awful. But not as chilling as the thought that Federated Suns citizens are in a war zone just two short jumps away.

Why haven't we liberated New Avalon yet?

mous Bounty Hunter, who killed a dozen bodyguards and more than a hundred civilians. By contrast, news from Free Capella does name the infamous Bounty Hunter as Allard-Liao's rescuer, but says the dead were eight Death Commandos and a battalion of Capellan bodyguards charged with preventing Duke Allard-Liao's escape.

Three days later, the first of four mercenary regiments officially released from AFFS service to take part in this operation made landfall in the St. Ives Compact. Coordinating with freedom fighters and home guard units identified by Free Capella agents, these mercenaries overran and destroyed Capellan-loyal garrison forces. According to press releases from St. Ives, that world and three others are free from Capellan rule and requesting humanitarian aid and other support from Duke Hasek. AFFS units along the Capellan border are on high alert and mobilizing for response to any Capellan aggression.

BROKEN SWORDS

HERDING CATS

Lord Marshal, I order you, as Regent of the Federated Suns, to stand down and recall your forces to worlds within the Federated Suns borders in order to assist in our defense against the Word of Blake invaders. This is the third such order I have sent since you initiated hostilities with the Capellan Confederation. Your actions have not benefited the Federated Suns' interests or her people.

George, I know you probably still think someone else should be running our nation, and that rightfully Victor should stand where I do. But I am here instead, and I need your help to keep this state together.

If you do not withdraw your troops and redirect them to the Federated Suns' defense, I will be forced to take appropriate measures to deal with such insubordination. I deeply regret that it has become necessary to issue such threats, but I will do whatever it takes to keep this nation safe.

The ball is in your court now, George.

(signed)

Princess Regent Yvonne Steiner-Davion

—AFFS Priority One communique issued 2 August 3068

(undelivered)

Compact is fighting for its freedom, and we will support them as they battle an unjust and totalitarian government—one curiously unaffected by the Blakist war currently being waged across the Inner Sphere.”

By all accounts, Duke Allard-Liao is in transit to New Syrtis and could not be reached for comment. Likewise, his mother, Duchess Candace Liao, is currently on Sian and unavailable to the press.

SOVEREIGN JUSTICE STRIKES DEEP

Capellans Unable to Stand Fast

(5 October 3068)

Kathil [FSNS] – Amid the chaos of the Inner Sphere, the war to again win freedom for the St. Ives Compact looks as if it might once and for all crush the Federated Suns' greatest enemy—the Capellan Confederation.

Operation Sovereign Justice began a little more than three months ago as Duke George Hasek supported the St. Ives Compact's bid for freedom. Initially intended as a humanitarian mission to provide relief to worlds freed from the Confederation's tyrannical grasp, with attached military forces authorized only to defend themselves and their charges from counterattack, the operation turned military when Capellan forces counterattacked the Compact and the Federated Suns.

“The citizens of St. Ives have themselves thrown off the bonds of oppression,” Duke Hasek said almost two months ago on New Syrtis, standing next to Duke Kai Allard-Liao. “Yet their cousins refused to recognize their independence in the most despicable way. Chancellor Liao must learn firsthand the price of despotism.” The very next day, AFFS forces crossed the Capellan border and struck targets in the Confederation.

Baron Linus Rou, spokesman for Duke Hasek, said of this alert, “We will not invade a foreign nation, but the Federated Suns will respond to requests for aid from our allies, and must provide the assistance demanded by our treaties with them. The St. Ives

NEWS DOWNLOADER v3.7



DATE & TITLE

(18-DEC-67)

“WORD OF BLAKE SHIPS DESTROY HIGHLANDER JUMPSHIPS”

SERVICE

[MERCNET]

STATUS

COMPLETED

(19-DEC-67)

“NEW AVALON DEFENDERS HOLD LINE, CRIPPLE BLAKE FLAGSHIP”

[NANS]

DOWNLOADING

(21-DEC-67)

“BLAKE WARSHIPS ASSAULT OUTREACH”

[INN]

ACCESSING

A SERVICE OF IRIAN NEWS INTERSTELLAR

HARD EVIDENCE

Major,

During Recon Operation Domingo, our operatives located an apparent prisoner-of-war camp on Altai, confirming your suspicions about the illegal and inhumane detention of Federated Sun soldiers.

After following several dead leads, our operatives located the camp several kilometers away from a newly started germanium mine on the planet's more remote continent. Providing little safety gear or proper equipment, the Combine handlers are working the prisoners sixteen hours a day with scant food and water. For punishment, they send prisoners to "The Hill" in the center of the camp, where they publicly flog them or perform rudimentary "medical" operations for the sole purpose of inflicting pain and humiliation.

Our last tactical operation immediately before extraction to our safe house was an unauthorized raid into the prison camp to extract several prisoners. Though we lost two operatives and three prisoners, the liberation of a dozen more prisoners, including several higher-ranking officers, allows us to classify the operation a success. Per your request, we have located Lieutenant Jacob Grunder, who is currently being held in "The Hill," but were unable to extract him.

Given that the DCMS now knows of our presence, we expect them to quickly relocate the camp to another site. I suggest another, larger-scale operation to extract the rest of the prisoners before they can do so.

—Report synopsis by DMI Operative "Gabriel" to Major Grunder on the latest operation in Draconis Combine space, delivered 28 August 3068

Shortly after Hasek's appearance, Baron Linus Rou, the duke's press secretary, and Lieutenant General Yelena Westerbridge, spokesman for the AFFS on New Syrtis, presided over a press conference. "The Capellans have taken a cue from the Word of Blake and are striking civilian targets in the St. Ives Compact and the Federated Suns in an apparent attempt to erode popular support for the Compact's fight for freedom," said Rou. "And they do this while holding Duchess Candace Liao hostage on Sian. You can almost see the gun to her head as she reads those statements condemning the people who 'fight against the wisdom of the Celestial Throne.' The people of St. Ives are not buying it, and neither should anyone else."

Westerbridge spoke about specific details of the military operation. "To this point, AFFS forces have defended themselves without penetrating the Capellan border. Those gloves are coming off now. In conjunction with St. Ives Military Command troops, regular and mercenary, we will begin targeting military objectives in the Confederation."

The lieutenant-general did not name specific targets, but she did indicate that the planned strikes will decimate critical military infrastructure while crippling Capellan logistics lines. Already we are hearing reports of assaults on military bases deep

"IS ANYONE OUT THERE?"

Dear Joanne,

I'm not sure if our runners will get this out to you, but if you're reading this, thank God for small favors. He doesn't seem to be granting us any inside this city.

We made it off the bases after the initial bombardment and got into the city ok. The abandoned warehouse where my company took refuge is holding up pretty well, though it hasn't withstood one of their naval bombardments yet. Probably won't hold up to a few laser bursts either, but right now, it still has three and a half walls and a roof.

I wish our chain of command were as intact. The highest-ranking officer we've managed to contact is our colonel, and it seems we have no organized resistance to speak of. The only thing keeping the Wobblies out is our collective sheer determination. I bet if we had some coordination, we could push these bastards off the planet.

We keep getting news articles about everywhere but New Avalon. It sounds like Sandoval is getting ready to go another round with the Draconis Combine, and Hasek seems more intent on freeing some damned Liao district than his own capital! Even before Hasek gets done pushing that Periphery scum out of the Pleiades, he's starting another war. And what is our precious "Princess Regent" doing? Who knows?! I wish she'd stop acting like a scared kid and start acting like a Davion. Oh, to have Victor back in charge.

If those idiots don't get their heads out of their rears, we're going to end up like Tharkad, nuked and bombarded off the maps. Because we've been showing the Wobblies on the ground the price they'll have to pay to take to get this rock, and if they want us gone, they have to send New Avalon to hell along with us.

I've got to go. Smitty just stumbled in with his damaged *Centurion* and now we only have three and a quarter walls to hold up the roof.

Love ya lots,
Mikey

—Letter discovered in the ruins of an Avalon City warehouse, dated 14 September 3068

in Confederation space, including worlds just a jump or two away from Sian and Capella.

"We will make it impossible for Sun-Tzu Liao to prosecute his war on freedom, ensuring the continued survival of the St. Ives Compact," said Westerbridge. When asked about reports of St. Ives forces battling AFFS troops, she said, "In every war of independence, some support the wrong side. Some have freely chosen their way, while others have fallen prey to the Chancellor's secret police. Already, the people of St. Ives are speaking as one—they have known freedom and they have known the yoke of oppression. They have chosen freedom, and we stand beside them in that choice."

connection/DAWN OF THE JIHAD/section08: TEARS OF THE DRAGON

TEARS OF THE DRAGON



TEARS OF THE DRAGON

Karma.

Does that not encompass the events that have transpired over the past twelve months? Have not our past transgressions returned to us a hundredfold? A thousand? Ten thousand? Like a viper allowed to fester in the tall grass until the stoutest bamboo walls cannot protect against sharp fangs and glistening venom. Not since the appalling time of the Von Rohrs and their defilement of the Chrysanthemum Throne has the Dragon felt the savage beak of the Yellow Bird so keenly.

When did our actions bring about such backlash? Karma tilting for rebalance? When did we stray?

In Volume II of the Dictum Honorium, do we not read the following Greater Quintadocs:

- Working toward the destruction of all our enemies.
- Promoting a unified Star League under the banner of the Dragon.

And who are our enemies? Have we made the gravest of mistakes—believing that the enemy of my enemy can offer more than a momentary alliance between warriors on the field of battle? That when the common foe has been vanquished, the alliance of contrivance can allow for the sheathing of blades? Have we taken enemies into the Dragon's lair? Allowed swine among our most precious jasmynes?

Some will decry my words. The word "traitor" will surely ring amid the Imperial City's teak and marble towers, while a quick brush stroke might send me to a hole from which I'll never depart. Others will assume I am in league with the *bakemonos* blackening the jewel of the Combine even as I write.

But is it traitorous to speak the truth?

Have we not allowed House Davion to befriend us? The enemy of our enemy, they came as a Dragon's Dove, and united we slew the Smoke Jaguars and put the remaining Clans in their place. But have they not struck across our borders since? Are they not even now striking at our worlds unprovoked, while the entire Inner Sphere shakes from the plague of the Word of Blake? Are the warriors of the Pillar of Steel not becoming a river of Dragon Tears? Should we not have turned our swords against an enemy who has brought war to us for centuries as soon as the last Jaguar fell?

And what of the *Kokuryu-kai*? While some will say I am in league with these *ronin*, they are gravely in error. The Black Dragons have risen against their rightful lord and there is only one punishment fitting for such actions. A clean death is too simple for the Yellow Birds they have placed at the Dragon's eyes. Yet again, they represent an enemy we did not destroy. No matter how often their poisoned darts cut us, we failed to excise their disease from the Dragon's womb.

And what of this Star League? Perhaps the greatest of all misjudgments—to join an alliance of convenience? To lay aside the greatness of the First Egg instilled in House Kurita by our founder Shiro himself, so that we may purchase cheaper trinkets from merchants? So that our Unproductives might find a path to

unjust riches, wealth they might have secured if they worked for the Dragon as they should? Or perhaps the Star League provides a cover to allow a swine to snuffle our jasmine, ultimately wilting and destroying the flower of the Dragon?

The original Star League succeeded because of the iron-fisted rule of House Cameron. A second Star League can only succeed under a similar iron will. That will should be the Dragon's. Without it, all is folly... pearls before swine.

In defense of the Coordinator and myself, I do not decry all his actions. His reforms within our nation I applaud, because I know those changes have made us stronger, more unified and focused. Yet we have gone astray in thinking such reforms need apply to our enemies as well.

With Luthien truly blackened, with the Coordinator and his heir leaving us rudderless and the Word of Blake spreading their pogrom throughout the realm of the Five Pillars, it is time to remember our roots. Time to ring the Dragon's lair in a storm of swords. Time to sweep our shores clean.

Or karma will destroy us.

—Mishcha Kurosawa, Koe No Ryu, 18 October 3068

DREAMS TORN ASUNDER

Unlike the attacks on Tharkad and New Avalon, the Word of Blake's holy war did not touch the Draconis Combine immediately or with the same evident ferocity. However, to say the Combine was not shaken by the events surrounding the Star League's dismemberment would be a grave error. Within a few weeks, the dream of a united Star League was dashed and close allies of the realm were under attack, while at home dark and ominous events had just begun to unfold.

—Michael Bosworth, INN Special Correspondent

LEADERS GATHER FOR WHITTING 3067

(27 November 3067)

Tharkad [VOTD] – House leaders and their entourages from all over the Inner Sphere have begun to arrive here on Tharkad for the 3067 Whitting Conference. Coordinator Kurita made planetfall last night aboard the DCMS *Spirit of the People* with several members of the royal court and ISF Director Ninyu Kerai-Indrahar. The Dragon's heir, SLDF Commanding General Hohiro Kurita, is already in-system and on final burn with an estimated arrival tomorrow.

First Lord Månsdottir has had a tumultuous term these past three years, seeing the end of the FedCom Civil War and border raids into Combine space. General Kurita's term as Commander of the SLDF was a huge success; SLDF units received multiple upgrades, new bases were constructed in the Combine and Free Worlds League, and the SLDF showed a strong presence along the Clan fronts, keeping Clan raiding parties to a minimum.

Many hope for a peaceful outcome from this meeting of the Star League Council, given that most fighting along major borders

TEARS OF THE DRAGON

everywhere in the Inner Sphere has quieted. For the first time since the Clan invasion, peace may be the norm rather than the exception for the Inner Sphere. Coordinator Kurita is expected to offer several new proposals that will boost the Combine's economy, open up new colonization efforts along the Pesht District border and develop stronger ties with Lyran agricultural shipping conglomerates.

Expectations are high for the upcoming conference, where several new members are expected to be formally welcomed into the Star League, including the Taurian Concordat and the Word of Blake. The topic of conversation across the Lyran capital, however, is who will be elected as First Lord for the upcoming term. Speculation runs high that Captain-General Thomas Marik will assume the post, with the Lyran Archon Peter Steiner as a close second.

With three days to go until the opening ceremonies, only representatives from the Capellan Confederation and her trading ally, the Magistracy of Canopus, have yet to arrive. These members are needed to maintain unity and equality for the Inner Sphere, and we understand that the Confederation's representative is en route. Barring travel delays, the Whitting Conference will start as scheduled.

STAR LEAGUE DISBANDS

For Immediate Release

(30 November 3067)

Tharkad [VOTD]—Over vehement objections from Coordinator Theodore Kurita, Elected-Prince Christian Månsdottir, Precentor Martial Victor Steiner-Davion and representatives of the Word of Blake and the Taurian Concordat, the Star League dissolved today. This unprecedented—and unanticipated—action came on the heels of caustic statements issued by the Capellan representative condemning the Star League and its function. His remarks sparked a long and heated debate that ended the dreams of unification for many in the Inner Sphere in a close but damning vote of no confidence, despite the desperate incorporation of the Taurian Concordat and Word of Blake into the voting membership.

"Where once we were harmonious, discord has fallen," remarked the Coordinator in a brief statement. "It pains me to see all the hard work of my fellow citizens and many others across the Inner Sphere pushed aside out of selfishness and greed. We have proved the Clan enemy correct by allowing our discord and individual desires to sever our hopes for peace and a new Golden Age."

The stunned crowds booed the Capellan representative, Mandrinn Kian Lih Sung, as he headed out of the Alessandro Memorial Auditorium on his way back to his DropShip. Immediate reaction on the streets of Tharkad put the blame squarely on the Confederation. "This was the best chance at peace we had, and that no good power-monger Sunny-Cho ruined it for all of us so he could make the evening news," commented Alexis Draven, a local record executive in the crowd outside the Auditorium.

The Word of Blake representatives seemed particularly shocked at the results of the no confidence vote, as the quasi-reli-

THARKAD BOMBED!

For Immediate Release, Top Priority

(6 December 3067)

New Samarkand [VOTD] – "Tharkad City has been bombed." That was the word today out of the governor's office, confirming the rumors that have swirled around water coolers, taxi stands and college papers across the planet. According to Governor Rothschild, the Lyran capital suffered a nuclear strike from an unknown WarShip orbiting the planet. Reports that the strike came from the ancient Lyran ship LCS *Invincible* remain unconfirmed.

"Coordinator Kurita and his heir are safe, having departed Tharkad almost twenty-four hours before the bombardment. They are currently en route to the Combine through a secure route and will enter our nation's borders in the next few weeks," said Governor Rothschild.

Details of the nuclear holocaust are sketchy at best, but various sources confirm that the devastating attack wiped out much of the capital city. Most of the planet is without power, and unsubstantiated rumors tell of elite BattleMech squads landing on the planet's surface. "The Draconis Combine condemns the perpetrators of this attack and their use of illegal weapons of mass destruction on the innocents of the Alliance," commented the Coordinator in a message sent to all Combine news stations. "Once the identity of these murderers has been confirmed, appropriate measures will be taken to assure the safety of the Combine people and the population of the Inner Sphere."

To protect the loyal citizens of the Dragon, all military leaves have been cancelled in all districts, and the DCMS has gone to standby alert. "Any attempt to strike a Combine world will be met with swift action," said *Tai-sho* Hohiro Kurita in a brief statement sent to prefecture capitals. "All on-world militia commanders are to report to their superiors. To the citizens of the Dragon, we understand the hardships you are about to face with the increased security and the calling up of our reservists. Rest assured that if the blood of the Dragon is spilled, we will spill much more from our enemies."

gious order was scheduled to make its membership presentation at this summit. The Blake entourage left the Auditorium in tense silence, with Precentor Martial Cameron St. Jamais promising the media a statement tomorrow. The Word of Blake's probationary membership was to end with this session and a vote was to have occurred in a few days to consider them for full membership in the Star League. Instead, the withdrawal of the Confederation and summary call of no confidence in the League forced a vote that required a three-quarters majority to sustain the body. Breaking protocol, the standing First Lord enabled the probationary members to vote, but to no avail.

The Capellan Chancellor was not present at this year's conference, choosing instead to send his vitriolic holoivid message

TEARS OF THE DRAGON

via special courier. Also absent were representatives from the Magistracy of Canopus.

THE DRAGON SPEAKS

The past few weeks have been trying to us all.

With the dissolution of the Star League, we are once again left alone in the stellar night. However, rest assured that we are not adrift.

We have come through much these past months and years, from outside enemies and certain internal disruptions. The Ghost

FAILURE

It is sad to learn of the breakdown of the Star League. That which offered hope to humankind—and, more importantly, to *us*—is now nothing but another shattered dream.

How could this happen? An institution that helped rid us of the vile evil known as Clan Smoke Jaguar? That subdued the Nova Cats to become almost-citizens of the Dragon?

It is Coordinator Theodore's fault. His lack of fortitude and determination has failed the Combine.

How many loyal soldiers died under the Star League banner? Were they not deemed worthy enough to sail under such an honorable flag to help spearhead the removal of the Yellow Bird in the form of the Jaguar? Are the lives they gave on so many worlds—Luzerne, Schuyler, Byesville and more—worth nothing? They watered the Star League's soil with blood, and for what? So that the Coordinator can—dare I print it—betray the spirits of those honorable sons and daughters?

His abuse of the First Lordship's powers pales in comparison to his refusal to uphold the ideals of the Star League. We are no better than the *gaijin* around us. The demon-spawn Victor can throw away lives in a reckless attempt to seize his throne, because the hated Federated Suns do not value life or honor.

But we know better. And our Coordinator—who embodies the Dragon, no less!—should know better. Now our enemies view us as baseless cowards and we are weakened as a society. How can we look at ourselves every morning, knowing that our beloved Combine—our life!—has been called into question? Are we a failure as a people? Do we share the shame of our Coordinator's inaction? How shall we carry this burden?

Perhaps a change is needed. Perhaps a new sun should rise. Or perhaps our "beloved" Coordinator needs to turn his eyes away from the Federated Suns' blinding glare and look back to our roots, our glory, our honor.

Shameful days have come. We should mourn the loss of honor and the ideals we have spurned. The Dragon weeps today. And I weep with it.

—Editorial by an unknown author, "erroneously printed" in "Plurality This Week" (Shimosuwa Cultural College), ed. XII, vol. iii (Dec 3067)

LUTHIEN BLACKOUT

For General Release

(20 December 3067)

Dieron [VOTD] – Minister Tsurui Chamberlain of the Ministry for Communications (MinCom) briefly announced today a loss of communication from Luthien. "There is nothing to worry about, as the system was scheduled for a routine relay upgrade. Under normal circumstances, such upgrades only take the transceiver offline for an hour or so, but in some cases errors may be found and need additional time to be corrected. This is the case here. Luthien received its last upgrade well over five years ago and is known to have some power connection issues, so this problem was not unanticipated.

"We assure the good citizens of Dieron that there is nothing unusual about this temporary loss of communication. ComStar has assured us that they will continue to take messages for Luthien as normal and will transmit them once the HPG comes back online in a day or so. In the meantime, MinCom will reimburse Combine citizens and businesses twenty percent for all transmissions passing through the Luthien station for the inconvenience.

"Thank you for your understanding and patience in this matter. Any further questions may be directed to your local MinCom office."

Bear raids. Minor attacks by disloyal members of the Federated Suns. The unfortunate passing of the Keeper of the House Honor. The dashing of our hopes for economic growth and prosperity among the other Great Houses. Yet we survive. We are strong. Because we are the Dragon.

As we prepare for our future, know that the Dragon is stronger than it has ever been. I know this because I know the Dragon's strength is you, the glorious citizenry of the Combine. You have helped move the Dragon to new heights economically and militarily, and even in the troubled times of the Star League, the Dragon has held its head high because you believed. You are the purity, the honor, the shape of the Dragon.

Our honor is intact and will not be broken. Our duty is clear: to remain a beacon to our neighbors, embodying the ideals and character of the Star League now departed.

As these crises pass, we will stand unbroken, unbent by the waves that crash over us. I know this because I see the stoutness of heart in you, the people.

The Combine shall prevail in this uncertain future. Because we are the Dragon.

By cowardice struck

The Dragon sheds tears anew

Fire is rekindled.

—Statement issued by Coordinator Theodore Kurita, 15 December 3067

TEARS OF THE DRAGON

BLACK DRAGON RISING

For the Draconis Combine, the true crisis of the Jihad began with betrayals and the retreat of a trusted ally at the most unfortunate moment. Even as the embodiment of the Dragon returned to face the emergencies on the home front, tragedy struck again, leaving the future of a nation in doubt as the fires of war spread throughout the Kurita realm.

UPRISING ON LUTHIEN!

Citizens of the Dragon! The Imperial City's alleged communications upgrade is a lie. Luthien is under siege!

"LOYAL CITIZENS OF THE DRAGON, UNITE!"

Citizens of the Combine, hear us!

Today we have done what honor has demanded ever since the collapse of the Second Star League. The fall of such a noble enterprise, bought and paid for with the Dragon's own blood, is the final evidence needed to show that our Coordinator has failed in his duty to safeguard the entirety of the Combine. Because of this failure, we have deemed it necessary to seize control of the Palace and of Luthien, and hold it in trust for the people until such a time as worthy leadership arises.

It is the right and duty of the people to reject our Coordinator if we see that he has become tainted by the *gaijin* around him. Who better to show the error of his ways than the Order of Five Pillars, the embodiment of the Purity of the Dragon? Is it not right that in order to save the whole we must sacrifice part of the body?

Our pledge to you, loyal citizens, is that we will merely safeguard the Chrysanthemum Throne until the Dragon can reclaim his majesty and reject these new ways that threaten our existence, our purpose, our being.

Soldiers loyal to the Order and to the *Kokuryu-kai* are being deployed around Luthien to protect the Dragon from foreign infection. Cooperate with them. Love them. Honor them. They are the scalpel to the cancer of Theodore. They are the extension of the Dragon's will, if not the head.

We pledge to you our duty and honor to hold this world in trust for the Dragon's resurgence. We will fight for you and die for you, shedding our blood for your souls. Remember, Theodore and his evil spawn spilled the bloods of thousands of your fathers and sons for no noble cause, no honor, no sense of duty—only to fulfill the whims of the *gaijin* Davion and his poisonous family, to create more powerful enemies of the Dragon that threaten our very existence.

This day shall long be remembered as the Day the Dragon Returned. Celebrate! And wait with us as the true Dragon comes to reveal himself, to carry us forward into a brighter future!

—Front page message on all Luthien press pieces, 30 December 3067

The local militia force responsible has been identified as servants of the Black Dragons (*Kokuryu-kai*), a reactionary political movement targeted by the ISF in several purges since 3057. Reports of sporadic fighting in some areas continue to pour in, and many of the capital's key people are missing. The city is held hostage at this point and all communication in and out has been severed, except for broadcasts of anti-Kurita propaganda by the invading force.

We know little about the true purpose of this attack, so close on the heels of the Star League's disbanding as well as Tharkad's bombing. One cannot help but wonder at the timing of these events and speculate as to their connection. And as we were misled in the beginning—with Luthien's blackout officially attributed to a communications system upgrade—how can we trust *any* other reports glossed over by the Dragon's Voice?

—Anonymous underground student pamphlet circulated on Benjamin, 25 December 3067

BETRAYAL AT THE DRAGON'S HEART

(16 January 3068)

Galedon V [VOTD] – Officials in the Prefecture Government confirmed today that Luthien is under attack by *dohi*—rebel—forces, and further complications have arisen from the arrival of a Word of Blake war fleet that has dispatched troops without authorization from the DCMS High Command.

Forces from the *Kokuryu-kai dohi* have seized the Unity Palace compound and declared the Coordinator unworthy of his position as leader of the citizenry. They have executed several members of the palace staff and captured *Tai-sa* Franklin Sakamoto, head of the *Otomo* after the assassination of Griffon Meshune in the opening hours of the sneak attack. These same individuals attempted to assassinate the Coordinator in 3058, the blessed Omi Kurita and her friend, Victor Steiner-Davion, in 3060, and who instigated the Ghost Bear war on our border, which saw the needless deaths of many of the Dragon's sons and daughters.

Demanding to be heard, the *dohi* seized the VOTD broadcast facility in the Imperial City and have been broadcasting their propaganda over the planetary communications networks. They demand that the Combine revert to the isolation of the early 31st century, reject the mercenaries assigned by the DCMS to protect certain worlds, and remove Theodore and his offspring from the Kurita bloodline "so that a true Kurita like the great Takashi may take the Dragon to its rightful place in the Inner Sphere." If these demands are not enacted, they threaten to plunge Luthien into a bloodbath "that rivals Kentares IV."

Within hours of that statement, a Word of Blake war fleet arrived in orbit around the planet and has begun landing troops in key positions around Unity City. Spotty reports from sources in the DCMS describe the Word of Blake commander broadcasting his arrival "to assist the true forces of the Combine to reassert rightful control of the realm."



TEARS OF THE DRAGON

THE NOVA CATS: WHERE ARE THEY?

dragonpirate: no one's heard a word in over a week. Dad thinks it's worse than what we know

DCPCModerator: ***A friendly reminder to all participants today of the likelihood of VotD monitoring on all chats. ***

dragonpirate: damn i hate that bot

PixieTrish: So it's true, then, about the Irece Prefecture going dark?

dragonpirate: yeah its true happened overnight no more anything
fistacuffs: Anyone in here have any news if the blackout with Irece is just another "system upgrade" or are they under attack like Luthien?

Shoshopeter has entered the chat

PixieTrish: Yeah—right. Upgrade, my ass. My neighbor has family there and her grandfather's blaming everything on the FedSuns.

fistacuffs: Then I'm guessing we're all pretty much in the dark as to what's happening there, just like we were with Luthien.

hot4ad8t has entered the chat

dragonpirate: Hi hot

PixieTrish: Evening Dave.

hot4ad8t: I've got news on the *Nova Cats!*

dragonpirate: more than the rumor that they left for the periphery?

PixieTrish: They did? When did they do that? My boyfriend's brother knows a member of the Nova Cats.

hot4ad8t: They left just after the whole Star League break-up. I just got a copy of *The Drake*—says they might be heading toward Luthien—maybe kick some Black Dragon ass!

screwdapooch has left the chat

fistacuffs: I hope the Nova Cats aren't planning anything rash.

hot4ad8t: Why not? I hope they storm Luthien and take Imperial City back. Someone needs to get in there and clean up the mess.

dragonpirate: unless they're up to something else.

PixieTrish: Dave, you know you shouldn't be reading that paper. *The Drake's* not VotD approved.

hot4ad8t: Screw 'em. If we want any truth about where the Nova Cats really are, we're gonna find it in the student presses. Not from the VotD.

fistacuffs: Could be they went back to Irece Prefecture. Dragon's got family there.

dragonpirate: trish does

PixieTrish: Not me. My neighbor.

DCPCModerator: ***A friendly reminder to all participants today of the likelihood of VotD monitoring on all chats. ***

—Excerpted from Pesht network chat room, 20 January 3068

Regardless of the Blakists' intent, it is clear that the *Kokuryukai dohi* intend to turn Luthien into a slaughter of the innocent. Whether they are in collusion with the Butchers of Tharkad is in question—though the current actions of the Word of Blake commander leave much to be desired. Until these actions can be understood, DCMS forces on and around Luthien will defend the Heart of the Dragon against ALL interlopers. To this end, Warlord

Minamoto has declared a State of Emergency for the entire Pesht Prefecture until the Coordinator arrives in Combine space.

The warlord has asked the citizenry to remember the many sacrifices of the Dragon as they resist the unlawful demands of a minority of malcontents.

"COWARDICE!"

Evil has befallen us! But the will of the Dragon remains steadfast!

The Word of Blake has taken it upon themselves to fulfill the plots of the *gaijin* Theodore and has attacked us as the Jaguars did on Edo. They light up the sky with fire and smoke, burning Luthien and attempting to scour the planet.

They do this under Theodore's command! He has no honor and refuses to even address our grievances against him, so he sends his Blakist mercenary lapdogs. They will not face us on the field of honor; instead they bomb us from the sky, from space! They treat the Combine as the Jaguars did in their war of conquest only a generation ago!

We will not let them get away with such cowardice! Such lack of honor! Just as the Dragon did a mere few years ago, so we will do again. The Dragon will rise up and smite the money soldiers from the sky and from our Combine! We will eradicate them as we did the Jaguars—balanced on the edge of Hell, we will push them in along with us. Not with our swords, not with our duty, but with our honor—for our honor DEMANDS we resist, and show no mercy toward those who refuse to honor us.

Once the Blakist threat is removed, we will carry our rage to Theodore and demand his place on the mat before us so we can remove this vile cancer once and for all!

Resist, people of the Dragon!

—Masthead story, *Luthien Today*, 12 January 3068

DOCTORS: COORDINATOR ILL, RECOVERING

For General Release

(2 February 3068)

Al Na'ir [VOTD] – Coordinator Theodore Kurita is doing fine after a short stay at the Okinawa Medical Facility. The Coordinator checked in for a medical exam after symptoms developed during a tour of the newly built military base in Aldinga. "The Coordinator exhibited symptoms of Unole Flu, which is as common to residents of Dieron as the common cold is to citizens of Luthien. The Coordinator had a mild bout of the flu, which had him bedridden for a few days and unable to travel. He is doing much better but is still recovering," reported Doctor Michelle Elyorc, head of the Okinawa facility. "Common symptoms of the flu include upset stomach, heavy mucus drain and loss of appetite. The Coordinator began exhibiting symptoms shortly after arrival and was admitted as a precautionary measure."

The Coordinator will continue on into the Combine. His son and heir, former SLDF Commanding General Hohiro Kurita, will arrive shortly and remain on Dieron to oversee DCMS training maneuvers.

"THE KING IS DEAD!"

Theodore Kurita is dead!

Do not let the propagandists fool you. It is true that Theodore Kurita, the blight on the honor and duty of the Dragon, is dead.

His ill-conceived spawn, the *gaijin*-loving Hohiro, is too weak to take the throne—a sure sign that the Kurita line no longer has the stomach to fight—to be the Dragon!

This is our time! This is our place! Arise, loyal Sons of the Dragon, and let us remove this taint of *gaijin* disease from our realm once and for all! Let us purge our homes and our borders of this cancerous growth and reclaim our rightful heritage so that we can welcome our new Coordinator with a clean spirit and once again raise our heads above the gutter trash of the rest of the Universe!

—Black Dragon Society propaganda, anonymously posted on the Galedon V public forums, 3 February 3068

COORDINATOR DEAD?

(7 February 3067)

Al Na'ir [THE DRAKE] – Coordinator Kurita is not dead, as the Black Dragon propaganda machines wish us to believe. Nor was he ever admitted to the Okinawa Medical Facility on Al Na'ir with Unole Flu.

Sources confidential and close to *The Drake* (your loyal source for the truth) report Coordinator Theodore Kurita suffered a stroke in January and remains in stable condition in an unnamed facility. His prognosis is still under review, but he is rumored to be comatose.

Citizens! How can we sit blindly as our leaders lie to us? First there was the cover-up of the Blessed Omi Kurita's assassination, exposed by *The Drake*—explained later as a move for Theodore to aid his *gaijin* friend Victor Davion as he finished fighting his civil war.

And what of Kurita's wife? Was it seppuku, as *The Drake* reported, or did she die in her sleep as we were told? Then there was the lie about the attacks on Luthien. Systems upgrade or local military? In every instance *The Drake* reported the truth. Why does the Dragon hide behind lies? Why must our pride come before facing harsh reality?

Citizens, how can we build strength when we can't even trust our own government?

"WHO AMONG US SHALL RULE?"

[Diamond]: "So, gentlemen. What are we to do with the situation now that our wayward son has stirred up Luthien?"

[Sapphire]: "You mean it was not planned that way? He acted alone?"

[Ruby]: "Not without help."

[Pearl]: "Yes, he did have help. My sources point to the Second Sword's overeager *Tai-sa*. Apparently, he did not care to wait until called upon."

[Ruby]: "No, it goes further than that. Our Pillar has rotted."

THE DRAGON

[Diamond]: "Interesting. Our friend is the source of our problem on Luthien, then?"

[Ruby]: "Hai."

[Obsidian]: "So sure are you, Ri—?"

[Diamond]: "No names! Do it again and I will demand your heart as well as your head!"

[Ruby]: "It is nothing. Yes, I am sure. Emerald has gone the path of *ronin*. He thinks he knows the way when he does not. The impetuosity of youth, I think."

[Sapphire]: "This sets us back, then?"

[Diamond]: "Not entirely."

[Ruby]: "Hai. It is actually beneficial. We can front someone now without fear of discovery."

[Obsidian]: "We are going to hang Emerald out to dry?"

[Pearl]: "For the good of the Dragon, yes. Let them think when they beat him down that the menace of the *Kokuryu-kai* is diminished, while instead we continue to gain power."

[Sapphire]: "So whom shall we consider?"

[Diamond]: "Sakamoto?"

[Ruby]: "No. I have watched him since the incident. He will not bend our way. However, his offspring may..."

[Pearl]: "Ah, yes, his marriage and coming child. We shall make arrangements. But for the time being..."

[Obsidian]: "Toytomi?"

[Sapphire]: "Too impertinent. He bears watching."

[Ruby]: "Why not someone already beyond the shadows? Hiding in plain sight? The bastard Kerai would never question it, not now."

[Diamond]: "Don't delude yourself. Kerai questions all."

[Pearl]: "Perhaps, but not the one we know Ruby speaks of. It is an elegant plan."

[Obsidian]: "Interesting, at least..."

[Sapphire]: "Right there, in the light of day. Where everyone can see, yet does not see..."

[Ruby]: "Yes. And in the perfect position for us to take advantage of."

[Diamond]: "Then let us make it happen. And make sure Emerald finds his place among the dead. We are too close now. We cannot afford another mistake."

[Obsidian]: "And I will send a message to our 'champion' personally this time—just in case *he* develops delusions of his own power."

[Sapphire]: "Then it is decided. The Dragon is blind and we will soon be the saviors that work the miracle of sight."

—Partial recording made between unknown parties, recovered from the ruins of the Imperial City, Luthien (date unknown).

THE WIDENING CONFLICTS

The coup on Luthien, complicated by the intervention of Blakist forces and coupled with the Coordinator's illness, would only be the first of the Dragon's woes. With the battle joined on other fronts, the Word of Blake's war quickly expanded to include

DRAGON'S SON DECLARES STATE OF EMERGENCY 

VOICE OF THE DRAGON

*****FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE, ULTRA-PRIORITY*****

To All Voice of the Dragon Affiliates:

You are to immediately put into print and voice the following statement. Override all other headline and story events.

—Regional Director Miygaki Gershwin (VOTD, Pesht)

From Hohiro Kurita:

"Citizens of the Dragon, I greet you on this dark day. Today we find ourselves embroiled in war within and without the Combine. For months now our valiant DCMS troops have engaged Word of Blake forces on Dieron and Luthien. This new enemy, this diabolical splinter group of the benevolent ComStar, has risen from the darkness and bitten us on our heel. Since the dissolution of the Star League, they have transformed themselves from ComStar's competitor into the Yellow Bird that threatens not just the Dragon, but all of humankind.

"The Word of Blake has used against human targets weapons that have been banned for centuries. Reports of chemical attacks and nuclear firestorms have been received from countless worlds outside the Combine. They have manipulated whole planets and governments—even House Lords—into furthering their destructive agenda and are even now attempting to cut the Dragon off at the knees.

"Because of these hideous events unfolding around us, I hereby declare the Draconis Combine to be in a state of emergency, so that we may properly handle the onslaught that faces us. To citizens held hostage by these fanatical zealots, know that the Dragon has arisen to crush the Word of Blake as it did the Smoke Jaguars. Your tears are felt and your blood is remembered. The Dragon will roar once more."

*Tearing through the void
Prepared for the Yellow Bird
Expect victory.*

—Broadcast by all Voice of the Dragon affiliates throughout the Draconis Combine, 1 May 3068

TEARS OF THE

more assaults on Combine worlds. Worse still, the legacy of conflicts fought in the past few years returned to haunt a nation already reeling from multiple tragedies.

DIERON UNDER QUARANTINE

Travel Advisory

(10 February 3068)

Benjamin [VOTD] – If you plan on traveling to or through Dieron, be advised that you may need to alter your travel arrangements for the time being. Prefecture officials announced today that Dieron is under medical quarantine due to an outbreak of a strong strain of Unole Flu. As a precaution against spreading the virus to neighboring worlds where it might mutate into something more deadly, planetary officials have curbed all travel on and off the planet until the outbreak passes.

Unole Flu is a common virus on Dieron. Every century or so, an intense outbreak occurs, prompting whole towns and cities to close off to outsiders until the outbreak subsides. This is not the first time a planet in the Combine has been temporarily quarantined. Donenac was closed off for three months during an outbreak of Chelosian Virus in 2964; Shimosuwa in 3011 from a planetary outbreak of the Notilc Sweats; and Sertar for almost a year in 3043 from a bad outbreak of Darr’s Disease.

Citizens who have passed through Dieron on planetary visits are advised to notify their local doctor if they exhibit three or more of the following symptoms: night sweats, hallucinations, thick mucus discharge, gastric discomfort, excessive tiredness, loss of appetite or heavy nausea.

Dieron officials believe the outbreak will peak in the next few weeks and predict the system will be open for travel in the next month or two.

DEATH TO MERCENARIES!

The honorable Takashi Kurita was right.

Mercenaries deserve to die, for they serve only the god of money. For all their fine vows to “protect the citizenry,” it boils down to this ugly truth: the mercenary will follow whoever has the most cash, like an ox with a ring in its nose.

Wolf’s Dragons embody the heart and soul of the mercenary, all right—black and cold, like the heart of the Christian devil. They came here to protect us, to keep us safe from the Davion bogey-

ALLIANCE, FREE WORLDS LEAGUE AT WAR

So was the dissolution of the Star League a good idea after all? We know our Coordinator was against it—we’ve seen the footage from that day in November 3067. Apparently the foolish leaders of the other realms thought they could maintain their own peace without “outside interference.”

Looks like they were wrong. News coming in from the Alliance and the Free Worlds League shows Skye province attacking the Free Worlds—without the sanction of the Lyran Estates General, no less. Not that anyone can blame Skye. Without an authoritative body to rein in the Alliance military, apparently provincial leaders feel they can declare war whenever they want.

If the Star League still existed, Skye could have appealed to that body for restitution of damages that Duke Kelswa-Steiner claims his world has sustained. Instead, power-hungry politicians believe they answer to no one but themselves and take matters into their own hands.

Well, we may not have the Star League anymore, but I for one am thankful to live in the Combine, where our sense of honor and duty overrides our selfishness. Seems the Alliance could learn a lesson or ten from us.

—Trevor Lindensholm, Editor, *Minakuchi World Times*, 1 June 3068

men—but once their master Mammon calls, they move on, leaving us alone and defenseless against the Davion hordes.

And what of the rumors from Fletcher? And Galatea? That mercenaries there are nothing more than fronts for the evil Word of Blake—the Coordinator’s own “white army” to crush loyal opposition? If you doubt my words, look sometime at the devastation caused by these supposed saints—the shattered ruins of towns and factories and thousands of innocent Combine citizens slain, wiped out by a Blakist WarShip captain who chose the dark heart of money over the honor of combat.

It almost makes me want to believe in God. That the love of money is the bedrock of evil is a hard truth to ignore...and that evil is personified in the mercenary.

We should demand the reinstatement of the honorable Takashi’s formidable decree! We should follow such venerable wisdom and strike them down where they stand!

Death to all mercenaries!

—Underground pamphlet circulating throughout the Draconis Combine, circa March-April 3068



(23-DEC-67)

“BLAKISTS KILL THOUSANDS ON STYK”

[MERCNET]

COMPLETED

(31-DEC-67)

“TALL TREES OVERRUN!”

[INN]

DOWNLOADING

(04-JAN-68)

“WORD OF BLAKE SEIZES EPSILON INDI, FLETCHER”

[MERCNET]

ACCESSING

"DIERON IN FLAMES"

(26 June 3068)

Benjamin [THE DRAKE] – Dieron is under siege thanks to a sneak attack by the Word of Blake. After four months of denial, the VotD can no longer hide the true state of affairs on Dieron and Luthien.

Little hope remains of discovering Hohiro Kurita's whereabouts. The acting Coordinator and leader of the DCMS forces that engaged Word of Blake troops on Dieron in March is "missing and presumed dead." So say the Coordinator's commanders.

It is this reporter's fear that Coordinator Theodore's only *legitimate* heir is now in the hands of the Word of Blake—which means he's as good as dead. I fear there won't be any attempt made to retrieve him from the hands of the Yellow Bird. Such tragic news arrives on the heels of recent information brought to light on Theodore Kurita's deteriorating condition. Languishing in a coma, he can do nothing to help the morale of the citizens of the Combine.

With both Kuritas missing or out of action, who will lead the Dragon out of chaos? The Lyrans and the Free Worlds League battle on their fronts. We fight the Federated Suns along our own borders. And let us not forget the treacherous Ravens and their Alliance cronies! Or the Black Dragon coup on Luthien, complicated now by unwanted Word of Blake intervention. Or the Nova Cat desertion, which has included the Dragon's only other legitimate—if questionable—heir, Minoru Kurita!

The Word of Blake has thrown the universe into chaos. As a people we must take up arms and fight. We must call on our warlords to take charge and to bring this war to a close.

BORDERS ON ALERT*****Travel Advisory, Priority Alert*****

(14 July 3068)

Pesht [VOTD] – Notice to all Combine citizens traveling to and residing in worlds along the Federated Suns and Outworlds Alliance borders: travel is restricted until further notice. A "high alert" advisory from the offices of Warlord Minamoto warns that travel to worlds within two jumps of the stated borders has been restricted to military traffic only. "For the safety of our citizenry, we ask that civilians refrain from visiting these worlds, as military activity in both nations threatens possible hostilities along these borders. We wish to lessen the risk as much as possible for travelers and residents in the affected areas."

DCMS officials also suggested that residents of the listed worlds purchase extra supplies in case of loss of power, water and other utilities. "While no attacks are expected or imminent, we are erring on the side of caution because of recent events outside the Combine. We wish to be prepared for any eventuality and hope that this advisory is nothing more than a false alarm," stated *Tai-sho* Howard Mencio, aide to *Tai-shu* Minamoto.

Refunds for travel packages and system jumps may be obtained at your local planetary travel office. Businesses may apply for tax relief for affected areas at their local Bureau of Interstellar Trade offices.

OUTWORLDS ALLIANCE ATTACKS!

(15 July 3068)

Galedon V [THE DRAKE] – Citizens of the Dragon, we are being invaded from all sides during this time of chaos. Reports of fighting along the Outworlds border have recently come to our attention; do not be blinded by Voice of the Dragon claims to the contrary. Outworlds Alliance forces have attacked the worlds of Enif, Tabayama and the prefecture capital of Galedon V. Not only are these attacks unprecedented, but we have received word that the Outworlds Alliance is in league with Clan Snow Raven, recently seen often along the Outworlds border. News of this connection came to us from several sources who saw firsthand the Alliance's First Air Wing using *Corax* OmniFighters, Alliance-produced aerospace craft reported to incorporate Clan technologies.

In the wake of the Nova Cats' departure from their Tabayama garrison soon after the dissolution of the Star League and the bombing of Tharkad, the only defenders of these worlds are their planetary militias. The Twenty-First Galedon Regulars on new Samarkand and the Nineteenth Galedon Regulars on Bad News have been called in as reinforcements.

Some suggest that the Outworlds border attacks have little to do with the present uprising on Luthien and Star League troubles, and are nothing more than the Snow Ravens making good on threats of revenge for the destruction of their precious WarShip, the *White Cloud*. But others—this reporter included—fear that this is only the beginning.

THE DRAGON'S REVENGE

(20 September 3068)

Proserpina [THE DRAKE] – We have done it, citizens of the Combine! We have struck back against the Federated Suns!

How long have we known there is no trust, no honor among the warmongering Davionists that plague our borders? With the attacks on Tharkad and New Avalon to fuel their false sense of grievance, spouting accusations of POW injustices since before the FedCom Civil War, Federated Suns forces sporadically attacked worlds along our borders, ignoring treaties authorized by the now disbanded Star League. Altai, Chichibu, Junction, Barlow's Folly, Misery and Beta Mensae V—our ancient foe hit all these undefended worlds. But along the Federated Suns front, local warlords counterattacked and have won their first victories. DCMS forces struck back at David, taking over the planet within a week. Next came Xhosa VII, where again the local militia was no match for DCMS might. Benet III and Cassias came next, and all reports from those worlds say fighting is still heavy in some areas. We're not sure the DCMS can hold these last two worlds, but we can certainly claim the Dragon has bloodied the Federated Suns' nose.

The Davion scum have once again shown their true colors. Striking at us in our moment of confusion, they prove themselves the cowards they are. Displaying their ancestors' tendency to bed their sisters and farm animals, the Davion filth now finds itself outmaneuvered before it begins to infect our worlds.

Let our ancient foe know we will not vanish into the night. Long live the Dragon!

EAGLE SCREAMS



EAGLE SCREAMS

It should have been our finest hour, the day on which Thomas Marik took his place as First Lord of the Star League and expanded his unifying vision across the Inner Sphere just like Albert Marik of old. Instead, treachery and war came upon us unexpectedly. At first we thought we could stand above the rising tide of chaos, but the murder of General Helen Thrall and the heightened tensions between Skye and Sirius drew us into the fray. The mutual recriminations of that early skirmish have become a footnote in history, lost in the war that erupted along the entire front: They hit us; we hit back. The ancient cycle of violence began. A succession of worlds fell to the invaders; others simply dropped out of the communications loop, taken by enemy assaults or otherwise isolated from the HPG network. With Lyran troops driving deeper into the Free Worlds League, unraveling such mysteries would have to wait.

Internally also, we felt the pressures of war. Zion Province protested the redeployment of troops from its worlds; suggestions of isolation from the League and murmurings elsewhere followed suit. Can we not stand aloof from this turmoil, was the whispered message. To the surprise of many, the call for unity came from an unusual source: Duchess Alys Marik, who only months before the Tharkad incident had proposed an end to “the crisis” and repeal of Resolution 288 that gave the Captain-General his power. Though careful not to support her uncle Thomas, Duchess Alys told people that division would only see the League crushed and in enemy hands, and she warned us to be as wary of the enemy within as of those outside our borders.

Thomas Marik, covertly making his way home from Tharkad, held back from wholly committing the FWLM to the fight, redeploying troops while attempting diplomacy to resolve matters. Coordinating our border defenses fell to Jeremy Brett, Marshal of Tamarind. Limited troops severely constrained his efforts, but his hard work earned him the hearts of the people, particularly when his counterstrikes liberated worlds lost to the Lyran behemoth. Could this be a potential Captain-General, bound to the Mariks but not a Marik? Certainly some people thought so—but Brett and his officers were too busy fighting the war to be dragged into the quagmire of politics. When the Captain-General and the LCCC finally moved, the Lyrans learned the error of their ways. They had mistaken tolerance and a desire to maintain the status quo for a lack of willpower—but now, with rogue forces at work in the Lyran state, they would see the FWLM’s true strength and the League’s determination. Triple FWLM thrusts along the Lyran border halted Alliance incursions and then turned them back. Unlike Operation Guerrero in 3057, this time our military did not stop at the pre-Fourth Succession War borders. The hunters had become the hunted.

Despite these successes, questions were asked on the streets: Why are we standing alone? We have allies, internal and external, but none stood with us. The Word of Blake, though targeted by an unlawful mercenary attack in the Terran system, maintained a presence in the League. Why did they not bolster our defenses? Were they too preoccupied with defending themselves against the power-hungry Dragons, or was this—as some “out there” journals

posited—part of a grand plan to bring humanity to its knees? Were we seeing Operation Scorpion on a much larger and more convoluted scale? No one seems to know for certain whether Thomas even asked for their aid, but all the evidence suggests the League has been operating largely solo, relying on the Blakists solely for communications links—including those on WarShips.

Amid the chaos, as the counteroffensive gained pace, the inexplicable happened. The Knights of the Inner Sphere were recalled to Atreus, and several other formations were pulled from their task forces and recalled to unspecified duties. Why the Captain-General ordered this move remains unclear. All affected units heeded their orders, returning to the League capital with alacrity. The parade to be held later today marks their first public appearance and seems to be part of Thomas’ efforts to convince the people of the FWLM’s strength. “Bread and circuses,” as the ancient phrase goes. As if this pageant—a demonstration of chivalry and military might—will make any real difference. Winning the war is what counts. From that perspective, this recall order makes no military sense, and whatever his enemies say, Thomas is no fool.

—Corrine Marik, Atreus, 20 October 3068

WINDS OF CHANGE

For some, the jury is still out on the role played by the Free Worlds League—the Word of Blake’s staunchest ally since the Schism of 3052—in the current holy war being waged against the Inner Sphere. Is the Free Worlds allied with the Blakists, or has House Marik become yet another pawn in Blakist machinations and their campaign of terror and destruction? We do know that this realm, an ardent supporter of the Star League and a nation that arguably owes its current greatness to Word of Blake influence, has become embroiled in the chaos of this war along with every other major power—yet its capital, Atreus, remains unscathed.

—Michael Bosworth, INN Special Correspondent

THE STAR LEAGUE FAILURE: WHAT HAPPENED?

The Star League is in session again.

News agencies from across civilized space are focused on Tharkad as representatives of the member states and would-be member states confer with great solemnity. Hard news reporters will give us the facts, what few there are, in mind-numbing detail. Investigative reporters will press the limits of creative nonfiction as they parse innuendo and supposition in search of the “real” story. Gossip columnists and social reporters, an elusive distinction, will update us *ad nauseam* on who had dinner with whom and from which hotel room they emerged in the morning. And of course, cultural pundits such as your own humble servant will thoroughly mull over all of this to provide Thoughtful Readers such as yourself with the benefits of our insights and predictions.

Those Thoughtful Readers familiar with this humble servant’s past musings, or who took the time to read the title of this week’s column,

EAGLE SCREAMS

will not be surprised to learn that the future of the Star League is not bright. Indeed, if one were bold enough to predict, this year's session may well be remembered by history as the first of the last times—if not *the* last time—humanity conducted this august experiment.

The failure of the Star League lies not in the institution itself, but in the composition of its member-states.

Throughout the bulk of the Human Sphere, worlds and lives are traded at the whim of monarchs who hold sway over hundreds of billions of people through no other merit than an accident of birth. Though these blessed beneficiaries of random chance may care for the well-being of their subjects in the abstract, they have no visceral connection to the souls of common men. They have no dialogue—nor the mechanism to conduct one—with the ordinary people whose lives they hold daily in the palms of their hands.

In short, they hold power by the opposite of the ideal on which the Star League is based.

“What ideal is that?” Thoughtful Readers may ask.

The same ideal that shaped and forged our own Free Worlds League: our desire to preserve freedom while serving the common good.

We are a league, a confederation, an amalgam of worlds united not through the charisma of a monarch or the machinations of a despot, but by our own clear-sighted recognition of what is in the best interests of all concerned. Certainly we have our differences. We are a family, and the members of a healthy, dynamic family redefine

their relationships within broad and well-understood limits every day. The free worlds of the League work together for the common good because *it is* the common good, while our individual states enjoy autonomy of which the rest of the galaxy can only dream.

Unless and until its other members embrace this fundamental principle of freedom, the Star League is doomed to forever be a hollow shadow of what it could and should be.

—Kenneth D’Candide, *The Candid View*, Free Worlds Features, 28 November 3067

MERCENARY ASSAULT ON MARS FAILS!

(10 December 3067)

Mars, Sol System [VOICE OF TRUTH] – Rogue mercenary units, including fragments of the discredited Wolf’s Dragoons, made a vicious and unprovoked attack on Mars in the Terran system yesterday.

The Word of Blake Militia’s Seventh Division, which is responsible for the safety and protection of the citizens of Mars, handily repulsed the disorganized onslaught. Though individual members of the attacking mob made planetfall, there was no loss of civilian life and no significant damage to the planet’s robust infrastructure.

Casualties among the elite Word of Blake units were light. Precentor XIII Carol Widegren, commander of the Seventh Division, attributed this to her troops’ discipline and professionalism.

Military analysts are puzzled by the raiders’ evident lack of cohesion and command structure. There was no apparent reason for the assault, which observers characterized as “suicidal.”

CIVIC ADVISORY

To all print, broadcast and hyperpulse news agencies and media affiliates throughout the League:

An incident has occurred on Tharkad, apparently perpetrated by a party or parties unknown in an effort to destabilize existing governments. While the exact nature and extent of the incident are not known, there is reason to believe control of HPG stations has been compromised. Therefore, any broadcasts received from worlds in the Lyran Alliance and the Federated Suns are to be regarded as suspect.

Formerly reliable information sources within these realms can no longer be trusted, as they are most likely providing misinformation, with or without malicious intent, based on corrupted or limited resources. More important, it is almost certain that any transmission from within the affected areas contains disinformation calculated to spread doubt and indecision at a time when our focus and resolve are vital to the survival of the Free Worlds League.

Therefore, any information that has not passed through this Office should not be rebroadcast until after its submission to the Office of the Captain-General for validation.

Your cooperation in this urgent matter is essential to the well-being of the Free Worlds League.

—From the Office of the Captain-General, 6 December 3067

THARKAD: WAS IT OR WASN'T IT?

[MP Gerald Rollinson (*Molokai*): “The use of a nuclear device is completely in keeping with the Blakist rant of cleansing civilization—”

[MP Everett Gould (*Gibson*): “The cleansing the Word speaks of is symbolic, or at most spiritual. They seek a return to a more fundamental and honest time—”

[MP Barbara Scott (*Clipperton*): “Which never existed.”

[Gould]: “Which *did* exist, for centuries!”

[Rollinson]: “What existed for centuries was ComStar’s stranglehold on human knowledge. We now know, what? Ten percent of what they did in shaping the course of human history. Only recently have they made the laudable decision to treat the rest of humanity as responsible enough to make informed choices about its own collective fate. The Blakists want to undo all that, return to the days of hidden cabals maneuvering history from behind the scenes—”

[Gould]: “That’s ridiculous. The Word of Blake is working toward a restoration of enlightened, centralized human government. The whole point of the demonstration at Tharkad—”

[Rollinson]: “Was to throw a screaming tantrum and hurl nuclear bombs when the legitimate leaders of human civilization chose, rightly, not to turn back the clock but move forward?”

[Scott]: “Jerry, you know I agree with you right down the line on their politics, but I don’t think the Blakists nuked Tharkad.”

[Gould]: “Of course they didn’t.”



EAGLE SCREAMS

[Rollinson]: "You're kidding!"

[Scott]: "Look at what we know of the pattern of bombardments. Saturation bombing of the countryside surrounding the city, displaying a massive array of conventional weapons. Followed by a single nuclear strike in the heart of the industrial district? It doesn't make sense."

[Rollinson]: "Terror tactics! They fired warning shots across the bow and when the national leaders refused to submit immediately, they fired a killing blow to the center, to prove they won't hesitate."

[Gould]: "You enjoy rancor more than you respect reason. There was no nuclear bombing of Tharkad. If a nuclear explosion occurred—"

[Rollinson]: "'If?'"

[Gould]: "Yes, *if!* Then, it was an accident, pure and simple."

—Excerpted from *Off the Floor: Roundtable Debate After Session*, Globe Broadcasting, 16 December 3067

ASSASSINS GUN DOWN HEAD OF SIRIAN CONCORDANCE

(28 December 3067)

Pollux City, Pollux [MARIK COMMONWEALTH TODAY] – General Helen Thrall, strong-arm leader of the military junta that seized control of the Sirian Concordance nine years ago, was gunned down last Tuesday morning as she exited her groundcar at the Ministry of Trade in Pollux City, Pollux.

MISSING: THOMAS MARIK

(18 December 3067)

Atreus [STELLAR INQUIRER] – Thomas Marik is missing.

There have been no authoritative, confirmed sightings of the Captain-General of the Free Worlds League since the apparent disaster on Tharkad.

Official communiqués that have appeared over his signature were in fact written by General Selim Halas. While the Office of the Captain-General insists no deception was intended—that General Halas was simply exercising his pro tempore authority in the Captain-General's absence—the fact remains that no effort was made to alert the people to the Captain-General's disappearance.

The last credible evidence available puts Captain-General Marik on Tharkad, perilously close to ground zero of the alleged terrorist bombing of the Star League Conference. Since that time, the authorities have woven a complex fabric of partial information that seems intended to distract the people from the fact that the Captain-General cannot be found.

Persistent investigation by this news source has prompted government spokespersons to say only that the Captain-General is "safe in an undisclosed location"—a buzz phrase for "we don't know" that predates space flight.

The time may have come to prepare for the worst.

The tireless investigative journalists at this news source will continue to pursue this mystery. Download daily updates for the full story as this potential tragedy unfolds.

PERCIVAL CONTINUES SHAKEDOWN

(25 December 3067)

Pollux [POLLUX MIRROR] – Pollux lost one of its most celebrated satellites yesterday at 1300 hours Pollux City time. The *Percival*, an *Eagle*-class frigate and a designated escort for the latest of the *Thera*-class supercarriers (the *Attica*) left orbit to continue its shakedown cruise, three months ahead of schedule.

The *Percival*, more than half a kilometer long, has been a familiar sight in the evening skies over Pollux City for the past two weeks as technicians worked to integrate all the systems assembled by construction crews in the Ionus orbital docks just over a month ago. According to sources, the final refit and testing exceeded all expectations, and every shipboard system checked out at optimal efficiency on the first or second trial: a feat of shipbuilding excellence unmatched in any vessel this size.

Carrying a full complement of DropShips for escort and emergency purposes, the *Percival* is expected to begin deep space trials immediately, before returning to Regulus to join the *Attica* battle group, the fifth and latest addition to the League's rapidly expanding naval force.

Though eyewitness accounts vary widely, it is known that anywhere from two to seven gunmen, armed with sniper-type slug rifles, fired on Thrall and her party as she exited the open groundcar. The fatal shots came from a pedestrian overpass overlooking the entrance to the Ministry and from an upper window in the adjacent Ministry of Education annex. Several of General Thrall's bodyguards were also killed or injured in the attack.

None of the assailants were apprehended. Given Pollux's open and busy ports, it is believed the perpetrators may already have fled the planet.

An outspoken critic of Captain-General Marik, Thrall was known for putting the interests of the Sirian junta ahead of the greater good of the League. Among other controversial actions, she withheld the Sirian Lancers from service to the FWLM.

Initial suspicion centered on Sirian Concordance citizens responding to Thrall's iconoclastic and heavy-handed policies. However, evidence characterized by investigators as "credible" and "damning" implicates Lyran Intelligence, Free Skye or both. Details of this evidence were not released to the press.

No official statement has yet been made concerning how the remaining members of the junta will respond in the face of this assassination. However, given their nature and history, a military response is expected.

OUTREACH NUKED!

(30 December 3067)

Zion [ZION INTELLIGENCER] – Reliable reports from several independent observers in the Chaos March, monitoring the ongoing conflict between Word of Blake forces and Wolf's Dragoons, have

EAGLE S

confirmed reports received Monday. On 28 December, elements of the Blakist forces in conflict with Wolf's Dragoons bombarded the Remus continent of Outreach with nuclear weapons.

Outreach had long been a nexus of the mercenary industry: a neutral meeting point where mercenary commands from all over the Inner Sphere could train, trade and negotiate with prospective employers. That ended in October when violence broke out between rival organizations in the mercenary community.

The origin of the initial dispute is not known, nor is the Word of Blake's motive for taking up the cause of those opposing Wolf's Dragoons. But whatever the bone of contention in October and whatever the military situation now, nothing—absolutely nothing—justifies the use of strategic nuclear weapons. We call on the civilized nations of the Inner Sphere to jointly require the Word of Blake to surrender the officer responsible so that he or she may stand trial for this war crime.

DAY OF THE HAWK

Though the circumstances surrounding the League-Alliance conflict remain murky on both sides of the border, it comes as little surprise to many who believe in the League's complicity with the Blakists that the Free Worlds has held the upper hand throughout the fighting. Despite initial losses and Thomas Marik's public objections to "Lyran aggression," FWLM troops on the Lyran border have easily pushed back the offensive and are poised to strike deep into Skye and Bolan provinces. A final League victory could conceivably cripple the Lyran state, an outcome that would doubtless have the Free Worlds' Blakist allies drooling in anticipation despite their unexplained absence from the combat region.

WAR!

(12 February 3068)

Zosma [BPNS] – Duke Robert Kelswa-Steiner has declared war on the Free Worlds League.

According to a statement released by Duke Kelswa-Steiner's office on Thursday, 6 February 3068, the declaration of war came in response to an unprovoked naval attack on Skye by the Free Worlds League.

This accusation, coming just two months after the Free Skye movement was implicated in the assassination of Sirian Concordance leader General Helen Thrall, has been denounced as "transparent propaganda" by the Concordance. The Council of the Silver Hawks Coalition has also rejected its validity, characterizing the uncorroborated statement as "disingenuous." Responses from Border Protectorate leaders to the duke's claims range from skepticism on Alula Australis to suspicion on Zosma.

Though the Free Worlds League Military would not provide a detailed fleet deployment, the Office of Information made the unprecedented gesture of stating unequivocally that no active-duty FWLM WarShips have entered Lyran Alliance space.

TAKING THINGS SERIOUSLY

(9 February 3068)

Marik [MALKENT MALCONTENT] — In a shocking turn of events, Duke Robert Kelswa-Steiner, ruler of the Free Skye Republic (formerly Skye Province of the Lyran Alliance) declared war on the Free Worlds League, in response to a recent raid on Skye that allegedly involved elements of the Sirian Lancers and an equally alleged *Eagle*-class frigate. Even though Duke Kelswa-Steiner failed to take any prisoners, he claims to have enough (alleged) proof of League involvement in "this insidious assault on the Free Republic's capital." After all, the 'Mechs involved were clearly painted in Sirian Lancer colors, right?

Faced with such overwhelming proof of our unprovoked attack, it is no wonder our own Captain-General has so far failed to comment on this recent outbreak of war. Skye forces wasted little time in persecuting the conflict when they aggressively redeployed a handful of units to the League-Skye border, including the Fifth Alliance Guards from Dalkeith, which is scheduled to arrive in no less than three months. Clearly these lightning-fast redeployments are a mere prelude of a full-scale invasion. We've asked our strategy panel to comment on these disturbing developments.

Colonel Allyce Verschwunden (Ret.): "I project that at this rate of maneuver, Skye forces will make landfall on Atreus early next century."

Colonel Coram "Old Cory" d'Youville (Ret.): "Hahahaha!"

To get the political angle, we discussed the prospect of a Skye invasion with several Members of Parliament:

"I would recommend that people consider stockpiling some necessary items, just in case," suggested MP van Leeuwen. "In particular, the Nostia gems from my native region have grown nicely this year, so take advantage of that and make sure you don't run out!"

"Without the guidance of the Star League, I simply don't know how we'll bring this horrible conflict to an end without additional bloodshed," stated MP Itibina. We asked whether Mrs. Itibina was aware that Skye forces had not yet crossed the border, and that there thus had not been any bloodshed. She quickly replied, "Not true! I was opening a letter when I received this news, and I suffered a horrible paper cut because it made me lose my concentration. Clearly, my injury could have been avoided! How much more must we suffer?"

In closing, it appears we have rough times ahead. This war with the Free Skye Republic must not be taken lightly, as we have only two to three times as many regiments on our border as Skye is currently deploying. The threat of imminent invasion looms over us all. Be careful out there.

Duke Kelswa-Steiner was apparently speaking on behalf of the Province of Skye alone and not the entire Lyran Alliance when he declared war. Some speculate that the province lacks the military resources to make good its declared intent.

Other observers point out that if the duke intended a limited war that struck isolated provinces such as the Silver Hawks Coalition, the Sirian Concordance or our own Border Protectorate, Skye troops might overrun one or two border worlds. Arguing that it is much easier and more prudent to defend a world than to take



EAGLE SCREAMS

it back, some urge augmenting the military forces already in place on worlds that may be in danger.

BOLAN DECLARES WAR

(4 March 3068)

Zosma [BPNS] – The Lyran Alliance’s Bolan Province declared war on the Free Worlds League earlier this week. They have pledged to join forces with Skye Province, which made a similar declaration in the first week of February. Neither province seems to be acting in concert with the Lyran Alliance central government, and many League officials question whether either combatant can raise a viable invasion force to back up their declarations without active support from their central authorities.

Skye Province’s declaration of war early last month was predicated on their duke’s unsubstantiated claim that a Free Worlds force—including WarShip support and BattleMechs—assaulted Skye. However, some analysts argue that this provocative accusation should be viewed in conjunction with last December’s assassination of General Helen Thrall, leader of the Sirian Concordance. Attempts

to destabilize the government of an adjacent state, followed by disinformation and manufactured outrage to provide a rationale for action, are all classic opening moves in any territorial war.

That Bolan Province chose to capitalize on the unfortunate death of Margrave Caesar Steiner last week—publicly blaming it on assassins or agents from the Free Worlds League—is unfortunate. Now Bolan has joined its sister province in attempting to leverage “restitution” from the League.

Whether Skye and Bolan provinces hope to use the threat of war to extort trade concessions or even territory from the Free Worlds remains unclear. However, without the weight of the Lyran Alliance behind them, it is doubtful this “war” of postures and threats will evolve into actual weapons fire.

CAPTAIN-GENERAL CONDEMNS “LYRAN AGGRESSION”

From: Office of the Captain-General

To: All News Agencies and Affiliates League-wide (for immediate release)

Date: 18 March 3068

Captain-General Thomas Marik, currently safe in an undisclosed location en route to Atreus, has issued this communiqué

COM GUARD BLOODED, BROKEN AT TERRA

(15 March 3068)

Terra [VOICE OF TRUTH] – In what has been described as the largest single naval engagement in recent history, ComStar forces invaded the Terran system. Their attempt to seize the birthplace of humanity lasted nearly two weeks and ended in failure.

The bulk of the ComStar aggressor force was destroyed in space. However, several DropShips made planetfall and an estimated two to three invading divisions gained two temporary footholds.

The smaller assault force attempted to establish a stronghold in the southwestern quadrant of the North American continent. There, the Word of Blake Militia’s Ninth Division, under the leadership of Precentor XVII Alice Phuong and supported by elements of the Militia’s Tenth Division led by Precentor VII Robin St. Nicholas, decisively confronted and destroyed the invaders, sustaining light casualties.

The major thrust of the Com Guard assault came in the north central region of the European continent. This larger force was valiantly engaged by elements of the Word of Blake Militia Third Division, commanded by Precentor XIV David Fellers, and the Eighth Division, led by Precentor XIII Alex Winningham.

Fighting was heavier and casualties higher in this densely populated region. Faced with defeat, the Com Guard turned their weapons on civilian targets, even resorting to weapons of mass destruction in an effort to maximize damage. The historic cities of Tallinn and Riga were destroyed in the final frenzy of destruction.

ComStar offered no rational justification for the assault. Observers speculate it represented a final, desperate bid of the failed and fading hierarchy to reassert control over the minds, hearts and sacred institutions of our free people.

SKYE, BOLAN FORCES HIT THREE WORLDS

(17 March 3068)

Amity [SILVER FREE VOICE] – Megrez, Cascade and Togwotee fell to Lyran forces last week. The whirlwind attacks, which analysts believe were launched from the Lyran worlds of Ford and Loric, overwhelmed the Sixth Marik Militia stationed on Megrez. We have received no reliable data on casualties among the military or loss of life among the civilian populations of those worlds.

What does this tragedy mean for us on Silver, or for the rest of the Abbey District? True, we are not one jump away from Lyran space, nor are we on a direct route to the heart of the Free Worlds League. Nonetheless, we are at risk.

No one should forget that the Seventh and Tenth Lyran Regulars regiments, along with their myriad supporting units, are stationed on Cavanaugh II. Though it is unlikely they could catch the Abbey District completely by surprise, could the noble Second Brigade of the Fusiliers of Oriente hope to defend the entire district? Even if the Sixth Regiment of the Orloff Grenadiers could somehow offer support from distant Cerillos, it is doubtful even the Golden Phoenix could stand against such an invading force.

The fall of Megrez, Cascade and Togwotee, worlds very like our own, serves as a reminder that no planet is safe in the current crisis. We cannot afford to be complacent, thinking ourselves safely distant from the thrust of Lyran aggression. We must all be vigilant, all stand ready to take up arms in defense of our homes and our families.

EAGLE SCREAMS

for immediate release by all media outlets throughout the Free Worlds League:

Citizens of the Free Worlds League,

Months ago, a series of unfortunate events unfolded on the Lyran capital of Tharkad. The end of the Star League was tragic in and of itself. Equally tragic, and criminal, is the fact that persons unknown chose to respond to this demise with violence.

Now should be a time for the nations of the Inner Sphere to come together. Even if rebuilding the Star League is an impossible ideal, as some claim, we remain civilized enough to support each other in this time of trial.

Instead, based on no evidence other than their own prejudices, elements within the Lyran Alliance have chosen to blame the Free Worlds for their misfortunes. On the face of it, these accusations are nothing more than a pretext for invasion.

We do not mean to trivialize the disaster on Tharkad, or the other attacks—if any—that have allegedly befallen the Lyran people on several worlds. However, whatever internal conflicts beset the Alliance, they do not justify a destructive war of conquest against an innocent people.

This aggression by the Lyran Alliance against the Free Worlds League must cease immediately. All seized worlds must be repatriated and reparations to civilians who have lost property and loved ones must be paid at once. Only then can we meet at the negotiating table to forge a lasting peace.

"ENOUGH IS ENOUGH!"

Danger and death threaten Zion Province on every side. The Capellan Confederation is under siege, its people coming apart at the seams, as the Federated Suns continues to invade.

The Chaos March is in flames. Rogue mercenary armies tear at each other's throats, grinding helpless worlds to bloody mire beneath their treads. Our doom could fall from our skies at any moment.

What does Thomas Marik, our wise and compassionate Captain-General, do for us in this, our darkest hour? What do our noble leaders at League Central Coordination and Command do? What, oh what, does the Free Worlds League Military, our stalwart protector, do?

They withdraw the Third Free Worlds Guard, our only defense, and dispatch it to bolster the Marik Commonwealth's already impenetrable barrier against imagined threats from disgruntled provinces of the Lyran Alliance!

Enough is enough!

The Free Worlds League has abandoned Zion Province. As we are alone, we must now stand alone, relying on our own solidarity to see us through the present peril.

The time has come for Zion Province to secede from the lie of the Free Worlds League. Independence for Zion! This is the ideal for which we must now stand and fight!

—Op/ed from *The Zion Intelligencer*, 22 March 3068

SILENCE ON SHILOH

(16 April 3068)

Danais [SILVER FREE VOICE] – The Public Information Office of the Silver Hawks Coalition Council announced today that the hyper-pulse generator on Shiloh has fallen silent. The Type B station did not transmit any indication of trouble before ceasing transmission, and apparently shut down in good order.

Long known for priding themselves on their independence from modern technology, the citizens of Shiloh have been reducing contact with other Coalition worlds. Their highly sought-after wood sculptures and rugs have become scarce (see "Investing in Folk Art," *SFV* issue, 11 July 3066), and Shiloh's consumption of off-world foodstuffs and farming equipment has steadily declined over the past decade in reverse proportion to the number of children being adopted off-world in Shiloh's burgeoning—if unlikely—new export industry. Yet even this new trade abruptly ceased in recent weeks, adding an eerie quality to the world's suddenly conspicuous silence.

Given the Shiloh ethic of self-reliance, these decreases in imports and exports can be seen as evidence of growing stability and economic self-sufficiency. Under normal circumstances, it would be easy to imagine that this sudden silence is a goal toward which they have long worked.

But circumstances are not normal.

In the face of recent Lyran conquests of League worlds, intelligent people must consider the possibility that Shiloh has fallen. While professing not to be alarmed at the world's silence, the Coalition Council has asked that any vessels whose routes take them close to the Shiloh system stay alert for any signal or other evidence that may indicate a Lyran presence.

As a civilized nation, we stand ready to help our neighbors heal the damage they have done themselves in this period of senseless internecine violence. However, as a sovereign nation, we stand ready to defend our borders against unprovoked aggression—and to pursue the aggressors as far and as hard as we must to ensure they do not threaten innocent lives again.

STEINERS LAUNCH SECOND WAVE

(31 March 3068)

Thermopolis [SILVER FREE VOICE] – Mere months ago, the talk was of the Fifth Brigade of the Fusiliers of Oriente, popularly known as Bolton's Rangers, and whether that unit would rejoin the Star League Defense Force. Upholding tradition, they would have reclaimed their original designation of Independent 208th Hussar Regulars as they took their place among the reborn and reorganized defenders of the Inner Sphere.

That plan ended with the second and many say final demise of the Star League last November. Yet none among the Fifth regret the lost opportunity to be part of a unified Inner Sphere. As Force



APPEAL FOR UNITY



AN APPEAL FOR UNITY

Today we face a threat to the very existence of our Free Worlds League far greater than any that has gone before.

To date, seven of our worlds have fallen before invading forces from the Lyran Alliance. While this is in itself a tragedy, more far-reaching in its significance is the fact that these forces seem to be sanctioned by only two Alliance provinces. To the best of our knowledge, Alarion, Coventry and Donegal provinces have no part in this war. While this may look like good news—that we face only two-fifths of an enemy—it is in fact an omen of a darker possibility.

That unknown forces used nuclear weapons on Tharkad is a given. That Tharkad City is gone is a certainty, and that the entire world has become a radioactive wasteland is a credible probability. The Lyran Alliance, bereft of its core, may be finding that the center cannot hold. Instead of a united government making balanced considerations based on the needs of all its provinces, the Free Worlds League may face a loose alliance of independent states—an alliance that may unravel as each province pursues its own goals. The recently reported attacks on Lyran provincial capitals may in fact be evidence of intense conflict.

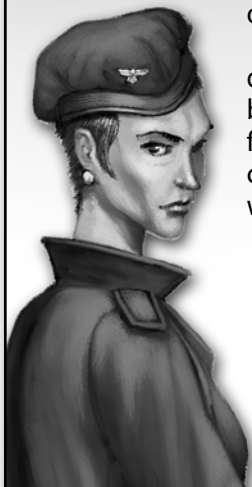
And this malady, this fever of rebellion and Balkanization, is not limited to the Lyran Alliance. Reports from the Federated Suns and the Capellan Confederation attest to similar instability and outbreaks of violence.

What must we of the Free Worlds League do in the face of this rising tide of anarchy and war?

We must stand firm. We, an amalgam of many noble states and worlds, must stay united in our resolve to hold fast to that which is ours; that which makes us who we are.

Now is the time for the Tamarind, the Regular, the Andurien and the Stewart, to set aside differences. Not to forget our heritage—never that—but to stand shoulder to shoulder with our brothers and sisters of the Free Worlds League. We must as one people turn faces of flint to the forces of chaos that threaten our League, our worlds and our families. Through our resolve, our commitment to each other and to the principles that give this, our League, its life and power, we will persevere. We will weather the storm that threatens us. And we shall overcome.

—League-wide public address by Alys Rousset-Marik, Duchess of Augustine, 1 May 3068



EAGLE SCREAMS

Commander Brian Domenic expressed it: "History and tradition and what might have been all take a back seat when it comes to doing what is right. The Free Worlds League is our home."

From the moment they learned that the Lyran invasion force—reportedly including elements of the Fifteenth Arcturan Guards, Fourth Alliance Guards and Fourth Skye Rangers—had taken nearby Cascade, Megrez and Togwotee, the Fifth Fusiliers have been preparing for the onslaught. With Thermopolis squarely along the shortest route from the Lyran beachhead to the heart of the Free Worlds League, it was only a question of when battle would be joined.

True to predictions, the second wave of the Steiner invasion began with an assault on Thermopolis just as dawn broke over the capital yesterday. From the first salvo, the true spirit of the Fusiliers has shone through. From Colonel Jerry Wagner down to his greenest tech, every one of Bolton's Rangers is determined to make the Lyrans' stay on Thermopolis short, expensive and painful.

The hand-lettered signs on the Fusiliers' BattleMechs, tanks and infantry helmets say it all: "The Steiners stop here."

THE QUAGMIRE OF THE ALLIANCE

Alethea Colby [Foreign Ministry Attaché (ret.), Foreign Market Report]: "It's true ten worlds have fallen to the combined forces of Bolan and Skye. These are League worlds and should and must be freed. But there's no need for a war to progress beyond this point. The liberation of our worlds, yes. Restitution for damages, yes, certainly. All evidence indicates the Bolan/Skye forces have observed the rules of warfare in these campaigns, but if any crimes were committed, the criminals should be prosecuted to the full extent of the law.

"Duke Robert Kelswa-Steiner is a reasonable man. He would certainly be open to reasoned diplomatic overtures on all of these points. But reprisal attacks? Punitive raids against Alliance worlds? No. An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth leads to an endless cycle of vicious retribution. A return to borders, proper restitution and restraint. That's the path to lasting peace."

Keith D'Candide [syndicated columnist, Free Worlds Features]: "You're assuming both parties want peace. The Lyran Alliance is interested only in expanding its borders at the expense of the Free Worlds League. They've lost territory to the superior fighting forces of the Clans, and the idea of diminished power is repugnant to House Steiner.

"Faced with a real enemy that is stronger than they are, the Alliance has taken one unfortunate death and isolated incidents of civil unrest on a handful of their worlds, and woven them together to create a conspiracy theory of epic proportions, painting as villains an innocent people whom the Lyrans believe are incapable of defending themselves. The implausibility of this construct is immaterial. It distracts the citizenry from the government's failures and provides a rationale for conquest. The only way to meet such a threat is to disabuse the Alliance of the notion that the Free Worlds League is either helpless or unwilling to defend itself.

"A military response, focused and unrelenting, is the only thing these Huns will respect. Continue to dither about talking, and we will continue to lose worlds. And lives."

Colonel Caleb Moneith [FWLM (Ret.), Armed Forces News]: "Your habit of dismissing as lies any information originating from the Alliance is shortsighted and dangerous. Credible evidence exists—verified by a variety of sources—that several worlds in the Lyran Alliance, including Skye, Donegal, Coventry and Hesperus II, have come under attack. These stories have the ring of truth, particularly since decapitating the Alliance makes sense strategically. Coordinated attacks of this sort require forces positioned in advance, lying doggo until the set time. Not a Clan tactic.

"If we grant that these attacks took place, then we have to grant that the Alliance command is not being completely irrational in suspecting the League. More is happening than we can see. Legal maneuvering over borders and restitution are out of place. And this is certainly no time for jingoist rhetoric. We need clear communication if we're ever going to get out of this mess."

—Partial transcript from *Commentators' Weekly Roundtable*, first aired 6 June 3068

NEWS DOWNLOADER v3.7



DATE & TITLE

SERVICE

STATUS

(11-JAN-68)

"AMC DEFENDS LIBERTY"

[MERCNET]

COMPLETED

(26-JAN-68)

"MYSTERY SHIPS ATTACK TUKAYYID"

[DBC]

DOWNLOADING

(03-FEB-68)

"TUKAYYID NUKED!"

[SBC]

ACCESSING



EAGLE SCREAMS

AT LAST!

(1 July 3068)

Stewart [STEWART FREE PRESS] – With nothing short of jubilation, we report that the Free Worlds League Military has struck back against the Lyran invaders. Though the details of the campaign must remain confidential to prevent information from reaching our enemies, FWLM forces under the command of General Jeremy Brett have liberated Preston.

Whether one characterized the military's hesitation in the face of recent Lyran aggression as confusion or restraint, it is heartening to see them take such decisive action. We are confident that this is the first of many such actions as the Free Worlds League takes back what is ours and frees our fellow citizens from the yoke of oppression.

At a time like this, it is perhaps inevitable to draw parallels between the events of 3058 and this deliverance of Preston—and with it the impending liberation of Rexburg, Pingree, Sheridan, Thermopolis, Togwotee, McAfee, Colfax, Cascade and finally Megrez

WHAT OF THE FLEET?

(9 July 3068)

Andurien [ANDURIEN CHRONICLE] – For the first time since the Lyrans invaded the League four months ago, the League Military has finally struck back. Rushed communiqués were forwarded by HPG per Marshal Jeremy Brett's orders to coincide with the landfall of several FWLM units. The exact composition of this counterattack is unknown, but we do know that a number of border worlds will be liberated.

The biggest question of late, from officials and civilians, is: What of the fleet? The Free Worlds League has pressed into service the largest fleet of any Successor State, easily capable of repelling any invaders. But this behemoth failed to even slow the Lyrans as they swarmed across our borders.

The *Andurien Chronicle* is credited with being the first to discover why. Apparently, the Lyran invasion could not have come at a worse time. As you may remember, last December, the *Eagle*-class *Percival* was briefly lost during her final shakedown cruise. Apparently, a critical flaw in the vessel's life-support systems forced her immediate withdrawal to dry dock for an extensive overhaul, and all vessels have since been recalled for immediate inspection and preventive maintenance to avoid similar mishaps among the rest of the fleet. This recall was kept top secret, so as not to compromise national security—but with the Lyrans invading without WarShip support and the Capellans under attack by the Davions, secrecy seems to be of increasingly less concern. Marshal Brett's counterattack may be a sign that the overhaul is complete, and that we can once again depend on our naval assets.

May *jagganath* Krishna protect and aid the defenders of our realm.

"PROFITS UP"

The numbers for the fourth fiscal quarter, ending 30 June 3068, exceeded projections by twelve percent. Of the BattleMech producers, Earthwerks-FWL remains the strongest in terms of profit per man-hour, while Kali-Yama Weapons made the greatest gains in gross income. Irian BattleMechs made more modest gains, their components and upgrade kits carrying them through a slight dip in large 'Mech production. Only StarCorp fell short of expectations, due primarily to political difficulties softening their Capellan market, but their profits were still up four percent over last year. Corean Enterprises and Free Worlds Defense Industries both provided solid year-end dividends for their stockholders.

Naval production was less volatile given the long-term nature of their production and market. Kallon, Nimakachi, Irian and Illium Naval all reported very strong years. The possible fall-off from an over-extended national economy did not materialize, as foreign sales more than made up for any hesitancy in local markets. ImStar Aerospace reported its most profitable year in more than a decade, while Free Worlds and Gutierrez Aerospace both reported strong fourth quarter earnings.

The big winners this past year, however, were the component producers. With the FWL/LA war heating up, as well as conflicts in almost all primary markets, the demand for missiles, weapons systems—both replacements and upgrades—armor and support technology of all sorts has been absolutely phenomenal. Oriente Weapon Works, Garret Satcom and Quicksell all had record years, while Fusion-Flametech and Emperor Automatic were both in back-order status for the first time since 3065. Small arms and ammo producer Austen-Armstrong describes its profit outlook as "robust," while Gilmour Miltech, specializing in 'Mech rebuilding and upgrading, has announced plans for major expansion. With the recent opening of its new light Gauss rifle plant on Wallis to support the company's latest revision of the venerable *Warhammer* BattleMech line, Ronin Incorporated has come into its own as a major component producer, seeing a two percent market share increase last month alone.

As the various regional conflicts show every sign of continuing, the market outlook is intoxicating. Analysts predict that the 3068-69 fiscal year will be the brightest in recent memory.

—From the Introduction to *Military Engineering Market Report (FWL Edition)*, dated 2 September 3068

as our forces push the Lyrans once and for all beyond the borders of the Free Worlds League. Shall we stop now, as we did ten years ago, with the righteous reclamation of our imprisoned sister worlds? Or should we press on, beyond our traditional borders, to establish a protective buffer against future crimes of aggression?

Only our military leaders can answer these questions. For the moment, those of us who can only stand and wait have a duty to offer our support—and our gratitude—to the valiant men and women who have at last struck the first blow for freedom.

EAGLE SCREAMS

JEREMY BRETT: USURPER IN A HERO'S CLOTHING?

(9 September 3068)

Oriente [ORIENTE OBSERVER] – At last, the tide of battle has turned.

The past week has brought news of daring advances by our Free Worlds League Military along three fronts. Three actions, not to retake League worlds, but to advance into Lyran space. Given the momentum of these victories, no doubt the days weeks ahead will bring news of more and greater triumphs as our finest men and women carry the war to the aggressor's heartland.

However, the name on everyone's lips is not that of Captain-General Thomas Marik, leader of our great League. Instead, the hero of the hour, credited as architect of these victories, is General Jeremy Brett.

Certainly, he is the officer in immediate command of the offensive, but is he the master strategist who positioned our forces and set all the wheels of supply and transport in motion? We do not know. The FWLM does not make public the inner workings of command. However, it is highly doubtful a field commander, no matter how talented, could have mobilized resources on this scale.

Yet a great deal of effort has gone into creating the perception that Jeremy Brett is the heart and mind of our resurgence. Why? Toward what end is this media manipulation aimed?

One need look no further than the Duchess of Augustine, Alys Rousset-Marik.

Her recent plea for unity notably omitted any mention of supporting Captain-General Thomas Marik. Taken in conjunction with her ardent and ongoing efforts to repeal Resolution 288, the glue that holds our Free Worlds League together, this lapse makes clear that she is pursuing a personal agenda. Nor does it take any great stretch of the imagination to see that Brett—who has in the past violated direct orders and the best interests of the League, throwing away the lives of those under his command in an impulsive and ill-considered effort on behalf of the Duchess' late mother—might be a tool of that agenda.

No one questions that General Brett is an able military leader. We do not fault his heroism or his effectiveness in carrying out our current campaign. But citizens should recall that he holds his field command under the overall leadership of the Captain-General.

Captain-General Marik guided our great nation through the initial stages of the Lyran assault while in mortal danger behind enemy lines. This ordeal of sacrifice, statesmanship and heroism far from the public eye bespeaks the soul of a true leader; a leader who places his people and his nation above all else.

Celebrate our victories. Honor our brave and valiant men and women who are even now giving their all in service to us and our great nation. But do not, in the emotion of the moment, forget our true leader, Captain-General Thomas Marik, who serves us even as we serve him.

"WHERE ARE THEY?"

(16 September 3068)

Regulus [REGULAN REPORTER] – The Word of Blake Militia has trained and served side by side with some of the finest units of the Free Worlds League Military for years. It has always been understood that if the Word ever found themselves in need, we would be there. And if the Free Worlds League ever had need, the Word of Blake would stand by our side.

Half a year has gone by since the Lyran invasion began. The Free Worlds League is at war, and our ally is...missing. Not a single unit of the Word of Blake Militia can be found defending our borders.

Where is this friend on whom we were led to believe we could count? From elsewhere throughout the Sphere, we hear of war and rumors of war, and all too frequently blame is laid at the feet of the Word of Blake.

We have been told that much of what we hear from other nations is disinformation; that we should take little of it at face value. But the rumors persist, and as we stand alone to face our enemies, they raise a question we cannot ignore: Have we been had?

If the Word of Blake truly is our ally, where are they?

KNIGHTS RECALLED

(5 October 3068)

Atreus [MARIK COMMONWEALTH TODAY] – In a surprise move earlier this week, Captain-General Thomas Marik recalled the Knights of the Inner Sphere to Atreus, along with a host of other units currently engaged in the fighting along the central League-Alliance front. The move comes just as the counteroffensive led by Tamarind Marshal Jeremy Brett penetrates deep into Lyran space, with some forces a mere jump away from the planet of Skye.

To recall the Knights after their stunning defeat of Lyran forces on Loric and Ford—and even on Cavanaugh II, where the Second Knights reportedly landed barely more than a week ago—seems counterintuitive. Likewise the alleged speed of the recall, for which a command circuit is reportedly being arranged, at least for the Knights. Should not the most celebrated champions of Free Worlds League ideals be at the forefront of our advance?

To date, all attempts to reach a diplomatic agreement with the Lyran invaders have failed. It seems painfully evident that the Lyrans neither seek nor desire a peaceful settlement as long as they believe they have a chance to seize more worlds. In light of this, a strong military response, vigorously prosecuted, would appear to be our best course.

However, the Captain-General has been known to play the long game. What may in the short term seem inexplicable may in the end turn out to have been careful preparation. This sudden recall may be part of a grander scheme.

Whatever the Captain-General has in mind, we can only wait and see. And hope he does not take too long to make his plans manifest, for the Lyrans will surely take anything short of the business end of a laser as a sign of weakness.



ENEMY BROTHERS

They can't say we didn't warn them.

On the day the Second Star League died amid selfishness and backstabbing, the Word of Blake showed their true colors and launched attacks on the Inner Sphere states and our order, the bloody specter of Myndo Waterly coming to the fore. Their brutal assault on our humanitarian centers in the Chaos March was only a precursor to their main event: the treacherous orbital bombardment of Tukayyid.

The Blakists were indiscriminate, striking civilian targets as often as military ones. The people of the Free Rasalhague Republic, a nation birthed in fire and then almost crushed by the Clan juggernaut, once again bore the brunt of the assault. Though ComStar's facilities took grievous damage, First Precentor Dow and Precentor Martial Steiner-Davion were not on-world at the time and escaped the initial attacks unharmed, though Primus Mori was trapped for a time behind enemy lines. The First Precentor immediately announced that our retribution would be swift and merciless, though he did not reveal specifics; Gavin has learned to leave military matters in the hands of those skilled in their use, even though his relationship with Victor is...tense. The arrival of ROM agents at my little retreat came as something of a surprise. Perhaps the Blakists had forgotten me—a minor ignominy—but Dow apparently felt my safety would be better served through ROM's professional efforts, and would also enable ComStar to call on my military advice in Victor's absence.

Not even Blakist attempts to assassinate the Precentor Martial and his sister—though it did delay Victor and prevent his joining the task force—halted the Com Guard operation. As March dawned, Case White went into effect: the largest naval campaign since the early Succession Wars, and the largest planned single ground offensive in the Inner Sphere since the same formations faced off against the Clans in 3052. A score of WarShips escorted eleven divisions of troops against Terra, enacting plans that had lain dormant ever since Blakist treachery seized humanity's homeworld in 3058. Only by sanitizing the viper's nest could the Inner Sphere be spared another Operation Scorpion. Cut off the beast's head and its body dies.

A fine thought—and one certainly espoused by many of my peers—but the first rule of warfare is that no plan survives contact with the enemy. Case White called for an overwhelming force to be deployed against Terra, and though I initially outlined the operation myself ten years ago, both Gavin and Victor had updated the plans numerous times. What precisely went wrong is unclear, but it appears the Blakists were more numerous and powerful than even my most pessimistic estimates projected. Together with technological advancements I dare not even speculate on, this strengthened force held off our assault with a fearsome loss of life on both sides.

Precentor Martial Steiner-Davion's report spoke of death and ruin, and he barely escaped from the Blakists' clutches with sensor recordings of the Terran system. Aside from the *Invisible Truth*,

no other ships escaped to the rally point. It could take weeks—if not months—to realize the full weight of what happened. In the meantime, our Primus remains under siege, as do we all. We must mourn quickly and rebuild more quickly still, hoping all the while that the enemy—though far from crushed—is sufficiently bloodied to withdraw to its den.

Assuming the Blakists will do that, however, might be the last mistake we ever make. Some animals, when cornered, strike out even harder. And if the past six months are any indication, the Word of Blake fanatics are such animals indeed.

—Anastasius Focht, Orestes, 29 April 3068

TUMBLING DOWNWARD

What happened at Outreach, at Mars and at Tharkad? What did the various powers of the Inner Sphere do to invite this so-called "holy war" the Word of Blake now wages against us all? Did they plan this all along, a conspiracy to bring humankind to its knees? Or did a series of accidents lead us to this path?

—Michael Bosworth, INN Special Correspondent

WORD OF BLAKE DECLARES WAR AS STAR LEAGUE DIES

(9 December 3067)

Tukayyid [INN] – Four days ago, decrying the dissolution of the Second Star League, the Word of Blake launched devastating dual assaults against the capitals of the Federated Suns and the Lyran Alliance. The two well-coordinated attacks, launched by Blakist WarShips slipped into the Tharkad and New Avalon systems, unleashed orbital bombardments against both planets. In the case of Tharkad, reports indicate that at least one nuclear device was detonated inside Tharkad City limits, causing massive damage and uncounted casualties within minutes of the first shots fired.

Preceding these attacks, Word of Blake forces issued brief messages to both of the former FedCom state governments, declaring a holy war—a *jihad*—against the corruption and disharmony that destroyed the Second Star League. This jihad, the Blakists say, will continue until the nations of the Inner Sphere reconsider their decision and reconvene the Star League.

In response to these horrific events, ComStar Primus Sharilar Mori, speaking from ComStar's headquarters on Tukayyid, released a brief statement condemning the Blakist attacks and offered ComStar's immediate assistance to both stricken nations.

HERETICS AND TRAITORS!

(9 December 3067)

Terra [VOICE OF BLAKE] – Do not believe the lies spread by the traitors who serve the false Primus!

As was prophesied, the rise of a new Star League set humankind down the path to redemption. Even though the murderer Focht and his puppet Mori inducted the son of the Fox into their



ENEMY BROTHERS

NORTHWIND UNDER GUARD

(24 December 3067)

Terra [VOICE OF TRUTH] – Following the sneak attack by members of the so-called Allied Mercenary Command against the Terran system, it has become necessary to place Northwind under protective quarantine. The Word of Blake acknowledges and salutes the contributions made by the heroic Northwind Highlander regiments in the fight against the Clans, and wishes to preserve their safety and neutrality and that of their world in these difficult times. With that view in mind, elements of our fleet have been deployed to protect Northwind from certain local powers that have demonstrated imperialistic ambitions.

Commercial traffic through the system's nadir and zenith jump points may continue to pass unhindered, though vessels may be required to submit to inspection at any time. The services of Northwind's recharge stations will remain available. We request that any vessels passing through the Northwind system refrain from using non-standard jump points, as such use constitutes a hazard to local shipping and will be deemed a hostile or criminal act.

Regretfully, travel to and from the world of Northwind has been suspended indefinitely. The Word of Blake regrets any inconvenience this restriction may cause for travelers and merchants.

The peace of Blake be with you.

ranks to aid them, they could not prevent the First Transfer. The Second Transfer was marked with portents both wondrous and terrible, but the traitors' unholy influence over First Lord Theodore could not prevent us from assuming our rightful place. As 3067 dawned, we rejoiced, for at last the long wait was over. The will of Blake would be done.

Then we were betrayed! Betrayed by those we sought to save!

Yet we could not abandon humanity as its last steps faltered. With the moment of the Third Transfer slipping away, we acted in the only way open to us. Like a surgeon who must amputate a limb in order to save the patient, we tried to cut out the cancer that was killing the Inner Sphere.

But always the traitors are there, whispering their evil lies. Claiming that a nuclear device leveled Tharkad City. Saying this was our doing! Lies! Vile falsehoods spread by Focht's puppets as they tried to keep the truth from you! We did not destroy Tharkad. That unfortunate planet succumbed to the incompetence of the infidels who thought to do the work that blessed Blake charged to our care. Like children playing with matches, they burned themselves.

Do not listen to the heretics! Soon we will show you the depth of their deceit. Then you will all know where your salvation truly lies. It is not too late! Together we can complete the Third Transfer and save humanity!

Blessed are those who walk along Blake's shining path!

SLAUGHTER!

(26 December 3067)

Ivanovitch, this partial transmission comes from Joseph Lawson, an INN correspondent embedded with the Second Division on Epsilon Indi. We can't air this, but you must know. —Petra

[Joseph Lawson kneels in a bunker. Behind him, Com Guard officers work at a holotable surrounded by a host of computer stations, the screens blurred for security purposes. Busy but organized activity fills the command center, and the room occasionally shakes. Nearby weapons fire and explosions outside are clearly audible.]

[Lawson]: "It looks like this will be the last transmission I can make. The Langendorf Lancers so far have not responded to Precentor Grandi's call to join against the Word of Blake invaders. It remains unclear whether the unit has been subverted or destroyed by the Blakists, or because the mercenaries have simply chosen to stay out of the fighting.

"In the meantime, we are on our own. The Second Division is possibly the finest military force in known space, but the Blakists have an impressive numerical advantage and have used it to devastating effect. A number of defections to the Blakists have complicated matters further, and the Second's advantage in mechanized infantry has not allowed them to withstand the Word of Blake's BattleMech onslaught. The Blakists are also deploying a new type of battle armor, which is proving lethal against conventional infantry forces.

"Precentor Grandi informed me that our defenses are crumbling. Soon this command post will be overrun. I may die. I... I just want to say th—"

[With a tremendous thump, the blast door behind Lawson bulges slightly at one side. A second thump, and the room shakes as the bulge expands. Officers yell out orders, and heavily armed troopers take up position opposite of the door as Lawson ducks behind the planning table. Junior officers abandon their consoles, drawing sidearms as they scramble for cover.]

[Lawson]: [unintelligible]

[The blast door bulge becomes a crack wide enough for metal fingers to poke through. The door servos whine as they are forced open halfway, revealing a smoke-filled corridor. With a short, barked command, the Com Guard troops open fire and toss grenades toward the opening. Smoke billows out after the blasts, then nothing.]

[Lawson]: [twitches] "Is it over? Is it over? Is it o—?"

[A rifle muzzle aims around the corner, and with a loud "crack" a single slug fires into the room. Gas begins to spread from the unseen impact point. Lawson crumples forward, clutching his unprotected ears. The muzzle disappears as the opening is flooded with weapons fire again. A standard Inner Sphere battlesuit, missing its left arm, rushes in. A second follows on the opposite flank as both immediately take harrowing fire. Plodding on, both troopers open up with machine guns, tearing through computer stations and technicians in a deafening hail of bullets. The roar nearly drowns out the screams of the dying.

ENEMY BROTHERS

A third humanoid shape—shifting and almost semi-transparent—emerges from the opening, sweeping the room with slugs that burst forth from one of its arms. As return fire pelts it, the mimetic effect fails, revealing gouged and tattered armor as the Purifier trooper falls back, one arm limp and one leg frozen. Shouldering past it, a fourth trooper, clad in Phalanx armor, storms into the room. The Phalanx's Gauss rifle fires with another deafening report, and voices cry out as an explosion hurls bodies across the chamber.

Recoiling from heavy small-arms fire, the Phalanx stumbles and then rushes forward, savagely snatching up a nearby Com Guard trooper in a battle-clawed hand. It uses its armored glove to crush the man's skull. The battle claws twist savagely, tearing out entrails as the corpse is released.

The camera swings, catching sight of the Purifier trooper just behind the Phalanx as the armor sheds, revealing the horribly wounded, heavily muscled woman within. Her left arm is cybernetic, a mass of myomer and metal. With an animal growl, the now-unsuited trooper leaps over the Phalanx to land on top of a corpse closer to the camera. Reaching out with her right hand, she snags a nearby officer, ignoring a burst of submachine gun fire that rips into her chest with a spray of blood. The wound reveals a web of metal fibers beneath. Her cybernetic fist punches through the officer's chest with little effort, tearing out a ruined mass of blood and tissue through shattered ribs and the man's blood-soaked uniform. Lawson's screams pick up where the dying officer's leave off.

Additional large humans stalk through the opening and join the melee, grabbing, pulling, breaking and maiming everyone their

REVIVE THE STAR LEAGUE—OR ELSE

(5 January 3068)

Terra [VOICE OF BLAKE] – People of the Inner Sphere, citizens of the thousands of planets settled by humankind. Once you were united under the Star League, but for three hundred years savage wars have consumed your worlds. Until a new enemy appeared, mysterious invaders known as the Clans. Powerful and ruthless, they struck like lightning, driving a wedge deep into the Inner Sphere. Then they made one mistake: they threatened hallowed Terra and had to face the warriors of blessed Blake! In the spirit of the Star League, ancient foes reunited and we took the fight to the enemy's homeworlds.

Citizens of the Inner Sphere, beware! Your leaders have betrayed you at the moment of triumph! Together we stood on the eve of the golden future the Third Transfer would have ushered in. But when the time came, your leaders faltered, once more letting their own petty weaknesses and jealousies rip apart one of humankind's greatest achievements.

Now the Master comes, bearing the torch of Blake's wisdom. See the light and revive the Star League, or face the cleansing fire as we burn away the corruption of those who have betrayed us all.

The peace of Blake be with you.

MONSTERS!

As I write this, Harlech burns.

The majestic spires of Wolf Hall, once strong and proud on the skyline, are blackened and broken. Now they are nothing but a grave marker for the fallen Dragoons.

Choked with oil and debris, Lake Kearney is a black pit that devours light and reflects nothing. The Harlech Links (where I have spent so many pleasant hours over the years) is a blasted heath gouged with BattleMech footprints. In the streets, once filled with cosmopolitan bustle, only the dead now linger.

The sky is black with smoke from a thousand fires. They rage unchecked, for to venture out invites attack from the white BattleMechs and packs of battle armor that stalk the streets firing at any movement. The wounded fill the hospitals, but are not safe even there from infantry searching for mercenaries or their families.

During the night (or what the chronometers tell me was night), the fighting came a lot closer to the HPG. I only have a Level II of infantry to defend the transmitter. I hope we can hang on. I hope the remaining Dragoons can defeat those who were once my brothers.

I hope Precentor Martial Steiner-Davion can save us all from these monsters.

I don't know how much longer I'll be able to keep transmitting...

—Acting Precentor Eric Dyllon, Outreach HPG, 10 January 3068

hands can reach. Suddenly the camera spins again, slamming to the ground as smoke and debris dance across the cracked floor before it. Lawson, a few meters away, turns at the sight and crawls toward the device. Blood flows from his ears and tears from his eyes.]

[Lawson]: "Mary! Mary—!"

[A metal-shod foot slams down on Lawson's outstretched arm. The crunch of bone can be heard over a cacophony of cries and weapons fire in the distance as his face contorts in agony. The female Purifier warrior bends down, driving her cybernetic arm into his back with earth-shattering force. Lawson convulses once, then goes limp. The arm is withdrawn, covered in blood and gore. It reaches for the camera. Lifting the device to eye level, the female Blakist, her flesh-and-blood arm little more a bloody stump and splintered bone, her body covered with deep flesh wounds that reveal hints of metal plates and fibers beneath her chest and face, grins into the camera. Her eyes are wild, her pupils dilated. Her voice rings out like a bird among the cries of the dying and the continued killing.]

[Trooper]: "I'm sorry...did I interrupt something important?"

COM GUARDS SHATTERED

(14 January 3068)

Zurich [INN] – I'm here at the headquarters of the Com Guards' Seventy-sixth Division, having jumped from Tall Trees with the survivors from the Eighty-third Division.

The Eighty-third (known as the White Cyclones) was forced to withdraw from Bryant when that world joined the Word of Blake



ENEMY BRO

Protectorate back in early 3066. Having set up new headquarters on Tall Trees, the division was eager to face the Blakists, but the rapidity and force of the enemy onslaught that fell upon them caught the Cyclones by surprise.

Initially confident that he could hold the ComStar HPG in Fa Shura and the city of Helena against the invading Third and Fourth Word of Blake Militia divisions, Precentor Omlid was rudely surprised to learn that the Blakist forces possessed significantly greater strength than reported in ROM intelligence briefings. While the Fourth Division troops pinned down half of Omlid's units in Helena, the Third Division threw a full six Level IIIs—comprised mostly of BattleMechs and battle armor—at Fa Shura.

Fighting in the city was reportedly fierce, with significant property damage and heavy civilian casualties. I was with the troops in Helena when we lost contact with Precentor Omlid and the HPG station during the fourth day of fighting. A few hours later, Fa Shura fell, with only a handful of survivors escaping aboard a pair of Com Guard *Overlord*-class DropShips. Rather than wait for the inevitable, Demi-Precentor Edmund Rydz elected to spare Helena the devastation that had ravaged Fa Shura. Mounting a breakout under cover of darkness, Rydz drove to link up with the fleeing DropShips. Dogged pursuit by the Fourth Division whittled the Seventy-sixth down, and less than a Level III of troops escaped Tall Trees.

Reports are sketchy, but it appears that the Com Guards' Second Division on Epsilon Indi and the Eleventh Division on Fletcher have suffered even higher casualties than the Eighty-third. As of this time, it appears that all Com Guards forces in the Chaos March have essentially been destroyed.

This is Moore Kramer, Zurich, reporting for INN.

TIDE OF FIRE

With the devastating assaults on Outreach, Tharkad and New Avalon under way, it was only a matter of time before the militant followers of William Blane and Cameron St. Jamais would finally target ComStar. Sure enough, in the final weeks of January 3068, the first strikes fell on Tukayyid, delivered just as indiscriminately as those launched against the Blakists' previous targets.

TUKAYYID HIT, HEAVY CASUALTIES REPORTED

31 January 3068

Tukayyid [INN] – In a devastating and unexpected assault that began yesterday morning with the detection of anomalous jump signatures by Tukayyid's orbital space stations, the Word of Blake WarShips *Deliverance* and *Blake's Sword* have struck the de facto capital of ComStar operations and the headquarters of the Com Guards. The Com Guards WarShips *Blake's Vengeance* and *Hammerstrike*, together with aerospace elements from the 278th and 472nd divisions, promptly engaged the Word of Blake vessels, but the attacking ships quickly deployed a large number of fight-

THE HOLY SWORD OF BLAKE

[Guiding Light]: "North Star, we've got an odd reading at vector oh-one-seven by one-zero-niner, station relative. Are you reading this as well?"

[North Star]: "Roger that, Guiding Light. Seems to be a building jump wave, but the signal's odd..."

[Guiding Light]: "It's registering a normal IR signature, but it's climbing four times as fast... North Star, are there any scheduled stops on the log for today? Include Alpha Priority in search."

[North Star]: "Negative, Guiding Light, no incoming vessels logged. Might be an early arrival, we've got the *Charles Grant* due in two days, bound for Orestes."

[Guiding Light]: "Emergence bubble expanding...will you look at that? I think it's a misjump in progress, the IR sig's too high for any known vessel..."

[North Star]: "Registering another jump wave, fifty clicks from first anomaly...Hell! Another at thirty-five clicks..."

[Guiding Light]: "Damn, log this! K-F bubble has severe fluctuations. Expansion rate is triple the standard ratio! Heat signature is passing contact plus three minutes!"

[North Star]: "Secondary waves are following the first anomaly's parameters, only smaller in scale. Same rates of progression... Link datastreams to planetside dump, Control Research will want to see this if it is a misjump in progress."

[Guiding Light]: "Expansion is beyond standard size for *Aegis*-class. Image forming now..."

[North Star]: "Beta anomaly is surging hot! Whatever it is must really have been moving when it hit the—"

[Guiding Light]: "Bubble at known expansion limit for anything we've got on record...Blake's ghost!"

[North Star]: "Object Beta is surging through...K-F field has fragmented! EMP wave at five times standard; initiate safety protocols, pull all sensors offline..."

[Guiding Light]: "Blake's holy sword...it's gigantic...wait a minute, that's the..." [explosion of static] "...sil! How the—Weapons lock! Weapons lock! All hands, battle stations! Repeat, all hands, battle sta—" [explosion, static whine]

[North Star]: [static] "...elocity pass! Weapons engaging! Brace for imp—" [sudden squeal, static]—"Star to Tukayyid Control! We are under attack! Say again, we have hostiles in system! North Star is under att—"

—Comm logs recovered from the ruins of Tukayyid Space Traffic Control HQ, dated 21 January 3068

ers, assault craft and attack DropShips that turned the initiative against the ComStar forces. Precentor Allian Higham, commander of the Com Guards' Twelfth Army, has confirmed that both Com Guards vessels were lost in the fighting, and that few aerospace fighters successfully disengaged. The *Deliverance* apparently took severe damage, but the Blakist WarShip has not left the battle site, while the *Blake's Sword* has since taken up position above Tukayyid

ENEMY BROTHERS

and has begun to bombard all Com Guards elements on the planet. Caught away from their underground bunkers, much of the 278th Division and the Twenty-first Centauri Lancers mercenary command have already suffered severe casualties.

Worse, there is still no word on the fate of the First Royal BattleMech Division of the now-disbanded Star League, or of the Killer Bees mercenary command. According to the last reports prior to the attack, both units were engaged in extended field ex-

ercises and undisclosed discussions in the Dinju Mountains region, but all communications with that area were lost during the initial bombardment.

Precentor Higham indicated that the rest of ComStar has been notified of these events, but could not say for certain when reinforcements might arrive.

DOW VOWS "SWIFT RETRIBUTION"

(9 February 3068)

Orestes [INN] – Releasing his first public statement about the ongoing siege of Tukayyid, First Precentor Gavin Dow today promised "swift retribution" in the making for the Word of Blake.

"We have left these misguided fanatics alone for too long, preferring peaceful coexistence to open warfare with our former brothers. It is clear now that they seek to harm us as well as all of humankind, and so the time has come to finish what we should have finished in 3058."

The First Precentor did not comment on the fate of Primus Sharilar Mori, who remains missing since shortly after the Blakist attack began. Nor did he comment on the nature of the promised retribution, beyond assuring its swift occurrence, though he did say that "the most capable and experienced officers available" would lead the imminent response to the Com Guards.

CASE WHITE

The swift action promised by First Precentor Dow soon fell with a vengeance when ComStar activated Case White, a pre-planned mass assault against the Terran system, developed soon after that world's fall to Word of Blake in 3058. With an overwhelming force that comprised nearly all of the Com Guards fleet and included more than ten divisions of ground troops, the assault seemed sure to overrun the Blakist defense. Even considering the results of Wolf's Dragoons' failed attack in December, few could have predicted the fateful outcome.

PRECENTOR MARTIAL VICTOR STEINER-DAVION SPEAKS

(11 February 3068)

Orestes [FSNS] – The following is a transcript of a Federated Suns News Service interview with Precentor Martial Victor Steiner-Davion, recorded on 9 February 3068:

[Willard Stevens]: "I'm here with Precentor Martial Victor Steiner-Davion aboard the Com Guards flagship, *Invisible Truth*. Precentor Martial."

[Victor Steiner-Davion]: "I prefer plain 'Martial'."

[Stevens]: "Martial, how do you view the current situation, in the Chaos March and elsewhere?"

[Steiner-Davion]: "I was horrified to hear the reports that the Word of Blake has resorted to weapons of mass destruction and war on civilians, especially in their attacks against Outreach, Tharkad and New

"THE SKY IS FALLING!"

[Reporter]: "... Civil authorities are recommending that anyone within a ten-kilometer radius of the War College evacuate. While it has not yet been targeted, officials believe it is only a matter of time.

"Here in Skupo, the situation is dire. Most of the population was caught unawares as more than fifty aerospace fighters bombed the Com Guards barracks to oblivion at dawn today. Even now, only two hours after the initial strike, the fighters still rain fire and death from the sky.

"The entire district has become a war zone, with at least three waves of fighters raking the embedded Com Guards troops. Behind me you can see the Teirgaard Cannery on fire..."

[A Com Guards Rifleman barrels past and plants itself at the intersection, arms elevated. Car alarms wail from the 'Mech's heavy passage.]

[Reporter, continuing]: "The Com Guards have put up a valiant stand, but the Blakist fighters just keep coming. North of here, the Toyota-Miuki warehouse district has been completely leveled, more than ten thousand people are dead or missing. Emergency crews can't reach the raging fire because of the—"

[Dual high-pitched whines come from the Rifleman as the autocannons in each arm spin up. A tearing sound accompanies twin flashes as the arms begin tracking a fighter that streaks overhead.]

[Reporter, shouting over scene]: "You can see here another pass by the Word of Blake, apparently on the Com Guards column behind us—"

[High-pitched wail and twin explosions in background.]

[Reporter, his face drained of blood]: "By Thor's holy hammer—that was the Heinrich Månsdottir Memorial Hospital..." [Camera turns wildly and focuses on a towering skyscraper that burns from several gigantic holes.] "There are more than one thousand beds in that hospital..."

[Camera slowly pans one hundred eighty degrees. The view catches multiple burning buildings, craters, piles of rubble and a shattered highway span, then stops on the openly weeping reporter.]

[Reporter]: "When will this madness end? What have we done to deserve this fate at the hands of the Blakist terrorists? Simply because we allowed ComStar to use our worlds as a forward base? Have we sold our souls to the devil hands of Blake?"

"Who will come to our aid?"

—Live special news broadcast aired by Republican News Interstellar, Tukayyid, 28 January 3068



ENEMY BROTHERS

Avalon. I can only add my condemnation of the Blakists' actions to those already voiced by Primus Mori and First Precentor Dow."

[Stevens]: "First Precentor Gavin Dow has promised that the Com Guards will swiftly deal with the Word of Blake. Just what action are you going to take?"

[Steiner-Davion]: "You understand that operational security forbids disclosing any details. I'm certain the First Precentor would be

more than happy to talk more to the press on the subject."

[Stevens]: "Of course, but when are the Com Guards going to get involved, and where?"

[Steiner-Davion]: "If you've been hearing the same reports coming out of the Chaos March as I have, then you'll know we've already seen heavy fighting there. But before the Guards can act, several divisions have to be redeployed. While that happens, ComStar and allied states need to gather as much intelligence as we can. As a relative of mine is so fond of saying, "information is ammunition."

[Stevens]: "Can we expect to see you take the field against the Word of Blake? Will the *Invisible Truth* head for the Terran Corridor? Will you escort your sister back to the Federated Suns?"

[Steiner-Davion]: "I can't comment on any of that at this time."

"DUTY OR SUICIDE"

Foolhardy.

That's the word Alain used this morning when we discussed our route to meet up with the Case White task force. And I have to agree.

The events of the past few months have definitely been one shock right after another. With Tukayyid hit, the Guards need to regroup there, not strike back at Terra, where we simply don't know what awaits.

Focht's information was scant—the defenses ComStar had in place before Terra fell to the fanatics surely have been upgraded by now. The Dragoons' slaughter is proof enough of that. But how much of an upgrade are we talking about? By all estimates, the ships the Blakists had at Tharkad, New Avalon and Luthien—that should have been all of them accounted for, and yet something took out Wolf's people before they could say more than that they were dying.

We won't go in blind like they did; recon ships will lead the way. But Gavin is too confident about this, believing this hasty strike will be enough. He thinks we can overwhelm anything the Blakists have on Terra and strike the head off of this beast.

That *alone* is enough to worry me.

But it isn't my decision to make, is it? Up to this point, I've been the master of my fate, answerable to no one higher save God. My duties as Prince required me to consider my people when a decision needed making, but ultimately I had complete control over which way I would go. Gemini was abhorrent and vile, but it had to be done; at the time my people needed safety, and I sacrificed honor for duty then.

Here and now, I suppose, I'll have to make the sacrifice again. No choice. I am subject to the First Precentor (galling as that may be) and must follow his orders. One thing every soldier knows is how to follow orders. I haven't forgotten my lessons...

My reservations are grave. As are Alain's. What if the League fleet lies in wait at Terra? What if *that's* the Blakists' surprise?

No matter. We'll make the best of what we have, because that's where our duty lies.

I need to at least make sure Yvonne is safely away; I am still honor-bound to the Suns enough to safeguard the Princess Regent. And she *is*, at the end of the day, still my baby sister.

I'll need to talk to Alain about arranging a rendezvous with a Suns tramp carrier. One of MIIO's watchdoggers should do nicely.

—From the personal journal of Victor Steiner-Davion, 10 February 3068

CASE WHITE UNDERWAY!

(9 March 3068)

Orestes [INN] – Case White, ComStar's contingency plan to liberate Terra, is finally underway, First Precentor Gavin Dow reported today. After spending a month marshalling the Com Guards fleet and enough troops to secure humanity's homeworld, Com Guards forces reportedly infiltrated the Sol system sometime today and were advancing toward Terra. Word of Blake resistance is expect-

DIERON UNDER ATTACK

(19 February 3068)

Dieron [FSNS] – Two weeks after contact with Luthien was lost, unidentified forces struck Dieron in a lightning assault that shattered the Third Dieron Regulars and forced the Eridani Light Horse back to Fort Winston.

The attackers have since been identified as elements of the Word of Blake's Eighth Division, supported by the Hannibal's Hermits mercenary command. The Light Horse can field their Twenty-first Striker and Nineteenth Cavalry regiments and their Brigade Command. However, Fort Winston is home to the Light Horse's dependents, effectively nailing them in position.

The Horsemen are probably trying to hold out until the 151st Light Horse can arrive, said to be en route from the Clan homeworlds. But with the dissolution of the Star League and communications patchy at best, the exact status of the 151st remains in question. Right now, one additional Light Horse regiment, the 71st, remains deployed on Huntress, and nobody can guess how the Clans will react.

The few local officials I've been able to talk to subscribe to the theory that the Blakists are also responsible for our loss of communications with Luthien. Sketchy reports of attacks on Tharkad and New Avalon support this contention.

This is Archie Weston on Dieron, February 5, 3068, reporting for FSNS.

CRADLE OF HUMANKIND DEFENDED!

VOICE OF BLAKE

(14 March 3068)

Terra [VOICE OF BLAKE] – "It was the greatest fleet of WarShips assembled for an assault since General Kerensky jumped to Terra to defeat Amaris. As evening broke on 12 March of this year, the scene from three centuries ago was repeated over Terra. Ship after ship of the ComStar fleet appeared and slid into formation as the invasion flotilla known as Case White went into action. Twenty-one WarShips and enough DropShips and JumpShips to cloud the heavens..."

<<Voiceover begins>>

[Terra Space Control]: "What the... We have unannounced incoming jump signatures! Building near L2 on the far side of Luna. Counting... sixteen signatures and rising! Condition Red! First ships are appearing... Lola III's, Essexes... Do we have any IDs?"

[Tactical]: "Working on it. First ones are in. Lolas are Divine Wisdom, Holy Martyrdom, Ranger and Strength Through Adversity. Holy Blake, those are Com Guards ships! They've got the whole damn fleet with them, even the Vision of Truth, fully loaded!"

[Terra Space Control]: "Central Command, this is TSC. We have a full Heretic invasion fleet incoming! Two score WarShips and a dozen jumpers. First and Second squadrons are burning for them at max G. Request Third Squadron also be released..."

<<Voiceover fades out>>

"Facing them, prepared by divine Providence, were the heroes of the Word of Blake Navy, veterans of the unwarranted mercenary assault on Mars, defending the heart of humankind against those who wished it harm. The stalwart defenders launched their vessels and prepared to fight—and die, if necessary—to protect their home.

"At 1500 hours [TST] on 13 March, the fleets met above the blue jewel of Terra. Battle was barely joined when the True Believers of Blake rose up to strike their first blows against the Heretics."

<<Voiceover begins>>

[Righteous Fury]: "What in Blake's name! Fleet Command! This is Righteous Fury! The Swift Justice just fired a broadside into the Vision of Truth! She's preparing to fire again! Permission to engage the Justice?"

[Blake's Strength]: "Righteous Fury, permission granted. Protect those droppers!"

[Righteous Fury]: "Command, Justice has just suffered three large onboard explosions. Her engines appear to be down and she's stopped firing, not responding to hails. We still have a solution on her..."

[Blake's Strength]: "Send a detachment of marines over to investigate. What? Damn them all to hell! Attention all captains! Deathblow and Ranger both report explosions onboard. Sabotage!"

[Defender of Versailles]: "Say again, Command? I thought ROM vetted all the crews?"

[Blake's Strength]: "Hang ROM, and don't speculate, Defender. Command to all vessels, prepare to engage enemy forces."

<<Voiceover fades out>>

"Even the late arrival of the Heretics' Precentor Martial and his flagship, the *Invisible Truth*, could not stem the battle as it turned against ComStar..."

<<Voiceover resumes>>

[Truth Bridge Crewman]: "Admiral, the Strength is lost, sustaining heavy damage on her port side."

[Crewman]: "So many ships... The scouts didn't mention any of this!"

[Admiral Beresick]: "Forget the scouts! Roll 180 degrees and disengage at full thrust. Starboard batteries, focus on that Aegis! Get us clear!"

[Crewman]: "Hull breach! Both left PPC batteries are out of action!"

[Beresick]: "Helm, get us out of here now!"

[Loud alarms sound]

[Crewman]: "Brace for impact, brace for impact. Collision alert, collision alert!"

<<Voiceover fades out again>>

"...In the end, twelve Heretic WarShips were destroyed, while the remaining ten were disabled or surrendered, but not without grave cost. The heroic crews of six Word of Blake vessels paid the ultimate price in defending Blessed Terra.

"Unfortunately, not even their sacrifice could keep all the Heretics from slipping past the lines. Roughly three Com Guards divisions managed to make landfall, immediately going to ground in nearby cities. In the ensuing struggle, the Heretics proved why they are no longer fit to rule Terra as they fought to their bloody, bitter end in some of Terra's most ancient civilian population centers. Rather than accept defeat, one division even detonated several tactical nuclear devices in the ancient city of Riga, killing tens of thousands of innocents to thwart the defensive efforts of two valiant Level III's of Militia and TerraSec troops.

"But in the end, even the underhanded tactics of the corrupt Heretics could not stand against the fury of Blake's justice. To all true believers in the Word of Blake, let this victory be a sign! The time to turn your backs on the Heretics has come! The time for Blake's Vision has finally arrived, and we are its harbingers!

"The peace of Blake be with you all!"



ENEMY BROTHERS

ed to be fierce, as a similar assault launched by Wolf's Dragoons recently ended in disaster. But the task force—which includes ComStar WarShips *Blake's Strength*, *Vision of Truth*, *Avenging Sword* and *Narbonne*—is expected to cast aside all hostile units. The actual number of Blakist WarShips deployed in the Terran system is not known, but Com Guards military leaders have estimated that the Case White task force would likely outnumber Blakist vessels by as much as four to one, leaving a substantial margin of security for the roughly 40,000 men and women being deployed.

"Once the Sol system is secure, we can focus on other Blakist strongholds and operational areas," First Precentor Dow explained. "Terra is their industrial hub. Without it, they cannot hope to maintain their jihad and stand against us, even with the nuclear weapons they have begun to employ."

"DEVASTATION"

[INN Anchor]: "The First Circuit released a statement today confirming the failure of Case White. All Com Guards Divisions and all ComStar WarShips—nearly the entire Com Guards combat navy—dispatched to the assault on Terra are listed missing and presumed destroyed.

"With the losses over Tukayyid and elsewhere in the Chaos March, the Case White failure has all but eradicated the Com Guards admiralty and rendered its ground force a shadow of its former self. The First Circuit statement did not mention the use of nuclear weapons in the Blakists' defense of Terra, and First Precentor Gavin Dow could not be reached for further comment on the operation. However, INN has received this video release from Jenna Martins, our field reporter on board the *Invisible Truth*, soon after she narrowly escaped Blakist interceptors in the Terran system—contrary to earlier reports by Blakist outlets..."

[Cut to: Reporter Jenna Martins stands in a small, soot-smeared corridor with several other reporters and their crews. A bulkhead door is visible some distance behind her, flanked by two Inner Sphere standard battlesuits. The letters 'C-I-C' can be seen stenciled on the door, over the ComStar and Star League logos.]

[Martins]: "We are standing just outside the command and control center of the *Invisible Truth*, which has been under heavy and steady acceleration ever since our arrival in the Sol system. Adept LaMoine Oberschulte, a designated spokesman for Precentor Martial Steiner-Davion and Admiral Beresick, both of whom are on the bridge at this time, will be addressing us shortly on the status of the mission and of the rest of the Case White task force."

[As if on cue, the sentry on the right side of the door shifts in place and a female voice issues from the suit's external speakers.]

[Sentry]: "Ladies and gentlemen, Adept Oberschulte will see you now." [The C-I-C door opens to reveal a holographic presentation in the center of a dim room filled with computer stations and busy crewmen in Com Guards naval attire. The camera focuses on the hologram, which projects the Sol system, a single green triangle blinking near Terra and along the planet's orbital path. A dashed green line indicates the

green triangle's projected course. Several red triangles are depicted closer to the planet and the moon, with multiple dashed red lines projected in front of them, all of which cross the dashed green line at various points. Numbers flutter around each icon, all apparently counting down. Stepping in front of the image, a ComStar naval officer in his mid-thirties clasps his hands behind his back and meets the eyes of the gathered reporters with a grim expression.]

[Oberschulte]: "Welcome, members of the press. I am Adept LaMoine Oberschulte. On behalf of Admiral Beresick, I apologize for the inconvenience of our current 1.5-G acceleration, but as the projection behind me demonstrates, there is an urgent need for us to put as much space between us and the enemy fleet as possible.

"What I am about to discuss with you has already been shared with the crew of the *Invisible Truth*. It will likely be weeks before you can give this to your news outlets, and even then only after significant editing for security purposes. The Precentor Martial has chosen to divulge this information because he feels you have a right to know what kind of danger we are presently in, but stresses that we expect more responsibility from you than that of certain colleagues whose actions nearly got us all killed.

"You see behind me a plot of the *Truth's* path away from our Word of Blake pursuers. We estimate no less than seven ships currently in pursuit, which we first detected at a spot roughly one point four one-gee burn-days away from our present location after our arrival here via a non-standard jump point believed to be that used by the initial Case White fleet. As far as we can determine, the Blakist ships were engaged in salvage operations on our arrival, and the space around their location appears to be filled with debris and derelict vessels. Unfortunately, sensors told us that all active IFF transponders in the field of debris belong to the Word of Blake. Upon confirming what appears to be the complete destruction of the main task force fleet, we received transmissions from the Blakists to cut our engines and surrender our vessel or be destroyed.

"Since then, we have picked up several drive flare signatures that indicate a large number of inbound vessels vectoring to intercept the *Truth*. In the past few hours, despite constant scanning, we have not picked up any ComStar beacons of any kind. We can only speculate as to what occurred here, but clearly the Blakist forces still active in this system are far more numerous than our scout reports let on. The cause of the intelligence failure remains under investigation, and I am not authorized to speculate.

"Ladies and gentlemen, it appears from the sensor evidence that Case White has utterly failed. We dare not speculate at this time how the Blakists managed to defeat a fleet three times as large as the vessels we knew they had, nor can we ascertain the composition and configuration of most of the Blakist ships now pursuing us. We have detected higher-than-normal levels of radiation from the debris field, suggesting that nuclear weapons may have been employed to destroy the Case White fleet, but we cannot be certain of that, largely because of some unusual signals and interference.

ENEMY BROTHERS

"With no apparent survivors or support available, and considering our present condition and prior battle damage, the decision was made to immediately move away from the enemy vessels in hopes of buying enough time to hot-load our K-F drive and effect an emergency jump out-system before the Blakists can engage. The admiral and the Precentor Martial want you all to be aware of the distinct possibility of imminent combat within the next twenty-four to thirty-six hours, and to know that we will do our best to assure the safety of everyone on board. But we are all in grave danger, and you have a right to know about it.

"I will not take questions at this time. Thank you for your patience and support."

[Oberschulte nods to another pair of sentries and begins to move around the holoprojection as another pair of battle-suited troopers ushers out the small gathering of silent reporters.]

—INN News Special Report, Orestes, 21 March 3068

MOPPING UP

With most of the Com Guards fleet destroyed and at least half the nations of the Inner Sphere in disarray, the Word of Blake has wasted no time consolidating its hold over several nearby worlds. The few leaders in their path who could have stood against the fanatics, cowed by the examples of Outreach and Tharkad or unable to muster the dedication and forces to hold the line like the defenders on New Avalon, began to cave in to Blakist demands, expanding a hegemony built on surrender and supplication, an empire based on terror.

"THE BRINGERS OF TRUTH"

My dearest Rianne,

We're in hot-drop mode, about ready to HALO deploy over our objective. Precentor Alvarez says it'll be a quick and clean strike on the array, but I don't trust that man's strategic depth as far as I could throw him. Good thing he's got us to watch his skinny butt.

Listen, I know we've had our disagreements about my assignment to this tour here on Keid. But I really believe in what we're doing. We've given these people jobs, protection, an education. We've reopened the underwater dome in the Allegheny Sea, installed a new magrail between Keid City and New Clairton. We've raised the standard of living to one of general prosperity rivaling any world in the League.

I know you feel that force isn't the answer. But in cases like this, it's needed. Governor Doucette has time and again stalled on passing Bill 47, which would give us the bond issuance we need to help fund the new spaceport. He practically blackmailed Alvarez with that ComStar scandal on Procyon, just because Alvarez was an unwilling member of that insane jackass's staff.

Yes, we could probably bring more pressure to bear politically. But there comes a time when politicking becomes just empty air. Someone needs to take action, for the future of the planet. For your future. And Jeremiah's. And Alyssia's. And all those other good, honest, hardworking people who deserve a better life than the one that this—this dictator—has given them.

I'll be careful, you know that. I've got five other men to watch out for as well, and they've got wives and children and parents to go

NEWS DOWNLOADER v3.7



DATE & TITLE

(12-FEB-68)
"AMC 'RUDDERLESS' SAY OFFICIALS"

(13-FEB-68)
"SKYE DECLARES WAR ON LEAGUE"

(24-FEB-68)
"MYSTERY SHIPS BATTLE IN NUSAKAN SYSTEM"

SERVICE

[MERCNET]

[DBC]

[SKYE BROADCASTING]

STATUS

COMPLETED

DOWNLOADING

ACCESSING

A SERVICE OF IRIAN NEWS INTERSTELLAR



ENEMY BROTHERS

home to also. I know you won't get this until after my service tour is finished, but I want you to know now that I love you and have loved you since we first saw each other at the Pirouette on Solaris.

I need to finish getting suited up. These Purifier suits still amaze me. Hopefully one day the Precentor Martial will let us take

vids with these babies so you can see what I'm always yammering about. I think Jeremiah'd get a hoot out of seeing his old man in one—you know, family memoirs and all that.

Ah, to touch your skin, to smell your hair again. If I close my eyes, I can smell the lilac of your perfume even now. A good thought to hold onto as I head once more into the breach.

Until the stars fade and time stops, I love you.

(signed)

Benjamin

—Demi-Precentor B. Emory, Personal Journal Entry 352/13-Apr-68:

"SELLING OUR SOULS"

[Price]: "I'm sorry, Ben, I just don't think it's wise."

[Abraham]: "I understand, Marjorie. But what choice to we have?"

[Price]: "None, apparently. Either we continue to suffer with inadequate turbines and slowly watch our people freeze to death during the cold cycle, or we sign on Blake's dotted line."

[M'Benga]: "If those damned Davions hadn't severed Mitercore's contract when they pulled out..."

[Abraham]: "I know, I know. We've tried everything, Samon. Tax breaks. Incentives. Even a seat on the governor's board. But no takers. The market for zinc and copper has just died these past several years. And the Commonwealth was our main buyer. With the split, the Suns have plenty of supply in the Draconis March, while the Alliance would rather look elsewhere than traverse the Chaos March for less-than-market ore."

[M'Benga]: "So they condemn us to die? And leave turning to these zealots as our only option?"

[Price]: "They're in the antechamber, you know."

[M'Benga]: "I don't give a ghu's fart! They're up to something. The deal is too good for us to pass up, which means there's a catch somewhere. A catch that will doom us all!"

[Price]: "Legal's been over it with a fine-toothed comb. They can't find anything that would hurt us. We have no choice, Samon. Either we seal the deal or watch our planet die a slow death as each environmental system fails from our dwindling power supply."

[M'Benga]: "You know we're dealing with the Devil. And he's going to burn us alive."

[Abraham]: "I hope beyond hope that isn't true. But my friend, I think you're more right than I want to admit. Just remember who we're doing this for."

[M'Benga]: [sighs] "I know."

[Price]: "Shall I let them in, Governor?"

[Abraham]: "Yes, Marjorie. And afterward, I think we're going to need that bottle of Chateau Tamarind '42. All of it."

—Private conversation between Duke Benson Abraham of Epsilon Indi and his aides, Samon M'Benga and Marjorie Price, allegedly recorded by elements of the defunct Epsilon Indi Freedom Brigade, circa 20 June 3068

THE HOLY LIGHT OF BLAKE COMES TO DEMETER

(26 April 3068)

Terra [VOICE OF TRUTH] – By withdrawing the Twelfth Vegan Rangers' Beta Regiment, the corrupt leaders on New Avalon and New Syrtis have abandoned the people of Demeter. Unable to defend his rich agricultural world, Planetary Governor Giovanni Estrella De la Sangre (CEO of Vicore Industries), formally requested aid from the Word of Blake. Filled with compassion, we dispatched the Ninth Division's Measure of Trust III-beta and Call to the Faithful III-delta. The enthusiasm of Demeter's population at the arrival of the valiant Word of Blake Militia troops on 12 April was indescribable.

Precentor Martial Cameron St. Jamais issued a statement assuring worlds in the region that the Word of Blake will endeavor to maintain vital food shipments from Demeter. However, he also expressed the fear that other powers in the region would act with no consideration for the millions who depend on Demeter's agricultural output, and has warned that any who try to do so will face "swift and final justice" for such an act.



connection/DAWN OF THE JIHAD/section11: TRIALS OF VICTORY

TRIALS OF VICTORY



موزی

TRIALS OF VICTORY

"United we stand, divided we fall." You might have thought the Clans would have learned the lessons of Tukayyid and the Great Refusal and realized they could meet the Inner Sphere on an equal footing only by working together. Well, for all our genetic superiority we're mightily shortsighted at times. Pardon me—too long on Arc-Royal and my language is slipping.

Even before the current bout of unpleasantness, the Clans had begun to turn on each other—the Ravens and Vipers, the Bears and Wolves—but matters seem to have taken a turn for the worse. Rumors first emerged about Tokasha, a buildup of forces and supplies suggesting an imminent resumption of hostilities. (*That* lesson we did learn on Tukayyid—the importance of logistics.) York saw clashes as well, as did our kinfolk's enclave on Tiber, though in a martial society like ours such events were hardly unexpected. The political angle of these fights and their brutality made them stand out from previous campaigns. The Cloud Cobra-Coyote feud over the Kufahl Bloodname was the low point of these conflicts, though such machinations—once almost unknown—had become a staple of the Hall of Khans. Watching it all were the 151st Light Horse, the now-defunct SLDF's garrison in Clan space. Unable to withdraw in good order, yet not trusting the provisions of the Great Refusal to secure their position, Colonel Sandra Barclay prepared for the worst while her troops faced a rising tide of challenges.

These clashes were not limited to the Clan homeworlds. The Ghost Bears reported attacks by forces purporting to be Hell's Horses, though it was not immediately apparent whether the assaults represented isolated raids or the preamble to another attempt to establish an Inner Sphere occupation zone. Coming atop the losses of their civilian kin in the Blakist assault on Tukayyid, these new attacks left the Bears off-balance. Meanwhile, the Snow Ravens, who had hitherto slowly built up their Inner Sphere presence, entered a frenzy after the loss of the *White Cloud* and instigated bloody assaults on Galedon, Enif and Tabayama after coursing the Periphery planet of Antallos. Even though they have always pushed the boundaries of normal Clan behavior, the Ravens' abandonment of zellbrigen in favor of a deadly and overwhelming assault without warning made friend and foe alike take notice.

In the Combine, the fall of the Star League—an event that directly contradicted their prophecies—unsettled the Nova Cats. Unsure of their next steps, Khan West ordered all elements of the Cats' touman back to Irece, forswearing SLDF and DCMS postings while the Clan council met to debate the crisis. Though the pull-back makes perfect sense to the Clan mindset, the Spheroids of the FRR and Draconis Combine might easily construe it as a betrayal, abandoning them during a crisis. Only time will tell.

For our own part, we did what we do best: fight and adapt. After staging a rescue operation to Outreach to extract what remained of the Dragoons, we moved to prop up Archon Peter's faltering reign. With the battered LAAF under strain on the Free Worlds border, Khan Kell ordered our forces to bolster the defenses on the Lyran-Falcon boundary, freeing up Alliance troops

to meet the Marik juggernaut. Phelan Kell expected that, after our last clashes along the border during the FedCom Civil War, Falcon Khan Marthe Pryde would not be too hasty in staging another incursion. He did not trust her, however, hence our deployment in a move that proved prophetic and demonstrated his grasp of Clan and Spheroid politics. The Falcons jumped the border once more, seeking to incorporate worlds like Graus into their occupation zone. So far, their objectives seem conservative, particularly given their likely concern over the fate of their "embassy" on Solaris.

And where are the Wolves? Their homeworld assets are under grave pressure by other Clans, but Khan Ward seems to be taking little action against Spheroid or Clan enemies. He is certainly planning his moves, whether against his immediate neighbors—the Bears and the Falcons—or the Inner Sphere. Khan Vlad stated some time back that he did not regard his Wolves as bound by the Great Refusal. Now that the Treaty of Tukayyid has expired, will he drive toward Terra? I will tell you this: the Wolf is not sleeping, but is coiled to pounce.

—Carew Nygren, Arc-Royal, 19 October 3068

SILENT RUNNINGS

Even before the Star League disbanded, the Clans seemed poised at the edge of a new wave of internecine fighting. Bereft of an ilkhan, and with factions and power blocs eyeing each other for signs of weakness, the children of Kerensky—in the Inner Sphere and at home—grew increasingly tense in the months before the League's collapse. Ominous whispers and gossip filled the Clan channels, particularly on the Chatterweb, that peculiar and often-overlooked medium of daily trade and communications, where the boundaries of the rigid Clan caste system seem remarkably blurred. Overall, it seemed as if the Clans—much like their animal totems—could sense approaching danger, but could not quite place the source.

On behalf of ComStar and the Inner Sphere, INN would like to thank our comrades in the Clan homeworlds, as well as allied intelligence agencies in Clan space and in the occupation zones, who risked much to relay the glimpses of life in Clan-held territories we are about to see.

—Michael Bosworth, INN Special Correspondent

WHISPERS AND RUMORS I

>>>STRATDOM/MERCH-CHAT/DS-PRIV#832<<4members>>

Shark42: Interesting read, that is.

Hawker8199: What?

Shark42: New shipping manifest from Niles. Horses are using the *Hawker's Run* to augment shipping.

Spina_QM: Another? That's four this month. Where to?

Shark42: Unknown. Same location marker as priors. R-0421

Hawker8199: Huh. Wonder if we can profit from this?

TRIALS OF VICTORY



Spina_QM: Possible. I have a contact with the Falcons here.

S3nn3t: So what's the manifest?

Shark42: Another Star of *Orcs* heading to Theta.

S3nn3t: Thought Delta was the Proto Galaxy?

Spina_QM: Apparently not anymore. Falcons would bid well for this, I think...

>>>BARC/MERCH-CHAT/00-PUB#12<<9members>>

Wolfman: So the Coyote says, "Hey bub, not in here you don't!"

Wardog: LOL!

TigerS4: Good one, Wolfman

<<FreeFury has joined the conversation>>

Wardog: Ho, FreeFury!

Howler: Heya, FreeFury, what's new?

FreeFury: Your language is atrocious, Jade.

BloodNH2O: And your Clan is a bunch of yipping snow ferrets. What else is new?

TigerS4: LOL

FreeFury: Apparently, you Sharks. Continuing to double-ship from Alpha Port, are we?

BloodNH2O: You walk a thin line, Hellion. You apparently do not know how to savor information for greater impact.

Wardog: Sharks are double-shipping?

FreeFury: Aff. We have seen many DropShips come and go. Preparing to flee to the Sphere, Shark?

TigerS4: Never you mind, Hellion.

FreeFury: See? He does not deny it!

Howler: Doesn't mean it is true, FF.

BloodNH2O: It is not. We are only strengthening our holdings.

Wolfman: So the Sharks are increasing production, are they?

TARGET PRACTICE ON THE RIM



[White Talons] This is the Raven vessel *White Talons* to the bandit scum of Antallos. We have come to do some cleaning and lay our claws here. Remove your verminous hides before we do it for you.

[Antallos Control] Raven? What the hell is that, some newbie pirate greenies?

[Talons] Hardly. We are Clan Snow Raven, masters of the Void and reapers of your souls.

[Drudge One] Clanners, eh? Go suck on a Gauss rifle, you genetic freaks. Come down here and you'd better be prepared to reap the whirlwind.

[Talons] Leave the channel open, Tech Brenton. I wish to hear their cries.

[Drudge Four] Multiple fighters launching, Control. What the hell are those thi— [explosion]

[Voidrunner Two] Jerry, Pam, reroute the *Red Raider* to vector five-oh-nine. Alert Rezak and his boys and get them spacebound. That's his booty-hauler; if he wants it in one piece, he's gonna have to save it himself. We'll do what we can, but...

[Raven Alpha Two] Locked on target. Engaging.

[Drudge Three] Damn! He's outturning me! Get him off my ass!

[Skull One] Skull Three, break port on my signal...

[Talons] The *Buccaneer* is changing vector. Star Bravo, intercept. Bring it down.

[Raven Bravo One] Acknowledged, *Talons*. Color it gone.

[Voidrunner Four] BREAK! BREAK! Dammit, he won't get off my— [explosion]

[Talons] Four down, twenty to go.

[Raven Alpha Three] Another one dusted. This is too easy, Star Captain.

[Raven Alpha Two] I bid away my missiles and autocannon for the glory of the Raven!

[Raven Alpha One] Vainglorious sibble. You expect to take out a *Chippewa* with only your mediums?

[Raven Alpha Two] Done and done, Point Leader.

[Voidrunner Six] <unintelligible> [explosion]

[Raven Alpha One] Impressive, Pilot Andrew. Worthy of that McKenna name...

[Antallos Control] Drudge One, Vance's crew is on their way up, but it'll be at least ten minutes before they can clear the horizon line.

[Drudge One] That's too long. *Raider's* lost her escorts and now portside thrusters. She's losing altitude.

[Raven Bravo Four] Ahhah! Another scum eats vacuum! This is like a Circian sibko turkey shoot!

[Skull Six] Six to any remaining units...lost Tyree, lost Clutch...I'm going in at that *Carrier*...

[Antallos Control] Fighters have hit low orbit, they're on an attack vector. Sound the general alarm! Switch all anti-air turrets to automatic locking sequences!

[Talons] Blow that insolent scum to hell. If he survives, I will claim him as bondsman just for avoiding our wrath so successfully.

[Raven Bravo Five] Acknowledged, *Talons*. Point Five engaging. They will not come near you.

[Raven Alpha One] Commencing run on Bandit Control. Point three, attack pattern Omega.

[Drudge Two] Great Dashkuta, *Red Raider* is gone...They took out a fragging *Buccaneer* with only three fighters...oh no, here they come....

<multiple explosions, static>

[Raven Alpha One] Point Four, execute flyby. See if anything is left down there.

[Raven Bravo Five] *Talons*, your attacker is neutralized. Target is EVA. Bandit pilot, you are hereby claimed as *isorla* by the mighty Clan Snow Raven.

[Talons] Welcome to Antallos, Unkindness. I think we will like it here.

—Intercepted comm. logs made over Antallos/Port Krin airspace, 3 November 3067



TRIALS OF VICTORY

Wonder if they have something going with the Horses...

Wardog: Why do you say that?

Wolfman: Well, Niles has had busy spacelane traffic recently, and Tokasha is undergoing a major overhaul. Plus, with the reacquisition of Tiber's plants....

Howler: So. The Sharks and Horses are preparing for war. Better watch out, Hellion. Methinks they are coming to shut your yaps.... :-)

<<FreeFury has left the conversation>>

>>>TOK/WARR-CHAT/00-PUB#839<<11 members>>

SNerk: So the Falcon Guards did not fire first?

JadeHell: Neg. The Lyrans claimed so and doctored the evidence. Once again proving why we no longer need follow zell in regard to these barbarian warriors.

PaelHorse: True, true. Then again, the Wolves do not either, considering their actions on Tiber.

SNerk: They have been tainted by the Spheroids.

Darkrider: Yes, kicking a vehicle that had declared honorable combat...disgraceful.

PaelHorse: Aff.

JadeHell: Vehicles are not honorable. They are...techs pretending to be warriors.

SNerk: Aff. Maybe we should challenge the Horses for more territory. I am concerned about this increased traffic.

Peregrine: Buildup?

Necroaddict: Possible.

PaelHorse: Neg, we are only retooling our factories. We are content with what we have.

Necroaddict: Then we should take more from you.

Darkrider: Try, Scorpion, and get squashed

SNerk: In a necrosian nightmare, maybe. But we can take you. Especially if events on Strana Mechty unfold correctly.

JadeHell: Speaking in riddles again, Scorpion? Or is your brain already addled by that poison you so love to ingest?

SNerk: You will see, Falcon. You will see. The Scorpion's tail has not yet fully risen.

Darkrider: Thank Kerensky. I'd hate to have to view your rear end when you run away yet again....

Fins: HAHAHAH!

Necroaddict: Bah. You will eat those words when we strike, Shark.

Fins: Strike away, little bug. Be prepared for blood if you do.

—Excerpts from Clan Chatterweb chat logs (merchant caste), late October 3067

WHISPERS AND RUMORS II

>>>NEWKEN/WARR-CHAT/CW-PRIV#8<<7 members>>

W-MATT: ovkhan, have you heard the news of Tiber?

W-JULIA: Aff. You take issue with my former kinsmen, *quineg*?

W-MATT: I do take issue! Certainly, the Horses had four times our numbers on the planet, but they bid far less to battle! Nowa

DARK PORTENTS

To: saKhan Karl Devalis, Delta Galaxy Command, Tabayama

From: kaKhan Santin West, Alpha Galaxy Command, Irece

Date: 8 December 3067

Re: Change of Orders, Highest Priority

SaKhan Devalis, I hope this message sees you in good health, though I fear its contents will change that. The Watch recently provided Oathmaster Minoru with some horrific news that I still cannot grasp even though I reviewed the same reports. To say it shocks and appalls me is a grievous understatement. The Star League is no more!

This tragedy appears to stem from petty bickering among the Spheroid leaders, who chose to abandon the League rather than salvage it. The exact nature of events leading to this decision is sketchy at best, as Tharkad went silent shortly after the news broke. Rumors among the merchant caste speak of a nuclear horror visited on that planet, possibly by the Word of Blake, but thus far we have been unable to confirm that.

Whatever the case may be, this dissolution of the Star League puts our Clan in a precarious situation. We predicated our entire path on the re-emergence of the Star League, and this tragedy places us in a position of unspeakable uncertainty.

Therefore, you and Delta Galaxy are hereby recalled to Irece. After you arrive, we will convene a Clan Council, we will speak privately and we will seek a new vision to guide our Clan. On your journey back here, you are to avoid all contact with the DCMS and Combine merchants. I have heard whispers of unrest on Luthien, though the Oathmaster cannot confirm anything at this time. Considering the problems we had only a few years ago, it is best to keep our heads low but our eyes and ears open. Let our hosts tend to their own affairs this time.

I have a grave feeling about all of this, Karl. I attempted a vision three nights ago and even now, I shudder from the darkness I saw.

I will share more with you once you arrive.

Vickers wasted no time breaking her bid! By Osis' left nut, she even moved the rest of her force into position before breaking it! It was her plan along! And then to use infernos on the tanks and infantry the Horses brought, weapons carried only by the forces outside her bid.

W-JULIA: Lost for words, young trothkin?

W-MATT: Do not mock me, Star Commander!

W-JULIA: Anyone who takes himself too seriously is fodder for mockery.

W-HENRI: Hah! Spoken like the Black Widow herself!

W-JULIA: You certainly are ancient enough to recall.

W-GREGGOR: MechWarrior Matt's passionate diatribe notwithstanding, he has a point. All you hear these days is how one Clan misbehaves and disrespects another in combat. The Horses are fools for their over-reliance on tanks, but infernos are no better

TRIALS OF VICTORY



than poisoning your opponent rather than fighting him. Where is the honor in that?

W-MATT: EXACTLY! That *dezgra* pig-product semi-warrior should be Reaved for her actions!

W-JOLAN: You deride vehicles too much. A Horse Mars-ATM defeated sixteen BattleMechs that day! Certainly, it faced them piecemeal as they advanced over a bridge, but that does not lessen that accomplishment. Sixteen!

W-HENRI: Impossible! Perhaps you have mistaken a Horse report on a simulation against a Cluster of one-legged *Locusts*?

W-GREGGOR: *Stravag!* Shut up already, Matt! I am trying to make a point here, and I do not wish to have it weighed down with your idiotic overreactions!

W-MATT: WHAT? HOW DARE YOU! I CHALLENGE YOU TO A TRIAL OF GRIEVANCE!

W-GREGGOR: Do you? Do you REALLY?

<<W-MATT has left the conversation>>

W-JULIA: Hah!

W-JOLAN: He has some Ice Hellion in him, I swear.

W-HENRI: All the sense of a Smoke Jaguar, that much is certain.

W-GREGGOR: Laugh if you wish, Julia. He is right. Every battle these days involves actions such as these that offend the senses. Zellbrigen is cast to the wind.

W-JULIA: You and Matt, Greggor. Both overly prone to hyperbole. Feuding Clans often fight like this. Surely you remember our war with the Falcons, *quiaff?*

W-GREGGOR: Feuding Clans? Has your mind gone weak? The Horses feud with the Bears, not us!

W-HENRI: They were mere puppets for the Wolves, no? Used as lucre-warriors by our own Khan?

W-GREGGOR: Indeed, and whose fault was that sad state of affairs? Does he exist still? And if we feel any anger of such a nature as we feel for the Falcons, it should be with the Horses.

W-JOLAN: Not a Wolf survived that battle on Tiber. The Horses went berserk, they say. And now they are stripping that world bare.

W-GREGGOR: AFTER they were treated with such disrespect! Who uses inferno missiles in such a fashion but Spheroids and the Dark Caste? Are the Wolves at the same level now?

W-JULIA: Let us go and find a Wolf. You may ask him.

W-GREGGOR: Mock me. Mock me, Julia! But it is clear we are straying ever further from the ways of Kerensky. Should we allow this?

W-JULIA: Your rant bores me. What of our good friends the Ravens and the Falcons? I have heard rumors that they have both begun operations to shift more resources, castemen and equipment to the Inner Sphere. Perhaps they will pull a Ghost Bear on us?

W-JOLAN: Let us polish our boots that we may send them off properly.

—Excerpts from Clan Chatterweb chat logs (public), December 3067

AWAITING ORDERS

>>Message Date 12/10/67

General Amis,

I have found our bases in good condition. To make sure no "accidental" damage would befall our facilities, the 151st remained

on station until we had fully deployed. I would like to commend Colonel Antonescu and his unit. They are obviously extremely eager to go home, and I can't blame them. We received various individual challenges to combat even before our first DropShip set down. To live with such constant harassment by the various Clans on-planet is nerve-wracking.

The only relief appears to be the Goliath Scorpions, whose challenges we can often resolve with non-lethal methods of testing our skills. They are respectful and very curious about even our most mundane habits. I credit Colonel Antonescu for building such a cordial relationship with this Clan, and for instilling a measure of respect for Light Horse prowess in the other Clans. Initially, challenges came frequently, but they tapered off after we proved ourselves equal to the 151st.

This deployment should prove immensely interesting. Thank you for the opportunity.

Colonel Sandra Barclay

>>Message Date 20/01/68

General,

The troops are buzzing with the news of the Star League disbanding and the resulting Word of Blake attacks. Many are concerned that we have been forgotten. So am I. Are we to abandon this site now that the Star League is no more? The number of challenges from the various Clans here on Huntress has increased since the news spread among them. The embassy staff on Strana Mechty is equally concerned.

I feel something big is about to happen in Clan space. I can't define the source of my concern, but I find it echoed by many of the Clansmen I have met. Star Colonel Blake Mannix, a Cobra warrior I've met with numerous times recently, seems to share this impression. He keeps making references to the calm before the storm, and suggests a major trial that awaits all the Clans. Mannix's presence here is puzzling on its own. The Cobras have no enclave on Huntress, and the Star Colonel always travels alone. I've asked him, and all he tells me is that he is on "Cloister Quarani" business.

Another puzzling development is the recent challenge I received from Galaxy Commander Rik Myers. This is the first I've gotten from the Goliath Scorpions, a Trial of Possession for part of our Lootera enclave and a full battalion of our troops. All the other Clans' Trial objectives have been smaller-scale, typically because most Clans require a Khan's sanction to make a challenge on the scale of Commander Myers. The implications are profound. I have not yet replied, but fear I must do so soon.

We do not have enough transport assets available to move ourselves and the embassy staff. Our options appear limited. Please forward guidance to us as soon as possible.

S. Barclay

—Excerpts from HPG message intercepts between Eridani Light Horse troops on Lootera and Huntress, and Eridani Light Horse Command on Dieron (via deep space relay TF4)



SEEKER REPORT YOR-017

Loremaster:

During our resupply here on Bazaar I found out some interesting information regarding the Adder's Upsilon Galaxy that went "missing" last year. We staged a Trial for the information; attached are the updated codices of the two Elementals who won for the glory of the Scorpion.

According to the Shark Watch, one of the Adder Clusters attached to Upsilon staged a series of Trials recently in the Suda Bay system: one to recharge their JumpShips, another for a Star of 'Mechs to replace lost units, and the third for a large amount of foodstuffs—enough to feed several DropShip crews for many months.

Apparently, the Adders lost the first Trial but won the last two, gaining a Star of *Mad Cat Mk II's*. The Sharks' labor caste workers, while loading the DropShip hold with the newly won foodstuffs, overheard that one of the Cluster's next destinations was the Horse-held system of Nouveaux Paris. The labor castemen also noted that several Adder 'Mechs were in various states of repair, including a *Kit Fox* still sporting Ice Hellion markings.

As a show of good favor, the Sharks allowed us the use of their training fields outside Prater for several days so our warriors could get in some solid gravity time. We have also resupplied our DropShips and are ready to continue toward the Chainlaine Islands. I will send another update when we arrive at Wolf 82.

—Star Colonel Kernan Elam, Bazaar, report dated 3 December 3067

BORROWED TIME

>>Message Date 03/11/67

To: Colonel Andrew Redburn, SLDF

Our duty station replacements are now two weeks overdue. We have not received confirmation from the *Starlight Explorer* on her status in more than three weeks and are unsure whether or not something has happened to the ship. I am requesting that an inquiry be submitted to the EC to determine her status and an update on her timetable.

We're kind of anxious to return home. Thank you.

EJL

>>Message Date 15/11/67

To: Colonel Andrew Redburn, SLDF

Still no word on the *Starlight Explorer* since last update sent six weeks ago. Embassy staff is getting antsy and the ELH on Huntress is chomping at the bit to begin pullout procedures regardless.

Trial issued today by the Wolf Clan over one suit of Gray Death battle armor. We accepted said Trial and Montgomery is making it a focal point for some entertainment to take everyone's mind off the late transport. We're also having some of the 151st transfer over here, after we won a small Trial against the Scorpions for one-way transport. I think we need the extra defense—tensions seem high around here. The Scorpions jumped at the chance to help; it seems they're fascinated with the ELH. Uncomfortably so, in my personal opinion.

VICTORY

Request for an investigation on disappearance of *Explorer*.
EJL

>>Message Date 17/01/68

To: Colonel Andrew Redburn, SLDF

Received word today of the Star League's dissolution. Requesting new orders and what our current operational procedure should be. ELH has asked for instructions from this office as well, though Colonel Barclay confided to me that, without compelling reasons to the contrary, she plans to abandon her Huntress garrison no later than 28 Feb 3068.

Three Trials fought against Sharks for embassy supplies, as we've seen no transports from the Inner Sphere in almost three months. We won all three, though Sgt. Detmon will need reconstructive surgery on his right femur after his *Guillotine* fell into the Ben-Shimon Gorge.

Sir, I respectfully request official orders to evacuate this posting.
EJL

>>Message Date 31/01/68

To: Colonel Andrew Redburn, SLDF

I am concerned about the loss of communication with Tukayyid HQ. We are receiving a Trial every day now from various Clans for our personnel, equipment and even our embassy building. The ELH lost a full company of troops on Huntress to Clan Goliath Scorpion yesterday after a pitched seven-hour night battle in the Kerensky Plains. The ELH won, which is fortunate, as the Trial was for the entire embassy and all property therein.

Though we are maintaining Clan ideals here, per the First Lord's standing orders, things are getting desperate. To be frank, sir, we want to go home. Two days ago we learned via the Sharks that Tharkad got hit by a nuclear weapon. It sounds as if all hell is breaking loose there and we feel we are needed back in the Inner Sphere.

If we receive no response in another week, I will issue a Trial against the Scorpions and Sharks for several DropShips and a JumpShip so that we can load up and come home. I take full responsibility for this action and you may court-martial me if you wish. But right now, my responsibility is to this staff and the Light Horse.

I will report in if I can.

EJL

—Excerpts from HPG message intercepts between the Inner Sphere Embassy on Strana Mechty and SLDF command via deep space relay TF4

ON THE PRECIPICE

Their unity fractured, their resolve weakened, the bizarrely subdued reaction by the Clans in the Inner Sphere to the collapse of the Star League bespoke a kind of shock, a confusion brought about by yet another example of incomprehensible Spheroid politics. But was it shock that sent the Nova Cats scurrying back to

A SPHEROID AFFAIR?



71ST LIGHT HORSE

[*Loremaster Kael Pershaw*]: This meeting has been called by Khan Marthe Pryde. She has the floor.

[*Khan Marthe Pryde*]: I am certain you have all heard the rumors. The false Star League is no more! Its extinction proves what many of us have been saying. It is a farce, a ploy intended only to cage us. The splinter-group of ComStar has declared war on them all for disbanding it, and has laid waste to Tharkad and New Avalon. Now there remains no reason to be restrained by the Great Refusal. Let us resume the Crusade!

[*Khan Raina Montose*]: Khan Pryde is right! A "united" Inner Sphere challenged our decision to invade, but such unison exists no longer. I daresay it never existed. The Trial of Refusal is null and void.

[*Khan Garrett Sainze*]: We should reassign the Jaguar corridor to more suitable Clans.

[*Khan Bjorn Jorgensson*]: Your reasoning is flawed, Khan Pryde. The dissolution of the Second Star League does not affect the Great Refusal in the least. It was legal then, and it is legal now.

[*Khan Garrett Sainze*]: Surely you do not believe it still holds any value, or should dictate our course now that the organization is gone?

[*Jorgensson*]: Our laws certainly do still hold value to me, Khan Sainze. And they are very clear in this respect. The decision to invade was Refused. That the party who accomplished the Refusal no longer exists is irrelevant. Would you reinstate all decisions that were Refused in your Clan merely because the warriors who Refused them died in honorable combat? Your Clan has been host to more Trials of Refusal than any other.

[*Montose*]: The situation before us is different. As you said seven years ago, this is about destiny and superiority. It required the combined might of the Inner Sphere to destroy one failing Clan. That unity is gone. That claim to superiority is gone. But our destiny remains, a destiny your Clan also saw and understood. War has wracked the Inner Sphere for nearly as long as we left it. In all those wars over three centuries, literally billions of people have died, and as the Great Kerensky predicted, the Spheroids almost blasted themselves back to the Stone Age. Some saw the formation of the new Star League in response to our arrival as a sign that the Inner Sphere had come of age. It is clear to me now that this assumption is false. The so-called Second Star League was nothing more than the lashing out of a caged animal, desperate to maintain its barbarous way of life. Khan Ward himself voiced the concern that the Clans had become corrupted and weak because of exposure to the Inner Sphere. Such corruption would certainly explain the Nova Cats, Phelan Kell and the sale of new *Mad Cat Mk IIs* to the Spheroid barbarians. But no matter how the Inner Sphere might challenge our convictions and separate the righteous from the weak of heart and mind, we must never forget that the Inner Sphere itself is thoroughly corrupted. The Second Star League could have been a sign that they were recovering on their own. Clearly, they are not. Clearly, they have squandered their right to make any claim on a reborn Star League. Clearly, they have proven the righteousness of the Crusade. We must strike and cleanse the corruption from humanity, once and for all!

[*Khan Brett Andrews*]: Khan Montose has a compelling argument. But I see no point in discussing this matter without an ilKhan present.

[*Pryde*]: Fine then, have your ilKhan. The Falcons require no such guidance to defeat the Inner Sphere, as we have proven countless times.

[*Khan Vlad Ward*]: Indeed, you have proven yourself quite adept at pecking the back of a wounded animal.

[*Pershaw*]: Khan Andrews called for a vote on the matter of installing an ilKhan. Khan Pryde seconded the call. The senior Khan will issue the vote for each Clan. I will have your votes now, by Clan.

[*Ward*]: Clan Wolf abstains. This matter is of no consequence to us, and we will not waste our time with it any longer.

[*Pershaw*]: It is not yet your turn to vote! *Stravag!* The Wolf Khans have disconnected their HPG link before this Grand Council has come to an end. I call for their censure!

—Partial transcript of Clan Grand Council emergency session, 12 December 3067

TRIALS OF VICTORY

THE COMING STORM

[*Star Colonel Cassin Drummond*]: You are wrong, my Khan. The Star League is dead! The visions of Khans Leroux and Carns were wrong! We turned our backs on the Grand Council and joined the Spheroids in destroying the Smoke Jaguars, for what? What is left of it? They cancelled it! They disbanded it, shut it down as if it mattered no more than a light bulb! They are no better than Amaris or the Not-Named!

[*Star Colonel Jokew Devalis*]: Cassin Drummond has the truth of it! Look at everything we sacrificed! We were all so certain of our path, the path to the Star League Reborn! Now, what is left to us? Nothing! Damn them! Damn them and curse them! I say that if they do not wish to continue the Star League, we will continue it without them!

[*Star Colonel Elrod Nostra*]: Enough of our subservient status! Let us claim the worlds we keep as our own. The Combine owes us, we owe them nothing!

[*Galaxy Commander Shen Drummond*]: Brothers! You are allowing your emotions to guide your actions, and spoil our language as if we are common thugs. The League we joined may be no more, but the Combine has done us no wrong. Severen Leroux guided us here today for a great purpose. We must be here now as we are, so that we may see that vision through! The storm is already upon us!

[*Oathmaster Minoru Novacat*]: Then it is too late for the raindrops to vote on the matter.

[*brief silence*]

[*Star Colonel Evelyn Morris*]: None of this double-talk! You are wrong, Shen Drummond! The Star League betrayed us when they did not muster us to fight the Ghost Bear. And now the Inner Sphere has betrayed us by disbanding the League. They have reduced us to mercenary whores, coaxed by sugar water so that they might destroy the Smoke Jaguar! The Spheroid *stravags* have betrayed us time and again, and now we are here with nothing to show for our sacrifices but the cast-off spawn of a barbarian House leader playing at being one of us! Damn these surats for making worthless all that we have lost to be here! Damn them all!

—Partial transcript of Nova Cat Clan Council emergency session, 31 December 3067

their enclaves even as their hosts fell under the guns of Blakist and insurgent attacks? And what was the reaction in the homeworlds, among the Clans who jealously watched the invaders in the Inner Sphere with covetous eyes?

WHISPERS AND RUMORS III

>>>STRANA/MERCH-CHAT/00-PUB#3<<27members>>

BriStein: So the Adders are denying that they hit Wolf82?

BanditBane: No, they just are not saying anything regarding the matter.

ShatterShark: How un-Adderlike. They usually crow all over the Chatterlink after every beatdown they give.

<<SpiritWanderer has entered the conversation>>

Plainsfox: Hey, SW. Smoke anything good lately?

SpiritWanderer: Have you heard?

Viperbait: Heard? Heard what?

SpiritWanderer: From the Council! It happened only minutes ago!

Tseng: What? What! Come on, you stupid Coyote, spill!

SpiritWanderer: The damnable audacity! It is...outrageous!

Plainsfox: Must be something juicy, then.

SpiritWanderer: The Cobra Khan, Kardaam, just declared that Khan Kufahl's Bloodhouse should be REAVED!

Plainsfox: No

Bloodpan: Impertinent *stravag*!

Devalis: Is he crazy?

CloisterCobra: About time

Plainsfox: What?

SpiritWanderer: Even more shocking, the Spirit Khans agreed! They seconded it! I just checked the feed myself.

Bloodpan: Two Clans interfering with the policies of another's Bloodhouse? Shameful!

BanditBane: Kerensky would be rolling in his grave....

SpiritWanderer: Kufahl declared a Grievance against Khan Kardaam on the spot. The Council adjourned so they could ready their 'Mechs.

ShatterShark: Feed line?

SpiritWanderer: In two hours, on the Plains of Kerensky. Vidline AA-310CE.

CloisterCobra: This will be interesting to watch...

—Excerpts from Clan Chatterweb chat logs, January 3068

TIME OF DELIBERATION

[*Khan Bjorn Jorgensson*]: What concerns me most are the preliminary reports out of Tukayyid describing huge casualties among the civilians caught in this war zone. Are these not Rasalhagians? Are they not blood to the Dominion castemen?

[*Loremaster Laurie Tseng*]: Aff! But is it right to interfere in what is obviously a Spheroid affair?

[*Star Captain Benjamin Snuka*]: Trothkin, while this bloodletting does appear to be restricted to the citizens of the Inner Sphere, should we just turn our backs? Withdraw into the snow while cousins of our newborn kin die in the fields, staining the ice with blood?

[*Khan Jorgensson*]: I tell you, it is not the Bear way. Nor the way of our Founders. To leave family to die?

[*Star Captain Sandra Tseng*]: But it is interference! We are Warden, pledged to protect the whole of the Inner Sphere from the outside, not from the judgments they bring upon themselves!

[*Star Colonel Sarah DeVillar*]: To step across the border and attack unprovoked is an ill action, indeed.

[*Star Colonel Douglas Silva*]: But we have an obligation to our new charges. It is only right that we protect them.

[*Khan Jorgensson*]: Aff, protect. Kin! I have here a request—nay, a demand!—that we open up negotiations with the remnants of the

TRIALS OF VICTORY

Republic to protect them from this plague of death brought by the ComStar rebels. You all know Star Colonel Ragnar, who is not present because he has not claimed a Bloodname.

[*Murmurs echo throughout the chamber.*]

[*Star Colonel Naiad Ortiz*]: Aff, and a worthier Spheroid of the blood of the Ghost Bear does not exist. Remember, trothkin, he was elected Prince-in-absentia by the Rasalhagians, which speaks volumes of his character. This request is worthy of consideration by this Council.

[*Galaxy Commander Rhen Devon*]: So we decide policy by the un-Blooded? Our founders would turn in their graves!

[*Galaxy Commander Gerrard Hambash*]: We need to move Ragnar into position to claim a Bloodname....

[*Sandra Tseng*]: Shame on you, Galaxy Commander! To suggest we manipulate our sacred traditions to the warped politics of the Inner Sphere—

[*Khan Jorgensson*]: Enough, trothkin. We must not deviate from our focus here.

[*saKhan Aletha Kabrinski*]: I motion we begin procedures to approach the Free Rasalhague Republic in the interest of protecting the population.

[*Star Captain Mical Devon*]: I second the motion...

—Partial transcript of Ghost Bear Clan Council session, 7 February 3068

WHISPERS AND RUMORS IV

>>>LUM/MERCH-CHAT/00-PUB#3<<31 members>>

FalconSuperShipper: By the Founder's left armpit! Curse the rancid burrock excrement! May their arms rot off with a blight!

MetalMerchant: ?

OpaqueShark: Which blight are you referring to?

FalconSuperShipper: All of them, surat! That is the fourth time in a row I have been bumped for my refit! Four times! DAMN the Raven monopolist scum repositories!

RavenSkipper: Hey now!

FalconSuperShipper: Don't even start! I've been due for the 900,000 light-year overhaul of the K-F controller for almost 500 light-years now! I can't wait any longer! And then they bump my *Invader* and yet another *Odyssey* gets ordered in before me. How is this fair?

RavenSkipper: Look, friend, are you frowning on my Clan for giving our own vessels priority at our own facilities? If your Clan had the shipyards available, you would not be crying in here now, would you?

<<*FalconSuperShipper has left the conversation*>>

JadeHeuristic: Disregarding my Clansman's hotheaded response to these events, surely you have noticed that several Trials of Possession have occurred recently for fairly routine maintenance, all because your vessels are disrupting agreed-upon schedules. Just yesterday, I saw a *Hunter* and an *Odyssey* challenge a *Comitatus* to a Trial. It was the weirdest thing. Like naval combat in slow motion. That is a bit extreme, *quiaff*?

RavenSkipper: Aff, but this is the way it is. Presumably, it will not be this way for much longer.

OpaqueShark: I heard you guys pulled out a number of JumpShips from the orbital Brian Caches around Circe. Moving it all to the Inner Sphere. Are you all going Ghost Bear on us, *quiaff*?

RavenSkipper: Ridiculous rumors. Between our recent acquisitions and our activities in the Inner Sphere, we merely have to put more demand on our fleets. Higher demand requires more maintenance. No more, no less.

MetalMerchant: Emitting broad statements that are truthful in any circumstance is not very informative.

RavenSkipper: Do you accuse me of lying?

MetalMerchant: I accuse you of nothing. You simply did not answer the question. But that is very Snow Raven of you.

<<*RavenSkipper has left the conversation*>>

MetalMerchant: Tiresome folk.

—Excerpts from Clan Chatterweb chat logs (Public), February 3068

GRUDGE MATCH

Clan Ghost Bear Advisory

To: All Dominion Units

From: Aletha Kabrinski, saKhan, Alshain

Date: 13 Feb 3068

Be advised that at 1730 (local time) on 12 February, a sizeable force bearing markings and colors of the Hell's Horses Clan attacked Rasalhague. The Horses unit, while currently unidentified, hit four different areas of the planet, absconding with war materiel, supplies and several key command personnel.

The Horses did not follow combat protocols upon arrival and landing, though they did abide by the ritual combat of *zellbrigen*. Unfortunately, Star Captain Jake Kabrinski lost his duel with an enemy *Thunder Stallion* and was taken along with several other members of his command staff. Their current status is unknown, though their codices have not been terminated.

All units of the Bear touman within four jumps of Rasalhague are to go to high alert and be prepared for other possible Horses strikes. Watch agents are being reassigned to assess this latest aggression from the Horses and where the Horses currently have their base of operations so that reprisals may be considered.

—saKhan Aletha Kabrinski

OUTREACH SURVIVORS?

[*WolfNet*]: I'm telling you, we need to pass this data along ASAP.

[*Watch*]: Tell me what you've got, then.

[*WolfNet*]: Two days ago we received a compacted datastream burst via HPG. It came from Outreach.

TRIALS OF VICTORY

[Watch]: Outreach?!

[WolfNet]: Aff. Apparently a ComStar ROM operative managed to penetrate the HPG compound and fire off this data packet we intercepted before the local HPG shut down or was destroyed. But the stream was incomplete. The pulse was cut off at the source. Since then, we have detected no transmissions from that system to any planet.

[Watch]: Interesting.

[WolfNet]: From what we've been able to glean, part of Epsilon Regiment is still active on Romulus, supported by fragments of several shattered commands. We've got a comm log packet from a running engagement outside the eastern Ridge, describing at least a Blakist division of troops. Remus is gone and there's a heavy blanket of radiation over the area. Harlech City is still standing, though apparently most of the Dragoons compounds and MRBC facilities were leveled. TempTown doesn't exist anymore except as rubble.

[Watch]: Civilians?

[WolfNet]: There's a small refugee camp about thirty clicks outside Harlech proper, probably numbering near a thousand. Right before the datastream gets interrupted, weather photos show at least three Blakist units headed that way.

[Watch]: So we have conclusive proof that there are Dragoons and civilians still on Outreach.

[WolfNet]: I'd stake my life on it.

[Watch]: I will notify the Khan at once.

[WolfNet]: WolfNet stands ready to help any way we can. It's time for some payback.

—Transcript log of discussions between an unidentified WolfNet intelligence agent and Wolf-in-Exile Watch officer, circa 20 February 3068

GUARDING THE FLANK

(18 March 3068)

Crimond [ARNN] – Crimond bids farewell today to the Third Lyran Guards, after a deployment of five months. Following days of preparations, the last Third Guards DropShip will lift off later this evening to begin its trip to the nadir jump point, where the rest of the Guards wait to begin their journey toward the Bolan front. Command of the defense of Crimond now rests with Star Colonel Jeremiah Straw of the Fourth Wolf Guardians, a situation made possible by the Arc-Royal Accords.

This redeployment comes after an announcement by General of the Armies Adam Steiner, in which he indicated the need to send more forces to deal with the ongoing crisis at Tharkad and the war with the Free World League. Margrave Steiner pointedly countered concerns that the redeployments occurring across the Melissia and Arc-Royal theaters would provoke Clan Jade Falcon to execute another incursion. According to the Margrave, Vlad Ward's Wolf Clan is currently engaged in a campaign against the Falcons, and the Falcons are unlikely to be in a position to strike our realm. General Thanom Hammerskjold expressed skepticism at reports of a Wolf-Jade Falcon war, cautioning against the redeployment. "We

should not prosecute a foolish and ill-conceived war against the Free Worlds League. Instead, we should sue for peace on that border. We need our resources here, against Clan Jade Falcon. If they are truly occupied with the Wolf Clan, then we should return the favor of preying on an enemy during a moment of weakness!"

When asked to comment on Margrave Steiner's assessment that the Wolves-in-Exile were fully capable of deterring any predation by the Jade Falcon Clan, as they did during Operation Bulldog, General Hammerskjold remarked: "I would prefer to see the Exiles

JADE FALCON WATCH REPORT — ULTRA HIGH PRIORITY

To: Loremaster Kael Pershaw
 From: Star Captain Brian Pryde
 Re: Watch Report L-E299 Lyran Update
 Send Date: 19 April 3068

Loremaster:

I have spent the past three weeks poring over communications logs from the Lyran Melissia Theater in order to present a clearer picture of the past few months regarding the Lyran High Command.

As you know, and as has been confirmed by agents in the Arc-Royal Theater, Tharkad was hit by a thermonuclear device launched from a Word of Blake WarShip. The Universe has a cruel sense of humor; apparently the vessel that launched the fatal blow on Tharkad was none other than the *Invincible*, a Lyran ship of some distinction believed lost more than two centuries ago.

Since that time, General of the Armies Adam Steiner has tried in vain to keep the LAAF together, but with several HPG relays off-line, coordination has been slow. Only in the Arc-Royal Theater does there seem to be some cohesion still, most likely from the Kells and their freebirth cur, Khan Phelan Kell.

In the past few weeks, I have noted an increase in traffic to several Alliance worlds bordering our OZ. Most of the vessels have been merchant shipping, but oddly enough our Watch agents report that garrison patrols are down and whole segments of units seem to be disappearing.

It is our guess that under the guise of merchant shipping, General Steiner is moving parts of the garrisoned units to assembly points deeper in the Alliance in order to bring together a task force to go after the Word of Blake in retaliation for hitting Tharkad. His paltry attempt to disguise these movements is the mark of a desperate man.

It is our recommendation that if the Khans wish to strike out and enlarge our holdings, now is the time to do it. Attached are the relevant files and what we determine to be appropriate targets for attacks.

>>file attached<<

>>Message ends<<

TRIALS OF VICTORY

take Lyran worlds back from the Falcons rather than just prevent them from taking more. At one point, they too contributed to our losing worlds to the Wolf Clan. It seems only fair that they work to reclaim those worlds."

RIGHTEOUS RAGE

Only in the most recent months have the Clans returned to menace the Inner Sphere, with the Snow Ravens and the Jade Falcons launching attacks against their respective Spheroid neighbors. But with the Falcon propensity for striking distracted enemies (as evidenced by their FedCom Civil War adventurism) and the Ravens' obvious lust for revenge over an alleged cowardly attack, are these assaults merely business as usual to these born-and-bred warriors, or the start of a growing trend toward Clan opportunism?

SHOWING RESTRAINT

Anne,

I, too, have not heard from our trothkin in several months. When last we spoke, Benjamin indicated to me that he was seeking approval to engage in the duels on Solaris, to prove that combat is for warriors while games are for children.

I have not learned of any action against him for such a request, nor have I received word of his death. Further, the Watch claims that technical difficulties are making communication with Solaris VII temporarily impossible.

If some of the news reports are to be believed, these difficulties actually stem from more warfare on Solaris. I do not fully understand who fights who on that world, but it strikes me as immaterial. We should just crush the strag Spheroids and be done with the confusion. I am certain Benjamin would be pleased to see us.

What of it, Anne Iler? Shall we advance to Solaris?

Hal

Hal,

I often wonder how you and your kin ever have the patience to stay still long enough to rest. Clearly you must keep raging in tantrums until you are spent, and only then can sleep grasp you.

I, too, am concerned about Benjamin. But I am certain we will have our opportunity soon, very soon. From the sound of it, we will have a chance to face Phelan's bandit Wolves, too. I assume this pleases you?

Anne Iler

—Excerpted personal messages between Jade Falcon warriors, intercepted by ComStar observers on Colmar, circa 18 June 3068

WATCHING AND WAITING

Field Report SVAR-H98-Alpha (07-Sep-68)

Matters seem to be cooling down on Svarstaad. I now believe I need to modify my earlier reports of a troop buildup here. Indeed, though it is garrisoned by the Sixth Wolf Cavalry Cluster and the

VENGEANCE IN THE VOID

[Explorer]: "Snow Raven taskforce! This is the *Galedon Explorer*! You are trespassing on a Draconis Combine holding! You will shut down your engines and prepare to be boarded!"

[Raven]: "*Galedon Explorer*! Your foolish request is denied. We have come to exact vengeance for the *White Cloud*. Do you seek to oppose us?"

[Explorer]: "Yes. I am *Tai-sho* Amanda Scofield. I bid this vessel and its attendant craft in defense. What forces do you bid?"

[Raven]: "Bid? Bid? I bid the scuttling charges of your nadir recharge station! You may dock with that facility at will!"

[Explorer]: "S-Say again, Snow Ravens? You seek to engage me with all *four* of your WarShips? Where is your honor?"

[Raven]: "In the Kazanka system, *stravag*! One does not *batchall* with bandits. One executes them!"

—Excerpted comm log intercepts made by the *Mammoth*-class DropShip *Black Star of India*, outbound from Galedon V, 14 July 3068

DOWNLOADER v3.7

	SERVICE	STATUS
	[FSNS]	COMPLETED
	[FWNA]	DOWNLOADING
NERON"	[MERCNET]	ACCESSING



TRIALS OF VICTORY

Blue Keshik, that currently appears to be the extent of Wolf deployment on this world. My early reports of an increase in troops by an additional Cluster are apparently related to a recent Conclave of the Bloodname House of Sradac. Galaxy Commander Shistu Sradac is apparently the Sradac House leader, and the conclave preceded a Trial of Bloodright here on Svarstaad that presumably concluded just a few days ago.

The only Clan forces currently present appear to be the Sixth Cavalry and the Blue Keshik. All additional Wolf warriors seem to have returned to their previous deployments.

I hope my prior reports concerning the possible implications of a Clan Wolf invasion of Clan Jade Falcon space did not adversely affect Command's ability to assess the local situation.

—Dirk Vermeer, Rho/Chi

CRY HAVOC

[*Martin*]: "I'm here live outside the command headquarters of the Twenty-third Arcturan Guard on Graus, where for the past day the unit has been preparing for the approaching Jade Falcon force that jumped in-system two days ago." [*looks off-camera*]

[*Martin*]: "Kommandant Bernhard—Kommandant!" [*The reporter grabs a tall LAAF officer's arm as he hurries by.*] "Andrew Martin, DBC. Why the sudden commotion? Have the Falcons responded?"

[*The kommandant glances off to his left.*]

[*Bernhard*]: "Responded?" [*His attention returns to the reporter.*]

"Haven't you heard, man? The Falcons sure as hell have responded." [*He grabs the lens, forcing its perspective up and to the east.*] "They're dropping 'Mechs on us as we speak! Get to the bunker and stay there!"

[*Kommandant Bernhard dashes off, shouting orders. The view refocuses, zooming in on several bright streaks in the sky.*]

[*Martin continues off-camera, voice slightly shaken*]: "It seems the Falcons have thrown standard Clan doctrine to the winds." [*The camera view snaps back to Martin, visibly pale.*] "They have not made a formal batchall, which is normally customary with this Clan."

[*A gigantic explosion occurs in the background. Martin flinches. He turns to look, pointing excitedly at the hilltop. The camera zooms in on five BattleMechs cresting the hill.*]

[*Martin, off-camera*]: "It appears some elements of the Falcons have already landed a short distance away. What you're seeing here is several lighter 'Mechs, probably a scout Star. The one in the front is an *Uller*, followed by a *Shadow Cat*, another *Uller* and two other designs I'm not familiar with."

[*Camera refocuses on Martin.*]

[*Martin*]: "The Falcons have come to Graus. Whether this is a raid or a prelude to invasion, we do not know. We're going to our safety bunker now and will report more when we get some solid information."

"From Graus, this is Andrew Martin, DBC Stellar News."

—Last known holoivid broadcast by Andrew Martin, DBC Stellar News, Graus, 12 October 3028

ICE HELLION WATCH REPORT—KHAN'S EYES ONLY

To: Khan Raina Montose, saKhan Connor Rood
From: Loremaster Jonas Cage
Priority: Gamma-Red (Khans' Eyes Only)
Subject: State of Clan Hell's Horses
Transmit Date: 13-Sep-3068

My Khans,

Our Watch has noted far greater than normal Hell's Horses JumpShip travel above Niles, Tiber, Kirin, Strato Domingo and Tokasha. These efforts appear coordinated, and occur in concert with reports of considerable activity on Tiber, Strato Domingo and Tokasha. At the same time, we are noting decreased activity on Bearclaw and Hoard. The latter situation is especially peculiar, as the Horses have allowed the Montose Pact to expire. This will severely hamper the efforts of their lower castes to transport raw materials to the lyaba smelter cluster, now that the Montose Valley has reverted to our full control.

—Jonas Cage

[*At times like these I wonder whether Jonas is still the best man for this Watch job. So much activity from the normally passive Horses can mean only one thing: they are gearing up for a major campaign, either against the Wolves here or toward the Bears or Wolves in the Inner Sphere. I suspect the latter, of course.*]

This is the perfect opportunity you have been waiting for! The timing is a bit off, but if we do not act on this, it is not likely that a better option will open up later.

By your command, my Khan, I can be on my way to Niles in a few hours to speak with Khan Cobb. The Horses can always be expected to consider any alliance. —Connor Rood]

CELESTIAL CRISES



موزی



CELESTIAL CRISES

To: HIS servant and trusted representative, Kian Lih Sung

As distasteful as it may be to seemingly bend our necks as the Davion blade sweeps ever closer, we must continue to maintain our innocence and our right to a strong defense among our enemies and one-time allies. His Celestial Wisdom knew this, and his final directives were very much in accord with these priorities.

You will continue to act as the voice of our people and represent Capellan interests among the other nations. To the limit of your wartime powers, as strictly defined in the attached file, and in accordance with any direction you receive from me or this High Office, it remains your duty to engage those who might still listen to and be swayed by the truth.

In this dark time of crisis, we must all do our part to ensure the viability of the Capellan state. Our duty is clear, and our voice must be heard.

Respectfully,

Talon Zhan

Sang-jiang-jun, Military Regent

It took the Federated Suns' propaganda machine all of a day before they began to lay blame for the Star League's final dissolution at the Capellan doorstep. Barely a week into the chaos of Word of Blake attacks, the Davions—along with their lapdogs in the Lyran state, in the Combine and in ComStar—cast further aspersions on our people.

Collaborators, we were called. Opportunists. Betrayers. Witting accomplices to mass murder!

The rhetoric worsened as every day our worlds and our people were spared the insanity gripping other realms. We should stand accused for our foresight? We should be castigated, punished even, for escaping the destruction and death being visited on Tharkad and New Avalon?

We—victims of the Fourth Succession War, working only to restore to the Capellan nation what is rightfully ours—will stand for such a distortion of the truth no longer.

WITNESS: Yvonne and Peter Steiner-Davion! By their own words, they reaffirm our Chancellor's decision to quit the Star League sham and see to his own nation's welfare.

WITNESS: Our offers of aid and succor, refused by the same nation-states that later berate us for our lack of involvement.

WITNESS: The despicable, cowardly acts of the Federated Suns, to launch a new offensive now, of all times, in their ongoing attempt to subjugate the Capellan people! The very definition of opportunism! Visiting upon our nation, our people, the atrocities we were spared in those initial months of Word of Blake attacks. St. Ives overrun. Sian assaulted. Chancellor Sun-Tzu Liao lost and presumed dead.

All by Hasek's hand! A Davion by any other name.

Not one hand have we raised against our neighbors. Not one moment have we offered support or relief to the enemies of humankind. After all the accusations, all the lies and half-truths that assailed us, now we will make the truth known about the extreme lengths to which other nations will go in order to victimize the Confederation, the Chancellor and the entire Capellan people.

You, who have given us no reason to cooperate except by threat of the sword, stand witness to the terrible depredations we now suffer.

The peace has been shattered and all trust lost between men and nations. Yet still we shall endeavor to do what is right by our citizens, and by the memory of Chancellor Liao. We provide the following information and reports, not because we must, but because we should—in order to demonstrate to the entire Inner Sphere that we are justified in the Chancellor's original action, in our steadfast declaration of innocence of collaboration with the Word of Blake, and in defense of our homeland.

It has fallen to me to undertake this task. To challenge the false testimony of the Davion propaganda machine, to bear true witness to events unfolding in and around the Capellan Confederation, and to ask that restraint and reason prevail even though throughout our history our neighbor states have afforded us little of either. To illuminate a path toward enlightenment—a task worthy of a bodhisattva, though it falls to a humble servant blessed only by the Chancellor's forgiving light.

By the Chancellor's will and the grace of the gods, let our voice be heard.

—Mandrinn Kian Lih Sung, Special Representative of the Celestial Wisdom, 20 October 3068

GATHERING SHADOWS

Considering the blame heaped on the Capellan Confederation for being the first to officially withdraw from the Star League, that the Word of Blake failed to assault Sian in the opening days of their holy war came as a tremendous surprise throughout the Inner Sphere. Speculation is endless as to why the Blakists spared the Confederation, and many have proclaimed it proof of complicity—a conspiracy by Sun-Tzu and the Blakists to bring humanity to its knees. Regardless, simply because a Blakist fleet failed to materialize over the Capellan capital in December of 3067 did not mean the Confederation could avoid the storms of war swirling across the Inner Sphere.

—Michael Bosworth, INN Special Correspondent

CELESTIAL WISDOM DEDICATES MEMORIAL

Victims of Black May Honored

(19 January 3068)

Sian [CNS] – Chancellor Sun-Tzu Liao appeared before more than 25,000 loyal Capellans in the Forbidden City today to dedicate a memorial to the thousands of devoted citizens who heroically

CELESTIAL CRISES

gave their lives in the tragic Black May attacks almost six years ago. The memorial is a simple black granite wall listing the names of all those who died in those terrible assaults, flanked by statues of the Celestial Wisdom clad in a resplendent armor, as if standing fast against any who would dare attempt similar cowardly assaults on the Confederation. Monuments like this one have been built on every world struck by the horror of Black May.

Addressing the citizens of the Confederation, the glorious Chancellor spoke these words. "Many times throughout history, our peace-loving nation has been assaulted by those who seek to murder or subjugate us. This memorial, and those like it on many other worlds, serve as a warning to all our enemies that we will not stand for such depraved assaults upon us."

In this time when the decadent civilizations of the Inner Sphere have brought war upon themselves, the Capellan Confederation stands alone in peace. The Celestial Wisdom will continue to direct us in harmony through these times and prove that our people and our way of life are the most righteous.

BLAKE'S WRATH TARGETS CAPELLAN PEOPLE

(4 May 3068)

Liao [CBS] – The Word of Blake continues to pursue its campaign of terror against Capellan worlds that threw off the bonds of Davion oppression in our 3057 War of Liberation. Staging their assaults from Terra and forward operating positions on Epsilon Eridani, the Blakists are attempting to broaden their sphere of influence into the Tikonov Commonality even as they prosecute a wider war against the infidel nations of the Inner Sphere.

Since declaring their own independence from ComStar some sixteen years ago, the followers of Blake have forged a path unlike any other. Part religious fanatic, part prophet and part salesman, the typical Blakist faithful has deluded himself into believing that the Word of Blake is the one and only answer to humanity's problems.

First they conquered Terra, using ComStar's ineptitude to secure humanity's birthplace. Then they began spreading into the Tikonov Commonality, targeting worlds not yet rid of the Davion influence that prevented their people from willingly returning to the Confederation. Mandrinn Goren Trahn, Deputy Information Minister for the Liao Commonality, released information about the attacks in late January.

"The Capellan people abhor violence," said Trahn, "but we will not tolerate such egregious assaults on our comrades, even if they lie beyond the borders secured by the Celestial Realm. The Word of Blake must realize that the presence of Davion sympathizers cannot justify an assault against Capellan citizens."

The indiscriminate Blakist assaults continue today, even as the Celestial Wisdom seeks a diplomatic solution to the crisis. Their targets include the homeworlds of the Davions, the Steiners and the Kuritas, delivering much-deserved destruction on each realm, but they also strike at Capellans on worlds like Epsilon Indi, Fletcher

and Tall Trees—worlds left unprotected by ComStar's continued incompetence. Against still other targets, such as Outreach, the Blakists have even used nuclear weapons to eradicate all opposition, at an incredible toll in human lives.

TAURUS ABANDONED?

"...But not all unit commanders are so accepting of the reasons for the lack of Confederation support. Several TDF commanders, on condition of anonymity, revealed their resentment of their treatment.

"We send troops over there to defend Sunny Boy's land whenever the Davions send a company over the border, but what happens when we get clobbered by regiments of Federated troops? Some nice-sounding words of commiseration for our plight, that's what," a veteran brigadier confessed to us.

"It's completely unfair to the Concordat. The Capellan Confederation is larger and more powerful, yet it feels like we're putting more resources and manpower into its defense than they are to ours," claimed another brigadier. "I mean, they're out taking over Chaos March worlds, using us to garrison their systems, while they can't spare even some reserves to deal with the Calderon Protectorate or pirates."

"Though not the majority opinion yet, such sentiments are apparently gaining momentum among officers and the enlisted corps. Most seem to arise from troops coming back from tours protecting the Capellan borders or pacifying recently conquered Chaos March worlds. Such soldiers claim to be disgusted by the disparity of support their units receive when compared even with second-line Capellan regiments..."

—Excerpted from "Taurus Abandoned?" *Free Concordat Journal*, Taurus Press, 20 June 3068

ST. IVES STRUCK

Duke Kai Missing, Hundreds Killed

(26 June 3068)

Capella [CBS] – Unknown marauders struck St. Ives today, killing and injuring more than a thousand. Among the missing and feared dead is Duke Kai Allard-Liao, cousin to the Celestial Wisdom.

Rebel separatists have long targeted the worlds of the St. Ives Commonality, seeking to undermine our government through riots and other acts of violence, including military raids conducted by Davion-supported insurgents. Even when the people of St. Ives chose to reunite with our Confederation five years ago, after surviving three decades of Davion oppression, rebels continued to strike out at government and military facilities, apparently in a futile attempt to turn the loyal citizens of St. Ives against their own nation.

While these rebel attacks have killed and wounded thousands of Capellan citizens, none have been so despicable as the one

CELESTIAL CRISES

that assaulted St. Ives today. Mandrinn Quon Il-Peng, St. Ives Commonality Minister of Justice, witnessed the attack and relayed what he saw to investigators.

"The Davion green BattleMechs fell from the sky and began shooting in all directions. Their only intent was to kill as many citizens and destroy as many structures as they could."

Other reports from the scene confirm the minister's account. The unknown 'Mechs appeared to have completed what is known as a "combat jump"—literally a controlled fall from a DropShip in orbit—to land in a military cantonment that Duke Kai was touring. They proceeded to destroy everything and everyone in sight before moving on to the spaceport, leveling everything in their path, where they rendezvoused with their DropShip and left the world. St. Ives Space Traffic Control identified this DropShip as a civilian liner of Sarna registry, but could not track it when it left the world as the marauders had knocked out radar and other sensors.

To date, there are 307 confirmed deaths on the ground, with more than 700 wounded. Roughly 400 more remain missing, including Duke Kai. No one has yet claimed responsibility for this heinous act of murder.

ROYAL FAMILY KIDNAPPING!**Duke Kai Allard-Liao Snatched From St. Ives**

(5 July 3068)

Sian [CBS] – Duke Kai Allard-Liao, cousin to Chancellor Sun-Tzu Liao, son of Duchess Candace Liao, heir to the St. Ives Duchy and currently second in line to the Celestial Throne, has been kidnapped by agents of the Federated Suns.

In an attack ten days ago, an assault force personally dispatched by George Hasek—the oppressor of billions of Capellans under the Davions' tyrannical thumb and key orchestrator of the civil war that murdered millions more of our people—captured Duke Kai and killed or injured more than a thousand citizens. Aided by traitors to all Capellans, these raiders slipped onto St. Ives, conducted a daylight assault and then escaped the world before facing anything more deadly than unarmed citizens.

Yesterday, the criminal Hasek confirmed that he ordered this deplorable assault on the Confederation. The attack is the first move in a war that the Davion pigs are bringing to the peace-loving Capellan people.

Ping Shuh, spokeswoman for the Ministry of Information, had this to say:

"The Federated Suns has declared war on the Capellan Confederation through this despicable act. They have murdered our citizens and kidnapped the Celestial Wisdom's cousin. There is no doubt this is a prelude to an invasion whose ultimate goal is to destroy the Capellan way of life and place a puppet upon the Celestial Throne."

She went on to say that the Maskirovka has already uncovered evidence of a body double created by Hasek for Duke Kai, apparently hoping to place a duplicate on the Celestial Throne. A

WHO DEFEATED THE UNDEFEATABLE?

FatBastard: So what's up?

CC-hAtEr: Yo Fat Bastard! We're rapping about Kai.

Kalilover: Yeah. Kai finally got his ass kicked and vanished.

KiloFoxtrot: He's been greased. Dead...Dead...Dead.

FatBastard: Say what? When did this happen?

Puddentang: Hiya, FB. Two days ago if you believe CBS.

CC-hAtEr: CBS = Capellan Butt Suckers

Kalilover: CC, can it will you? Enough already.

Puddentang: Anyway, according to CBS Kai got taken down during his tour of the St. Ives Comp...er...Commonality. Rumor has it the deed was done by none other than the Bounty Hunter.

FatBastard: The Hunter? WTF! Who's this guy and what does he pilot?

KiloFoxtrot: You got to be kidding me. You've never heard of the BH?

FatBastard: Um...sorry, never heard of him or her.

Kalilover: Jeebus, did you grow up under a rock?

Puddentang: FB, the BH is a MechWarrior who goes after others for money, mostly other 'Mech jocks. He sometimes fights for the right price, too.

FatBastard: Sounds like a merc to me.

CC-hAtEr: This guy's no ordinary merc, FB. This same person de horsed Nasty Kerensky and took her *Marauder* afterward.

FatBastard: Who?

KiloFoxtrot: Are you boneheaded or what? How old are you, FB?

Kalilover: That's it, KF. One more time and your ass is banned. :-(

FatBastard: Thanks, Kalilover. I'm only 13. So how did he take out Kai and with what?

KiloFoxtrot nods and offers apology

Puddentang: Word is he used a souped-up *Marauder II*, a Dragoons variant, and blasted Kai out of Yen-lo-wang and captured him.

FatBastard: OMG! Do they know where the BH took him?

CC-hAtEr: No

KiloFoxtrot: Assuming the rumors are true, of course. Otherwise, you go with the CBS line and say ol' Kai's "missing," and that the Davies got 'im. Which do you wanna believe?

—Excerpt from a St. Ives network chat room (monitored by the Maskirovka), 27 June 3068

similar attempt by Victor Davion to place a double in command of the Free Worlds League resulted in the sundering of the empire his father had built and ultimately the decimation of the Davion civilization and military.

"The Capellan nation cannot fall," said Shuh. "The strength and will of our people is too great. Once more we will stand against the Davions. We will free every Capellan enslaved by Hasek and we will once and for all crush our enemies."

CELESTIAL CRISES



FLASHING SWORDS

"No generation has ever lived in the Capellan March that did not wish to draw swords against Sian." Paraphrased from the remarks of an ancient Terran leader, these words, recently attributed to Duke George Hasek of the Capellan March, rang truest of all when—instead of racing to defend the embattled FedSuns capital of New Avalon—Hasek instead announced the start of Operation Sovereign Justice, a military campaign aimed at the heart of his realm's ancient enemies.

CONFEDERATION UNDER ATTACK



"Wait—I've just been informed that a fleet of JumpShips has appeared at a nearby pirate point and has discharged a mix of assault and carrier DropShips, all bearing Federated Suns colors. They are approaching our position at a combat pace and it appears we are moving to engage the invaders. I say invaders instead of raiders because the officer in charge tells me it looks like the Davions have sent an entire Regimental Combat Team to attack the system.

"Thankfully, I am already strapped into my chair, or the geoforces from our own DropShip's combat maneuvers would have thrown me around this bridge like a rag doll. We were also fortunate that our *Leopard CV* had all its fighters in space before the Davions appeared. Watching the tactical screens here, I can see our vessel is coming about, opening up on a pair of Davion heavy fighters. Wow! Looks like our weapon bays tore one up. The other seems to have survived. We are turning to face a Davion DropShip now...this one looks like an *Aven*—

[Large explosion. Alarms wail.]

"What's going on? My screens just went dead and the emergency lighting has kicked in. I think we've been hit by an enemy DropShip, or maybe a squadron of fighters..."

[Indistinct, exciting muttering. Alarms cease abruptly.]

"Oh, gods! I've been told the life-support system suffered critical damage and main power is out. We're dead in the water, adrift in space. To conserve power, I must end this report, and hope that—"
<<End of Transmission>>

—Veronica Sarine, Canopian field reporter onboard the CCAF DropShip *Starsword*, Necromo system, 28 June 3068

CAPELLANS UNITE!

(7 July 3068)

Sian [CNS] – "The lapdogs of the Davion empire have come barking at our door. Citizens of the Confederation, now is our time to rid the universe of their kind!"

Chancellor Liao spoke those words before more than 100,000 citizens gathered in the Forbidden City this morning, announcing to the entire Capellan Confederation that the Federated Suns had invaded the St. Ives Commonality.

Davion agents had been supporting criminal enterprises and anti-government rebels within that commonality since the Capellan Confederation liberated it from their oppressive grasp five years ago. Their actions directly flouted the orders of their leader, the benevolent Archon Katrina Steiner, with whom the Celestial Wisdom had negotiated a treaty that finally ended centuries of aggression by the Federated Suns. But the untrustworthy warriors of that nation could not abide such peace, and in response rose up in rebellion against the only peace-loving leader they had ever known. When they finally deposed Archon Katrina, placing a puppet princess in her place, the Davion oppressors once again began their campaign of terror and domination against the peaceful citizens of the Capellan Confederation.

"They have struck St. Ives," said the Chancellor of the Davion invasion, "as well as Warlock, Indicass, Texlos and Vestallas." The Celestial Wisdom did hasten to point out that Confederation military forces have surrounded the invaders on each of those worlds and will soon annihilate them. Meanwhile, the CCAF is strengthening those worlds' defenses, along with the rest of the worlds in the St. Ives Commonality, preparing them should the Davions attempt further invasions.

Chancellor Liao spoke clearly to the truth of the matter: "I call every true Capellan citizen to stand united against this immoral attack on our very civilization. Some unfortunate souls exist among us who have fallen under the spell of foreign influence and are now aiding our invaders. It is the duty of every Capellan to identify those poor folk so that we may help them overcome their

DUCHESS CANDACE ACCEPTS INVITATION TO SIAN



(8 July 3068)

Sian [CBS] – In response to the Davion aggression that has targeted her homeworld and her family, Candace Liao, Duchess and Prefect of St. Ives, leader of the St. Ives Commonality and beloved aunt to the Celestial Wisdom, has accepted the Chancellor's invitation to Sian.

Ministry of Information spokesman Ping Shuh gave this statement to the press: "Duchess Candace has had to endure many hardships in her life, not least of which were her years as a hostage to the Davion Prince as he subjugated her people. While she expressed her desire to stand by her subjects as they once again battle oppression, she saw the wisdom of the Chancellor's concerns for her safety and accepted his invitation to stay with him on Sian until this current conflict is concluded."

The duchess was touring the St. Ives Commonality when the Davions first struck and kidnapped her son, Duke Kai Allard-Liao. After brief consultation with the Celestial Wisdom, she made her way to Sian. For further protection, she was joined en route by bodyguards from Warrior House Imarra. She arrived on Sian earlier today, but was unavailable for comment.



CELESTIAL CRISES

weaknesses, and destroy those who dare desecrate our worlds with their oppression.”

When asked about the fact that the Federated Suns is holding Duke Kai Allard-Liao hostage, the Chancellor said: “The Capellan Confederation can not abide even one of its citizens being held against his will. My cousin knows firsthand the enemies who hold him captive. He will not bow to them before we can free him and make his captors pay for their crimes!”

LUCK OR FORESIGHT?

(15 July 3068)

Highspire [FCS]—Is the Chancellor merely lucky, or does he have a gift of foresight?

That persistent question has been asked more and more over the past year. It is, of course, not a new question. Many believe him prescient, and point to decisions he has made throughout his life that, on the surface, seemed odd but ultimately turned out for the best. But though the naysayers could ignore the evidence before, the events of the past year defy any other logical explanation.

When the Celestial Wisdom chose to back Victor Davion during the FedCom Civil War, many called it unconscionable that the Confederation gave aid to the Davions. But when House Dai Da Chi reclaimed Tikonov for the Chancellor, those same faithless individuals hailed the backing of Victor Davion as a stroke of genius.

Clearly it was more. How else can one explain the Chancellor’s last-minute decision to remain on Sian instead of traveling to Tharkad to deliver his announcement to the Star League Council? With that decision, he deftly avoided the Word of Blake assault force and remained in exactly the right place to oversee the countering

of the Davion invasion of our nation. What’s more, the decision to pull out of the Star League foreshadowed its eventual dissolution.

If one desires more evidence, one need only contemplate the Chancellor’s invitation for his aunt, Duchess Candace Liao, to join him on Sian. Delivered in the hours before Davion forces abducted her son from St. Ives, Candace saw the message for what it was—the truly celestial wisdom of Chancellor Sun-Tzu Liao.

RECLAIM YOUR DESTINY

Citizens of the St. Ives Compact, rise up against your oppressors. Throw off the yoke of slavery Sian has chained around your neck. Turn your weapons on the real threat: *Sun-Tzu Liao*.

FREEDOM!

Duke Kai Personally Overseeing Fight for St. Ives Independence
(26 July 3068)

St. Ives [SIFP]—The future of our people on this anniversary of St. Ives Founding Day looks bright, for Duke Kai Allard-Liao is personally leading the fight for our independence.

Nearly 900 years have passed since the first colonists set foot on this world, and in those nine centuries we have seen much hardship, but none as severe as we experienced under the Capellan thumb. Thankfully, we have leaders like Duke Kai and his mother, Duchess Candace, who are willing to fight for what is right. After months of secret negotiations with Duke George Hasek, Duke Kai left his Capellan “handlers” behind and joined Hasek on New Syrtis, where he is personally overseeing the military campaign that will once again win independence for the people of the St. Ives Compact. “The people of St. Ives will meet the challenges of the future,” he said to a group of university graduates just a week before leaving for New Syrtis. “It is up to you to take control of your destiny.”

Already, mercenary units in Duke Kai’s employ have taken up position inside the Compact and laid siege to those who stand against our independence. Coordinating with the St. Ives Armored Cavalry and Janissary Brigades, these forces are fortifying our borders against the Capellan response that is already attempting to stop us from achieving the freedom we deserve.

Unlike the war we fought against the Confederation just five years ago, this time Sun-Tzu Liao doesn’t have the army of the Star League to call on, or even his Word of Blake allies, who are embroiled in their own war. Neither does he have the help of a despotic ruler on the Davion throne; instead, we have the full force of the Armed Forces of the Federated Suns ready to support us.

Unfortunately, Sun-Tzu has Duchess Candace Liao in custody on Sian, to which he spirited her as soon as he learned of Duke Kai’s journey to New Syrtis. Nevertheless, we must not allow her incarceration to turn us away from our path. “Freedom is dear and can never be taken for granted,” she said almost four decades ago after declaring independence for St. Ives. “The cost of freedom is never too great unless it is freedom itself.”

THE CHANCELLOR IS LYING

[CBS Anchor]: “And now an update on the Capellan March invasion...”

Transmission Interrupted

[A masked man stands in front of the Free Capellan banner]

[Man]: “Wake up, St. Ivers! Sun-Tzu is lying to you. The Davion forces are moving unabated because the CCAF is hiding. Where’s the vaunted Capellan military? Sun-Tzu is allowing Duke Hasek’s forces to bleed our beloved St. Ives Cavalry dry. We are in danger of subjugation by the bloodthirsty FedSuns, just like what happened in the Fourth Succession War!

“Must we live through another invasion where tens of thousands of St. Ivers die because of greed and lust for power? We say no! Stand up and be counted! Take up arms against the dictators’ hordes! Make them pay with their own blood! Long live the St. Ives Compact! Long live Free Capella!”

Transmission Terminated

—Capellan Broadcasting Service *Nightly News* report, St. Ives, 25 July 3068

CELESTIAL CRISES



For more than thirty years the Compact and the Federated Suns enjoyed a true friendship, a relationship sundered by Sun-Tzu's *Xin Sheng*. Do you, free Capellans of the St. Ives Compact, want to see this restored? Do you want to continue your lives under the oppressive Confederation regime? Rise up and reclaim your destiny! Join us and together we shall break Sun Tzu's chains of bondage and make St. Ives free again!

—From Davion propaganda pamphlets dropped over the capital city of Teng, July 3068

VICTORIOUS THEY VANQUISH!**Capellan Troops Bring Glory and Honor to the Confederation**
(17 August 3068)

Ares [CNA] – Despite boasts to the contrary from all levels of the Davion government, the Capellan Confederation Armed Forces have halted the Federated Suns' invasion and are destroying the enemy everywhere they are encountered.

The invasion, begun just over a month ago, initially targeted worlds in the St. Ives Commonality. George Hasek, Duke of New Syrtis and leader of the Davion military forces along our border

with the Federated Suns, justified this illegal and immoral action as military aid to an "independent" St. Ives—as led by a small group of rebels supported by Hasek himself.

Though the Davion onslaught initially overpowered the loyal citizens of St. Ives—an onslaught that killed, injured and left homeless countless thousands—our own glorious military responded swiftly and lethally. Staging counterattacks against the Davion troops in conjunction with true patriots on the besieged worlds, our military stunned the enemy, costing them their tenuous grasp on five worlds and forcing them to retreat to temporary fortifications they had constructed on six more, including St. Ives and Warlock.

Already, Strategic Military Director Talon Zahn is moving additional forces into the St. Ives Commonality and along the Federated Suns border to deal with what little opposition remains. Reliable sources on the few worlds still beset by the Davion blight report that enemy troops are surrendering wholesale, and those that do not stand down remain bottled up in their bases while Capellan citizens surround them and continuously subject them to sniper and bomb attacks.

"HASEK'S WAR"



August 24th, 3068

The so-called "Third Wave" has hit us here on New Westin. Most of our defensive lines are holding, but only by a hair; the Federated Suns troops are just too numerous for us to push off at the moment. They're drawing closer and closer to Sian, and we have fewer and fewer systems to use as a buffer.

I still cannot believe we are fighting this pointless conflict. The Star League disbanded of its own accord, and Hasek's capital system of New Avalon lay under siege. His once-sister capital no longer exists. Taurian guerillas bent on reclaiming their lands still plague his Periphery border worlds, and most of the planets he claims to be "liberating" would rather not be. And yet he presses harder and deeper into Confederation territory. Why?

I can only come up with two theories. The first is that with New Avalon weakened and in a precarious position, Hasek believes he can carve out his own fiefdom, making himself more powerful than a mere March Lord. Perhaps he wants a new Successor State, a House Hasek. With the Federated Suns too weak to oppose him and the Capellan Confederation shattered, he could easily absorb Crucis March worlds and declare his newly expanded realm an independent state. Of course, all this hinges on defeating the Confederation, as well as a long drawn-out fight between Yvonne Steiner-Davion and the Word of Blake.

My second theory is that he has gone insane. Of course, those two theories aren't necessarily mutually exclusive.

—Last personal journal entry of *Si-ben-bing* Sergei Pin, CCAF, (KIA on New Westin, 25 August 3068).

FORTRESS OF DETERMINATION**Brave Confederation Troops Hold Tikonov**

(6 September 3068)

[*Pris Khoji*]: And now for a special report from Kollin Wade, currently on assignment to Tikonov.

[*Wade*]: Tikonov was once a shining pearl of the Confederation, a commonality capital and an industrial giant. Snatched away during Hanse Davion's murderous rampage some forty years ago and forced to live under his dictatorial regime until its people said, "No more!", this world stood up against the very government that oppressed it for all those long decades. But can it hold out? The people of Tikonov say, "Yes!" and the Capellan Confederation stands behind its citizens. With me is *Gao-shiao-zhang* Fah Li Shei, leader of House Dai Da Chi. Thank you for giving us your time, *Shiao-zhang*.

[*Shei*]: You are most welcome.

[*Wade*]: Tell our viewers about the current situation on Tikonov.

[*Shei*]: The Celestial Wisdom tasked House Dai Da Chi with the defense of Tikonov, an assignment we have carried out continuously and without fail. Even when the mercenary Dragoons abandoned this world, our warriors willingly shouldered the burden of preventing the Davions from returning here with their oppressor armies.

[*Wade*]: But that's not the whole story, is it? What of the naval blockade?

[*Shei*]: When the people of Tikonov stood as one to throw off the bonds of Davion oppression and called on the Chancellor's favor, the murderer Hasek, who even now is prosecuting a war against our nation, sent his WarShips to cut off Tikonov from the rest of



CELESTIAL CRISES

the Inner Sphere. He ordered the seizure or destruction of every inbound and outbound DropShip, but his fleet could not stand against the strength of the Confederation. After several titanic battles, the Davions retreated. Now they satisfy themselves with destroying shipments of food and medicines coming in to this world, and taking prisoner Tikonov students and workers bound for opportunities in the rest of the Confederation.

[Wade]: What about the reports of fighting around the planet?

[Shei]: When we destroyed the Davion garrison here a year ago, many enemy soldiers fled into the countryside and began a guerrilla war against the rightful government of Tikonov. We have caught or killed many hundreds of these criminals, but after almost forty years of occupation, the world is full of Davion sympathizers and agents. With the help of the people of Tikonov, we believe we will find the last of these criminals shortly.

[Wade]: So the Federated Suns hasn't made any attempts to recapture Tikonov by landing troops?

[Shei]: No, they haven't. And even if they tried, they could never succeed, which they know. The will of the people and of the Celestial Wisdom simply will not allow it.

[Wade]: Thank you, *Gao-shiao-zhang* Fah Li Shei. This has been Kollin Wade, reporting for Confederation News Associates from Tikonov.

DAVIONS SUE FOR PEACE

(3 October 3068)

Capella [CNA]—No longer able to justify their assault on the Capellan Confederation, the people of the Federated Suns are calling on their leaders to end the illegal war and finally accept Chancellor Liao's lasting peace proposal.

When the Davion criminal George Hasek, oppressor of billions of Capellan citizens in the Federated Suns' so-called Capellan March, launched his unprovoked and unjustified invasion of the St. Ives Commonality, he doubtless intended to conquer the same worlds his grandfather did just four decades earlier, this time adding them to his own realm. But the people of St. Ives long ago had enough of Davion subjugation, and despite the puppet "government in exile" that Hasek propped up in front of holocameras, stood fast against the invasion.

Hasek sent all his military power into the St. Ives Commonality, but could claim only defeat. Try as he might, he could not keep the truth from his own people: his kidnapping of Duke Kai Allard-Liao, his complete inability to gain control of even one Capellan world, the thousands of dead sons and daughters he sent back to their parents, the tens of thousands of prisoners or war our own valiant *janshi* have captured and the countless Davion troops who deserted their posts rather than feel the wrath of the mighty Capellan armed forces.

Since the beginning of this war, time and again we have seen civilian demonstrations against it erupting across the Federated Suns. We have also seen how Hasek brutally put down those

demonstrations, killing and imprisoning at last count more than a million of his own citizens. News of his criminal actions has spread throughout the Federated Suns, so much so that even the Davion princess can no longer stomach his renegade behavior.

"George, stop this invasion at once!" she told Hasek in a message obtained by Capellan agents working in the Federated Suns. "We can no longer afford a war against the Capellan Confederation."

Nevertheless, Hasek continues to pursue his criminal enterprise. Even though his troops have been halted, even though his people continue to oppose this war and plead for its end, even though his princess has ordered him to cease this violent demonstration, Hasek continues to wage a war he cannot possibly win.

Chancellor Liao has pledged to end this violent and illegal assault on Capellan sovereignty peacefully if possible, militarily if necessary. So far, Hasek has forced the latter.

FALLING SKIES

In October of 3068, the war between Duke Hasek and the Capellan Confederation took a drastic turn. Succeeding against all odds, the AFFS forces stood just one jump away from Sian, with much of the St. Ives territories liberated behind them—willingly or otherwise. Though both sides tell a different version of events, the dramatic assault that struck the Celestial Throne sent shockwaves throughout the region and beyond.

SIAN STRUCK!

[Wen-Long]: My...my god. This is Peter Wen-Long. For those of you just joining us, Sian...has been attacked. The reports are confused and are...are just pouring in. What? I'm told we have a live feed from military command channels. Let's listen in.

[Unknown #1]: ...have an ID yet?

[Unknown #2]: No. Sat comms are down and we've got multiple inbound unknowns on uncontrolled reentry paths. Damn thing must have blown everything nearby out of the sky.

[Unknown #1]: Sensor profile?

[Unknown #2]: Wideband EM interference. I can't even tell you how many damn ships there are! *Di bian!* Heat spike! It's firing!

[Unknown #1]: Wha... Where?

[Unknown #2]: Working.

[Unknown #3]: This is Sian Space Traffic Control. We've... We've lost the Forbidden City.

[Unknown #1]: What do you mean you've lost the Forbidden City? That's impos—

[Unknown #3]: Every feed we had from the spaceport and its satellite locations just dropped, and our screens... There's a fifty-kilometer wide sensor hole around the Forbidden City.

[Unknown #2]: Confirmed. Every base in the city just dropped off-line and... Wireless communications are impossible, we've even

CELESTIAL CRISES



lost the landlines. It's like...by *Buddha*...there aren't that many...I mean, a nuclear—

[Unknown #1]: Don't say that! We don't know it was a nuke yet. Could just be jamming...

[Wen-Long]: Can we get some confirmation of what's going on?

[Unknown #4]: ...fire, buildings disinte... [static] ...on fire. Alert every... [static]

[Unknown #1]: What was that?

[Unknown #2]: Forbidden City emergency channel. Just barely coming in.

[Unknown #4]: ...allions three, four and five, respond to sector one. Call in...call in everyone. What th— [static]

[Unknown #2]: Another heat spike!

[Unknown #1]: Send to all stations: Sian under attack. All military forces on high alert for immediate response and civil defense. Wu, get me some damn eyes in the sky!

[Unknown #2]: Getting something. Bounced through about five relays.

[Unknown #1]: Give it to me! Blake's Blood...

[Wen-Long]: We're getting a visual feed from an outlying station. I...I don't know if you can see this, but... it...it's incredible. The Forbidden City is on fire. The whole city is burning. Beams of light, what must be lasers, are cutting through the smoke leaving a trail...A trail of fire hundreds, thousands of meters high. How...? Who could possibly...?

—CBS News Special Report, Sian, 7 October 3068

NOT AGAIN!

"It is said that if we are not careful, history will come full circle and repeat itself. Apparently, and in the darkest way possible, this has finally happened to the Capellan Confederation.

"It was one of our darkest moments. In August of 2367, Confederation troops raised from Sarna and St. Ives naval forces, supported by hastily armed merchants, engaged a flotilla of Davion "peacekeepers" above Capella, led by then-Chancellor Franco Liao. Though our troops were outnumbered and outclassed, the epic battle shattered three Davion regiments...at the horrific cost of two thousand Capellan civilians and the obliteration of our capital city on Capella.

"In the aftermath, the Confederation moved its capital permanently to Sian and the black border was added to the official Capellan triangle, to commemorate the valiant sacrifices of those citizens who died to prove that the Confederation would never yield to a foreign aggressor. The Davion regiments destroyed on Capella never re-formed, a testimony to Capellan mettle.

"Flash forward to the present, to a disturbingly familiar scene that echoes in the hearts and minds of a new generation of Confederation citizens. Just over ten days ago, one or more Davion WarShips committed a heinous act of aggression against Sian, destroying the Celestial Palace and most of the capital city. Murdering millions—including our beloved Duchess, Candace

Liao, and perhaps even the Celestial Wisdom himself—the brutal attack has left our people reeling with shock, grief and anger.

"Though the FedSuns news agencies repeatedly deny their involvement, the fact that Davion troops stand an easy jump away from Sian is not to be overlooked, nor are the centuries of hostility the Davion realm has always directed toward our nation. Theories of alternate attackers abound, accusing everyone from the Free Worlds League to the Word of Blake, and questions swirl in minds across the Confederation as to where our own WarShips were on this fateful day. But none can overpower the obvious, imminent threat of Duke George Hasek's naked aggression. No culprit could be more obvious than the Davion invaders.

"We do know known for certain the pain, the loss, the horror and—above all else—the determination that followed. Just as on that fateful August day seven hundred years ago, the people of the Capellan Confederation everywhere have grown united and resolved. We have stood on the precipice before. Never will we do so again.

"For KDBR, I am Robert Sung-Li. Good night."

—News 2 Commentary, KDBR News (a CBS affiliate), Denbar, 10 October 3068

"INTO THE BREACH"



...However, my sources at TMI informed me that out of the sixteen Davion WarShips left from the FedCom Civil War, only five are in deployable condition. Of those five, only one Davion WarShip known to be operational condition is likewise known to be near our borders. It is currently stationed over Tikonov, renewing the Davion blockade of that world. Unless Hasek sent a partially crippled ship (entirely possible, given his recent power craving) to Sian, he has no resources to have carried out the attack.

But if the Davions are too weak and spread too thin to conduct such an operation, then who did it? Whoever carried it out must have enough covert operations resources to take down Sian's defense grid, sneak a WarShip into orbit, do the hideous deed and escape.

Such a group would need a nearby WarShip fleet, as well as access to the Confederation's defense grid to shut it down. The attack went off flawlessly, so the perpetrators must be skilled WarShip operators with a competent intelligence agency. The three most likely suspects are House Marik, Word of Blake or turncoats in Confederation—elements of Free Capella, blindly seeking revenge for their past defeats.

But the Free Worlds League is not known for committing such heinous acts, and it is unlikely that even Free Capella would fire on the Celestial Palace, especially with St. Ives' Duchess Candace Liao in attendance. That leaves one major suspect beyond the Davions. Could Blake's wrath finally have come to Sian?

—Excerpt from *Truth and Lies*, a Confederation-wide syndicated column, 18 October 3068



CELESTIAL CRISES

UNION OF SWORD AND SPIRIT

(12 October 3068)

Sian [CNA]—In the aftermath of the terrible assault on Sian five days ago, Strategic Military Director Talon Zahn addressed the Capellan people from a grassy hill overlooking the still-burning Forbidden City.

"Five days ago, the Capellan Confederation was assaulted by its enemies in a way never before thought possible. In a cowardly move, those enemies struck the heart of the Confederation—Sian—with an anonymous WarShip attack. First they crippled our communications and planetary defense satellites, then they attacked the Celestial Throne. They directed their weapons on the Forbidden City, with the obvious intent of completely destroying our capital, and jumped away before our armed forces could respond to this unconscionable assault on our sovereignty.

"That assault did not completely destroy the Forbidden City. Thanks to the valiant combined efforts of every firefighter, police officer, soldier and citizen, the fires our enemies ignited with their weapon blasts did not spread to consume the entire city. Nevertheless, those strikes devastated much of the capital. The city burns yet, as you can see behind me.

"At this time, we do not know how many martyrs perished in this craven assault, but we do know its target: the Celestial Palace. The majority of the strikes were targeted there, and there the greatest devastation lies. Firefighters and rescue teams could not reach the palace until just two days ago. What they found was disheartening.

"Candace Liao, aunt to the Chancellor and Duchess of the St. Ives Commonality, is among the dead. Worse still, the Celestial Wisdom is missing. While we hold out hope against hope, we must also face reality. No survivors have been found amid the ruins of the palace, even in the bunkers designed to withstand direct nuclear assaults.

"My heart is heavy for having to report this, but the Chancellor, the Celestial Wisdom, the leader of the Capellan people, Sun-Tzu Liao, is lost to us.

"As much as we might want to grieve over these terrible losses, we must put aside our emotions and instead direct those energies against our enemies. The perpetrators of this atrocity are clear—the Davions. They have kidnapped our citizens, tainted our worlds with their assaults time and again, and now murdered countless numbers of our fellow Capellans in hopes of preventing us from destroying them. But they did not take into account the spirit of the Capellan people. We may have lost our Celestial Wisdom, but our sorrow will not dissuade us from doing what we must. We must avenge our Chancellor, and we must avenge Duchess Candace!

"Clearly the criminal George Hasek-Davion seeks not only to claim the St. Ives Commonality for himself, but to place a puppet on the Celestial Throne. His abduction of Duke Kai was merely his first step. Now that the Celestial Wisdom has been lost, he believes he can launch his final solution. We will not allow that!

"People of the Confederation, your duty is clear. Peace with the Davions is possible now only through their destruction! We must make them pay for their crimes. We will make their rivers and lakes and oceans run red with blood! We will destroy their armies and crush their will. We will free the Capellan citizens still under their yoke, and we will free their own people from the Davion legacy of tyranny. And though we will lose many lives in the process, we can no longer stand idly by.

"When we are through with the Davions, the Inner Sphere will rejoice and sing, for the Confederation will have delivered them from evil once and for all!"

"THE THIN LINE"

"We of the Free Capella Movement hereby deny any involvement in or knowledge of the 'Day of Death' orbital attacks on Sian. We do not condone or promote such terrorist operations and would never consider participating in one. We strive to promote the freedom and safety of Confederation citizens through legitimate means. Though those may include military means at times, never would they include such a reckless attack.

"Many may wish Sun-Tzu Liao dead, even us at times. However, we would never consider the deaths of tens of thousands of others in the same attack to be acceptable 'collateral damage'. For our onetime benefactors, the Federated Suns, to do so is outrageous and unwarranted.

"From this day forth, Free Capella repudiates any affiliation or peaceful relations with the Federated Suns. From this day forth, we will fight side by side with the official government and military of the Capellan Confederation to push back the Federated Suns invasion of the Xin Sheng province. We will fight as always to preserve our fellow citizens' freedom and safety, only now against a different foe, House Davion.

"There is a thin line between acceptable military operations and monstrous acts. George Hasek, you have just crossed that line and will pay dearly for that mistake."

—Colonel Warner Doles, CO of the Blackwind Lancers (Free Capella), 12 October 3068

TOO FAR!

(17 October 3068)

St. Ives [SINS] – "The Federated Suns has gone too far in its misguided attempts to fight for the independence of the St. Ives Commonality."

Salentine Liao, close advisor to Duchess Candace Liao and a senior minister on St. Ives, gave that statement just days after confirmation that the duchess was killed on Sian. "St. Ives has a long history of peaceful relations with the rest of the Inner Sphere, as it has since the first days of the St. Ives Mercantile Association. But

CELESTIAL CRISES

CANOPUS GOES SILENT

(18 October 3068)

Joppa [CSN] – Word of Blake officials have confirmed earlier speculation that contact with the HPG on Canopus has been lost. As of October 16th, no messages have been received from Canopus IV, or from any of the worlds within a fifty light-year radius of that planet. The affected worlds include: Adherlwin, Borgan's Rift, Farnardir, Gallis, Lockton, Magarez and Royal Foxx in the Magistracy of Canopus, as well as Aspropirgos, Butzfletz, Gouderak and Umka in the Free Worlds League.

The Word of Blake has not commented on the likely cause of a HPG shutdown on this scale, which is unprecedented since the Terran Hegemony's collapse after the fall of the first Star League. Blakist representatives likewise did not offer any estimates on when service is likely to resume.

With the Federated Suns' vicious attack on Sian only two weeks old, one cannot help but draw a parallel. Has the Federated Suns struck at Canopus to isolate one of the Confederation's most powerful allies? If so, what lies in store for Taurus?

With the communications breakdown, Magestrix Emma Centrella could not be reached for comment. Her daughter and heiress-apparent, Naomi Centrella, remains on tour with the Third Canopian Fusiliers in Capellan space.

we can no longer stand by as George Hasek and the Armed Forces of the Federated Suns prosecute a war of liberation, murdering our citizens and our beloved leaders, in our name. This stops now!"

Speaking to more than a quarter of a million St. Ives citizens, who gathered to mourn the deaths of Duchess Liao and the Chancellor, she took the opportunity to echo Capellan Strategic Military Director Talon Zahn's impassioned speech to the Confederation five days earlier. "We must end this rebellion against our brothers and sisters and stand as one Capellan people. The Davions are not our allies, and they do not fight for our best interests. And now they have murdered the greatest among us! We cannot allow their slaying of Duchess Candace to go unpunished! It is up to us to lead the strike on New Syrtis to free Duke Kai and punish the murderer, George Hasek!"

Liao, who broke down in tears at the foot of a 30-meter tall mural of the slain duchess at the end of her address, returned to the duchess' palace, but not before urging the people of the St. Ives Commonality once more to oppose the Federated Suns' invasion.

"Their legacy of oppression ends now! For Candace!"

NEWS DOWNLOADER v3.7



DATE & TITLE

SERVICE

STATUS

(20-APR-68)

"AS WAR SPREADS, IE EMERGES AS UNLIKELY EMPLOYER"

[MERCNET]

COMPLETED

(05-JUL-68)

"BLAKIST FORCES EMPLOY WMDS ON ALTAIR, YORII"

[INN]

DOWNLOADING

(08-JUL-68)

"DAVION TROOPS PILLAGE WMD CEMETERY ON TSINGTAO"

[CBS]

ACCESSING

A SERVICE OF IRIAN NEWS INTERSTELLAR

AFTERSHOCKS

INN NEWS



It is now confirmed that a naval and ground assault is underway on New Avalon...

Mozzi

AFTERSHOCKS

[Camera fades in on a room decorated in white panels with gray marble trim. In the middle of the room stands a U-shaped table with a black marble top, behind the center of which sits INN Special Correspondent Michael Bosworth. Four men and one woman occupy other seats at the table, with three to Bosworth's left and two to his right.]

[Bosworth]: "Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. I'm Michael Bosworth, and this is a special edition of 'Stellar Pulse Today'. Tonight, our topic: Jihad, the Word of Blake's ever-widening war on the Inner Sphere. Let's meet tonight's panel, joining us in our INN studios here on Orestes..."

"To my immediate right, Mandrinn Kian Lih Sung, special representative for the Capellan Confederation, and aide to the late Chancellor Sun-Tzu Liao."

[Sung—a man of obvious Asian ancestry, with dark almond eyes, a well-trimmed and slightly drooping moustache (shaved clean under his nose) and dressed in a black Nehru suit with a close-necked mandarin collar—nods silently to Bosworth.]

[Bosworth]: "Beside him, James Graham, our resident expert on the culture and politics of the Free Worlds League and chairman of the Free Worlds Parliamentary Archives. Thank you for coming, James."

[Graham is portly, obviously not a warrior, but is well turned out. His long dark hair reaches to his collar and he sports a thin mustache. His charcoal suit is well tailored, but he seems slightly uncomfortable with the high collar of his starched white shirt.]

[Graham]: "Thank you for having me, Michael."

[Bosworth]: "And to my immediate left, speaking on behalf of the Federated Suns, is Countess Ariel Simms..."

HIDDEN ARMIES

(7 July 3068)

Arc-Royal [INN] – In the face of massive destruction wrought by the Word of Blake, people everywhere are asking the same questions. How could this happen? Why didn't our governments see it coming? Everyone wants to know where to point the finger of blame for a catastrophic intelligence failure.

The truth is, the Inner Sphere's intelligence community did not "fail" at all.

Following the fall of Terra to the Word of Blake, the community had known of the Blakists' Deep Periphery training camps. Likewise, the Blakists' acquisition of so many new BattleMechs—from the Terran factories they reactivated and from sources across the Inner Sphere—led analysts to postulate (correctly) that the Word of Blake had more troops than they officially acknowledged. The elaborate shell game the Blakists played by expanding their existing divisions while duplicating designations of existing Level IIIs to hide the paper trail generated by those new formations succeeded in hiding their location, but not their existence.

On the WarShip front, the Word of Blake helped the Free Worlds League salvage Star League-era WarShips. That they kept the best ships for themselves—a *McKenna*-class battleship, for example—should surprise no one. The Blakists' ability to kick-start the Free Worlds League's WarShip program, and that of the Capellan Confederation, pointed to access to unknown manufacturing plants, or perhaps a large cache of components. We now have a name for that source, even if the precise location of the "Ruins of Gabriel" remains elusive.

So much for the men and materiel.

As to intent, the intelligence community (again, correctly) judged that these forces would safeguard Blakist holdings. William Blane's diplomatic initiatives in the Chaos March back in the early 3060s were taken as a strong indication that the Word of Blake wanted to establish a buffer zone, finally resulting in the formation of the Word of Blake Protectorate. Relations between the Dragoons and the former ComStar were never good. To anyone who could read a map, the Blakist conquest of Terra set the two groups on a collision course. The Blakist-sponsored violence on Outreach was shocking, but unsurprising in light of the veiled declaration of war represented by the formation of the Allied Mercenary Command.

The rest of the Inner Sphere was not oblivious to all of this, but they were in no position to take action against a probationary member-state of the Star League over dealings with a non-aligned state. If challenged over their actions, the Blakists could have argued that the whole affair lay outside the jurisdiction of the Star League council—or even called on the Star League to come to their aid.

The intelligence community is only "guilty" of failing to predict how the Word of Blake would react to a situation that did not yet exist. Not knowing that the Star League would not survive the fourth Whitting Conference, they had no way to guess what was coming.

Transmission Altered

"As was foretold, the spirit of blessed Blake blinded the heretics and unbelievers to our preparations for the glory of the Third Transfer."

Alteration Ended

AFTERSHOCKS

[Simms, a 30-something woman of means, her raven hair pulled back into a single pony tail and wearing a conservative Avalonian-cut suit decorated simply with a sword-and-sun lapel pin, shakes Bosworth's hand.]

[Simms]: "Michael."

[Bosworth]: "...with Mister Bertram Habeas, acting editor-in-chief of the former Chekswa School of Literature on Donegal, sitting beside her..."

[Habeas—a nervous-looking man in his mid-20s, with short-cropped, dark brown hair and green eyes that constantly shift between the other guests, Bosworth, and the camera—keeps his hands entwined on the table before him. His off-the-rack business suit is slate gray, and a silver-and-blue enameled Steiner fist serves as a pin for his black tie. His thumbs tap the table in a random pattern.]

[Habeas]: "Pleased to be here, Michael."

[Bosworth]: "...And, last but not least, Mister Mishcha Kurosawa on the far left, representing the people of the Draconis Combine."

[Kurosawa, short and thin, with an oval face and wheat-colored skin, flashes an open smile filled with brilliant white teeth. His dark eyes are enigmatic, as though the friendly manner can be switched off and on at will. Surprisingly, he isn't wearing traditional Combine clothing, but instead a signature charcoal-gray silk Kirisuki one-suit, with a hint of a dragon woven in iridescent thread across the torso. He bows his head to the gathering.]

[Kurosawa]: "Arigato. I'm pleased to be here."

[Bosworth]: "Right. So, let's begin by addressing the biggest concern—Tharkad. Mr. Habeas, can you give us any new information on just what happened there? And, more importantly, where is the Archon?"

[Habeas jumps slightly and takes a moment to compose himself, obviously unprepared to field the first question.] "Ah, well, the evidence on Tharkad pretty much speaks for itself. I've heard, of course, that the Word of Blake insists they did not set off a nuclear device, but they don't deny firing on the capital city. And they didn't hesitate to use the same means to...pacify Outreach, nor in their recent attack on Donegal. Numerous witnesses and satellite footage in and around Tharkad City clearly witnessed the explosion and mushroom cloud, and a blanket of radioactive waste has rendered everything within fifty kilometers of ground zero completely uninhabitable. Casualty estimates are horrendous, in the millions, with hundreds more dead every day.

[Slightly more emotional now]: "I mean, whether or not the bombardment had anything to do with it or whether the city reactor—as some are saying—simply chose that moment to suffer a catastrophic meltdown, the Blakists' role in it can't be denied. They were the ones who fired on a civilian population center without warning. They were the ones who landed troops afterward and began shooting anything that moved. They were the ones who blockaded the system—and are still there, even now—to block any form of communication or humanitarian aid. Only the fact that LAAF troops managed to secure a foothold, and that some information has leaked through the blockade, makes it possible to grasp the extent of the damage."

[Bosworth]: "So, who's in charge right now? Where is the Archon in all of this?"

[Habeas]: "The Archon? Um, rest assured that, despite the initial reports and the loss of HPG contact on Tharkad, we managed to determine that he is, in fact, alive and well. I've seen some reports saying he was injured at first, and that even the people on Tharkad weren't sure for a few months as to his condition, but some footage smuggled through the blockade proves that Archon Peter is most certainly alive, and in command of the local resistance—er, not only that, but he's also aware of affairs beyond Tharkad."

[Sung, after a slight pause]: "From everything Mr. Habeas says, and chooses not say, it seems that the Word of Blake is still in charge of Tharkad."

[Habeas, flustered]: "The Archon is absolutely in charge, and looks forward to convening a new Estates General as soon as the current crisis on Tharkad is resolved. Militarily, of course, he is being assisted by Margrave Adam Steiner for Alliance-wide defense matters." [turns to face Sung] "And one could as easily ask who is in charge on Sian, considering the tragic loss of your own 'Celestial Wisdom'"

[Bosworth]: "Gentlemen, please. There will be time enough for rebuttal later in our program. Our viewers want facts, not a Solaran pre-game show." [turns to Habeas] "Getting back on track. Mr. Habeas, is this self-prosecuted war against the Free Worlds League by your own Duke Kelswa legitimate? Does the Estates General approve of such an obviously uncharacteristic action? The precedent set by the Duke of Skye is rather disturbing, to say the least."

[Habeas]: "Well, um"—[nervous glance at James Graham]—"I think that, without getting into some of the rhetoric that some local leaders may have used to justify the current conflict, I have to admit that, as the invading nation here, one might see our actions as unjustified, but considering the obvious ties between the League and the Word of Blake, Duke Kelswa-Steiner of Skye and Duke Umayr of Bolan have a right to assume an...aggressive stance here, to proactively defend the Alliance against possible aggression by Blakist allies. You have to admit that, in the moments after the Tharkad attack, the natural assumption had to be that the League would act in support of its friends. The Alliance has suffered quite enough lately."

AFTERSHOCKS



[Graham, eyes narrowing]: "Having had their fill of fighting each other, they now seek... other diversions. The Free Worlds is no Capellan Confederation, however." [A thin smile crosses his lips as he tips his head toward Sung.]

[Sung]: "Of all the—"

[Habeas, face reddening]: "Now, wait just one verdammt—"

[Bosworth]: "Mr. Graham, we will get to you." [returns to Bertram Habeas] "So Mr. Habeas, in your opinion, how is the population of the Alliance handling the loss of Tharkad and the rumored bombardments of Donegal, Skye and Coventry? Is there anything you wish to say to Lyran viewers out there, especially the ones away from home?"

[Habeas, flustered, and glaring at Graham]: "The people of the Alliance remain strong, despite the *very real* attacks on Tharkad, Donegal and elsewhere. To the people of the Lyran Alliance, I would say that we have suffered much these past few years, and these latest indignities are the worst. But at the end of the day, even weapons of mass destruction and the ambitions of a few terrorists have failed to break our nation. As long as we stick together, we will always be here." [shoots another scathing look Graham's way] "Terror cannot prevail against any nation whose people remain united."

[Bosworth]: "Thank you, Mr. Habeas, for your insightful answers. I'm sure many Lyrans in our audience will feel comforted by your reassurances." [to the camera] "As many of our Federated Suns viewers know, within hours of the horrific attack on Tharkad City, New Avalon—the capital of the Suns—was struck in similar fashion from space. Countess, can you tell us what happened in the New Avalon system and what is the status of Avalon City?"

[Simms]: "What happened? I'll tell you what happened! The Word of Blake launched an unprovoked assault on the people of the Federated Suns! Jumping into pirate points around our capital, their WarShips opened fire without warning, killing *millions* in the first few minutes. And when the people of New Avalon refused to roll over, the bloody Blakists tried to take by force what they couldn't take through fear and intimidation. But that didn't get them any further. The only parts of Avalon City they've set foot in are sections they destroyed from orbit just so they could claim that much.

"The Blakists have tried three times to take Avalon City, and each time we've beaten them back. The only thing that's saved their asses to this point is that they haven't used nuclear weapons on our citizens. But we know what they've done to Tharkad and to Outreach. And they've taken the lives of millions of innocents who will be avenged. When all is said and done, there will be no dark place they can hide!"

[Bosworth]: "What of the First Princess? Conflicting reports have come from the Chaos March, where Blakist propaganda says a jump incident destroyed the transport she was on. However, the Avalon Press continues to maintain that the First Princess has arrived on New Avalon and is safe from harm. Can you confirm either report?"

MEDUSANS INTERCEPT TAURIAN WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION



(13 August 3068)

New Syrtis [FSNS] – Rear Admiral Harwood has reported successfully intercepting yet another Taurian supply convoy as it attempted to resupply the Concordat troops still maintaining a foothold on Electra in the Pleiades Cluster.

Last month Admiral Harwood's Hydra Assault Squadron caught a flotilla of Concordat military transports attempting to sneak in from one of the system's many pirate points. After a short but spirited engagement led by the Admiral's flagship, the *Fortress-Class Ajax*, the interlopers were driven off with two DropShips and seven fighters destroyed and a third DropShip crippled. The Hydras lost three fighters, but two of the pilots were later recovered.

Most disturbing is the report that the marines from *Ajax* discovered two nuclear devices aboard the crippled *TCS Jamestown*. The Taurian Concordat holds the dubious distinction of being the only government to refuse to sign the Ares Conventions. The Word of Blake's willingness to use weapons of mass destruction, combined with the desperate situation the Pleiades invaders now face, may have persuaded the Concordat to

unleash its nuclear arsenal on the battlefield for the first time in almost three centuries.

Duke Hasek has yet to comment on this disturbing development, but mercenary troops currently involved in holding off the Taurian threat have called for any Taurian force that dares unleash such weapons to be declared war criminals.

This is the third time Admiral Harwood's Hydra Assault Squadron has encountered Taurian ships since assuming station in the Pleiades Cluster earlier this year. The Hydras' parent unit, the Medusans, are a mercenary DropShip force under contract to March Lord Hasek since 3061. The Basilisk Squadron—the Medusans' second assault DropShip squadron—is expected to relieve Harwood's command in the new year.

Transmission Altered

"The Taurian Concordat has seen a glimmer of the truth! Those who betrayed all humankind are a cancer that must be burned from the body of humanity."

Alteration Ended



AFTERSHOCKS

[Simms]: "The *Princess Regent* remains in an undisclosed location and is in constant contact with her senior military and government leaders. She wasn't killed, no matter what the rumors say. In fact, she appeared on a broadcast to the entire nation just a few days ago, though I'm sure some crackpot out there will say that her tri-vid message was some elaborate phony produced by the same people that faked Hanse Davion's death and are keeping our relations with extra-galactic aliens a secret.

"No matter what you might hear or believe, the simple reason for all this cloak-and-dagger is her security. She did have some close calls as she made her way back home from Tharkad, and we're not about to publish her itinerary just so the Blakists can take a shot at her. The people of the Federated Suns understand that."

[Bosworth]: "As, I'm sure, do our viewers. Moving on, then. The most recent reports coming out of the Suns lately, especially from the Capellan March, suggest that Duke Hasek has begun to prosecute his own war against the Confederation, defying the will of the Office of the First Princess. Could you comment on this, Countess?"

[Simms]: "Seems to me the people of the St. Ives Compact have chosen to throw off the bonds of Capellan oppression once and for all. Duke Hasek is only doing what the Federated Suns' treaties with the Compact demand—defending St. Ives' sovereignty from an aggressor looking to suck it dry and let its people rot in repayment for three decades of honest-to-God freedom! And Lord knows they need the help! The Capellans may not be able to suborn the Star League to fight their wars this time, but news of Blakist activity within the Confederation is conspicuous by its absence..."

[Sung]: "Oh yes! Well and good to play the strident victim, cowering before the Word of Blake, but when confronted with their own aggression we see the Federated Suns preferring to deceive, incite and obfuscate. There is no..."

[Simms]: "The truth speaks for itself, Mandrinn, as do the blatant lies you're spewing."

[Sung]: "There *is* no Compact, and has not been one since Candace Liao chose to return her realm to the womb of the Confederation. And no act of aggression, either, in the four years since Focht's 'Truce of Sian' save George Hasek's recent and *unprovoked* invasion of Capellan space!"

[Simms]: "Get your facts straight, Mandrinn! The oppressed peoples of the St. Ives Compact are finally fighting for their freedom, and now that you don't have the Star League to do your dirty work, you cry foul!"

[Sung]: "Strange that we do not see the crest of the St. Ives Lancers or Free Capella on these battlefields! But, in fact, regiment after regiment under the imperialistic sword and sun of House Davion? Or is it now House Hasek?"

DARING RESCUE

(16 August 3068)

Orestes [INN] – Earlier this month, the CSS *Bordeaux* penetrated the Word of Blake cordon around besieged Tukayyid. Demonstrating great skill and courage, Precentor Forrest Cole, commander of the *Bordeaux*, successfully lured both of the Blakist WarShips in the Tukayyid system out of their position close to the planet. Using his frigate's superior acceleration, Cole exploited the narrow window of opportunity thus created, landing an expeditionary force on Tukayyid despite tenacious opposition from the Blakists' remaining aerospace assets. These forces, comprised of elements from the Com Guards' 104th Division, subsequently extracted Primus Mori and several senior Com Guards personnel, who had been trapped on-world under enemy fire for more than six months.

Though dogged by Blakist naval and aerospace forces all the way to a pirate jump point, the *Bordeaux* successfully escaped to Orestes. Making planetfall last week, Primus Mori was full of praise for "the heroic efforts of the Com Guards in stemming the evil tide unleashed upon the Inner Sphere." Meanwhile, Com Guards officials report that while the *Bordeaux* suffered only superficial damage, she inflicted "heavy damage" on the Blakist forces she encountered.

First Precentor Gavin Dow spoke at length of his joy at Primus Mori's survival. "I cannot sufficiently express my gratitude to Anastasias Focht

for masterminding the operation that returned our beloved Primus to us. Were it not for the foresight of our former Precentor Martial, I would probably have been charged with the burden of leading ComStar through this current crisis."

Transmission Altered

"Though he is retired, Focht still plays the puppet master—jerking the strings of his puppet Primus to pull her from our grasp. Do not let his age or apparent lack of position fool you. Focht is a power of which to be wary. But at what cost did his tool survive? Fully half the Com Guards that struck Tukayyid will stay there permanently, and the damage to their precious WarShip—one of so few remaining—was far greater than they admit. What cost, Focht? Gavin Dow cannot be happy to see your puppet return. And what action did he take to rescue Mori? He could throw whole divisions against blessed Terra, yet could spare nothing to rescue his Primus. Ambition, greed and corruption! This is the new shape into which Focht and his puppet have forged the golden dreams of the blessed Blake. We must open the eyes of our misguided brethren. We must illuminate the truth with a dazzling ray of light."

Alteration Ended

AFTERSHOCKS



[Bosworth]: "Countess! Mandrinn Sung! We will address the ills of the Confederation shortly, so please extend some courtesy to your peers and allow them to speak without interruption." *[back to Simms]* "Countess, since we seem to be speaking of St. Ives and in particular, the late Candace Liao's family, can you confirm the rumor that Kai Allard-Liao is in Duke Hasek's protective custody?"

[Sung]: "Protective custody... ha! That would be the latest Davionista euphemism for a prisoner of war?"

[Bosworth, *throwing Sung a dirty look*]: "Mandrinn Sung—" *[Bosworth is interrupted as the Countess grabs the commentator's arm, pushes him back slightly and looks directly at Sung.]*

[Simms]: "Bold words coming from a nation who felt so beholden to the people of St. Ives that they had to kill 7.4 million of them just to free them. Hardly a—"

[Sung]: "That may be the fiction you teach on worlds of the Davion outback, but it will not hold water in this court. *And if we are comparing the price in lives the Federated Suns places on freedoms, shall we look at the cost of the Fourth Succession War, then? Where Hanse Davion's righteousness 'liberated' more than 100 million Confederation citizens from their mortal coil for no other reason than to annex some of our most productive worlds?*"

[Simms]: "Worlds that tasted freedom for the first time four decades ago, worlds whose populations and economies grew by magnitudes under the Federated Commonwealth!"

[Sung]: "Duke Hasek is nothing more than—"

[Simms]: "Duke Hasek responded to a request from Duke Allard-Liao himself, who is Hasek's personal guest on New Syrtis. He and his family are free to travel as they like. He's met with representatives from St. Ives as well as his sisters, both of whom are taking an active part in aiding the St. Ives people with their bid for freedom."

[Sung]: "*Wang-ba-dan!* The person of St. Ives truly in need of his freedom is Kai Allard-Liao himself. His sisters, of course, have been 'invited' to New Syrtis, but will take no part in delivering more hostages into Hasek's greedy hands.

"Or are you saying Duke Kai *asked* for a military extraction, taking no aides and no bona fides from the Duchess, in order to meet behind her back and plot against her efforts to successfully and peacefully reintegrate the people of St. Ives with their Capellan family? I cannot believe he would so betray his mother, or, now, her memory!"

[Bosworth]: "Countess! Mandrinn! *Enough!* This is *not* a forum to discuss the ills and errors of the Federated Suns *or* the Capellan Confederation! This is a forum to present what information each of us knows to better assess the common threat of the Word of Blake! Or have you forgotten what they did to your nations only a few short months ago?!"

[Silence for a few heartbeats]

[Bosworth]: "Now, Countess, can you tell us how the Office of the First Princess assesses the total situation? What's the state of affairs as she sees it?"

[Simms]: "You mean, what's going on? The Inner Sphere is going to hell in a handbasket, that's what's going on! We've got the Blakists prosecuting a war against pretty much all of humanity because they've got some delusions of grandeur. Those crazy sonsabitches think they can destroy civilization as we know it by targeting a few capital worlds and suborning others so they can swoop in like some kind of saviors. Well, we already had one ComStar, and you see where that got us. Two hundred years of war and nearly a new dark age while they spent the profits building their own army. That's not going to happen again!"

[Bosworth]: "Indeed. Thank you, Countess, for your insightful and passionate responses. We will now turn our attention to our esteemed representative from the Draconis Combine, Mister Mishcha Kurosawa. Thank you for joining us, Mister Kurosawa."

[Kurosawa, *leaning back as though staying out of the debate, flashes a too-knowing smile toward the rest of the participants.*] "I'm glad to have accepted your invitation to this... discussion."

[Bosworth]: "The first thing we need to address is the status of the Coordinator. We've heard reports that he was suffering from everything ranging from a mild sickness to a stroke to fatigue. We've also heard rumors that the Coordinator—on his way to a secret base in the Benjamin District—has hand-delivered plans to Warlords Petroff and Kurita to invade the Draconis March. So just what is going on in the Combine? Can you set the record straight for our viewers, Mr. Kurosawa?"

[Kurosawa]: "While we cannot deny that the weight of the universe has unduly pressed upon the Dragon's shoulders, his health is not in question. As for hand-delivering messages, the Dragon does not need such constraints with *his* Warlords. The Dragon has no plans to invade the Draconis March."

[Simms]: "Only because he's on a respirator. His Warlords, on the other hand..."

[Kurosawa, *teeth showing through a brilliant smile, voice almost happy, eyes pinning Simms*]: "When the time comes, the Dragon will die honorably, as did his great father before him. Not drowning in his own drool after a heart attack, following the receipt of a message from a Capellan pup."

[Bosworth]: "Please, Mr. Kurosawa. We are here to talk about recent events, not ancient history. Getting back to the status of the Combine family, can you tell us about the Coordinator's son, Hohiro Kurita?"



AFTERSHOCKS

[Kurosawa]: "The Dragon's Heir, as during the Clan invasion and as the Dragon did before him during the Fourth Succession War, is taking the war directly to the Blakists."

[Bosworth]: "Very good. Now, we've had several conflicting reports regarding the status of your capital, Luthien. Pirate transmissions indicate that the Black Pearl has fallen to the same fate as Tharkad, but up until recently, official reports from your government indicated that Luthien was simply undergoing an HPG upgrade. Both of these reports conflict with a subsequent Voice-approved statement that a major rebellion was underway by rogue groups, including—or even led by—the so-called Black Dragon Society, and that the Blakists' arrival there occurred only after the initial coup had been launched. So where does the truth lie? Has Luthien truly fallen to the Word of Blake and its dark allies?"

[Kurosawa]: "Luthien was indeed undergoing an HPG upgrade. It was simply bad karma that terrible events should unfold during this scheduled communications blackout. But let me be very clear. Luthien was not, nor can it be, lost to the Blakists." [Eyes flick to Habeas, who scowls.] "They, like some"—[gaze flicking to Simms]—"are scavengers and bottom feeders, leaping at rumors of 'internal issues' to achieve their own aims. As for these alleged rebellions and internal dissensions, what does that have to do with the Word of Blake? If such is occurring, it is an internal matter, which will be dealt with."

[Simms]: "Luthien's gone dark, Kurosawa-san. Sounds like a little more than an internal issue. Or perhaps the Black Dragons finally managed to overthrow the Coordinator? They did kill his wife a few years ago."

[Kurosawa's smile falters, his voice becoming slightly rough]: "Tai-sho Sakade absolved all shame in seppuku. The Dragon will not brook the soiling of her name or memory." [smile returns with visible effort]

[Bosworth]: "Other troubling reports indicate that the Clans are taking advantage of these attacks and have hit worlds along your border with the Ghost Bears. Comments?"

[Kurosawa]: "The Clans are warriors and are forever active. As for complicity in the Jihad, do not be ridiculous. The idea of the Clans aiding the Blakists is akin to describing the fallen Star League as effectual."

[Bosworth]: "Granted. However, can you confirm that yet another Clan from their homeworlds has arrived on your border with the Outworlds Alliance and been involved in attacks there, again coinciding suspiciously with the Blakist war?"

[Kurosawa]: "There are always rumors. Sorting through the chaff for the wheat is what we are about, is it not?" [glances around at the other guests] "There are rumors of black 'Mechs bearing the Hell's Horses logo operating in the near Periphery. Also rumors of a new Clan, with a twisted snake against a star, moving subtly along multiple borders, including the Dragon's. But the rumor I assume you are referring to concerns Clan Snow Raven. That Clan is indeed in the Periphery and already working closely with the Outworlds Alliance. They have apparently cleansed the pirate worlds of Rezak's Hole and Farstar; a feat we are more than willing to applaud. One or two incidents have occurred between us." [waves a hand casually] "It is being dealt with."

WORD OF BLAKE. WHY DO THEY DO IT?

(23 August 3068)

Arcturus [TBC] – The Word of Blake has unleashed terror and horror on a scale unprecedented since the early Succession Wars. But in the midst of the death and destruction, one question goes unanswered. Why do they do it? Not their leaders, but the rank and file. Surely, some of them must stop and wonder why they are using nuclear weapons like firecrackers, or just why it is necessary to bathe whole worlds in a chemical and biological Armageddon.

Of course, the answer (like the question) is not that simple.

First, it is necessary to wonder if they actually *know* what is going on. The Word of Blake is just as bad as ComStar was under Primus Myndo Waterly. With complete control over all interstellar communications between the worlds where they hold sway, it is highly unlikely that the Blakists' adherents are in a position to grasp what is actually happening. At best, any rumors that filter through can easily be dismissed as "enemy propaganda."

Second, when one looks at individual instances where weapons of mass destruction have been unleashed, one may see that such worlds

were heavily fortified against any assault. Would any soldier really object to eliminating the enemy wholesale, when faced with the alternative of dying in a costly ground action? With the choice of dying for "the cause" or pressing a button to make the other man die for his, the nuclear option starts to look pretty good. Certainly our forefathers thought so on numerous occasions during the Succession Wars.

Transmission Altered

"True warriors of Blake go into battle willingly, knowing that through their courageous efforts we may yet gain victory for all humankind. And what of propaganda? The corrupt leaders of the Inner Sphere are fast enough to spread their lies. What of Tharkad? They were quick enough to lay the blame for this so-called nuclear attack at our feet. What of the guilt for all the other crimes they try to foist upon us? How could we have been so wrong, to think that such as these could help us usher in the golden age the blessed Blake foretold?"

Alteration Ended

AFTERSHOCKS



[Simms]: "Oh, for Christ's sake! They've *invaded* the Outworlds Alliance, and now you've got various factions inside that nation alternately fighting them off and inviting them in. This is a danger that threatens both our nations..."

[Bosworth]: "I'm sure the situation is indeed well in hand. Thank you for your candor, Mr. Kurosawa." [pause] "Before we move on to Mandrinn Sung and the Confederation, I'd like to remind our panel that we are here to gather information to help our viewers—and ourselves—to sort out the events of the past few months. So, please, I ask one last time that you refrain from interrupting your colleagues." [looks pointedly at Countess Simms] "There will be time enough for panel interaction later in our program. Save your energy until then so we can proceed. Understood?"

[Nods and murmurs of assent from the various members.]

[Bosworth]: "Mandrinn Sung, what does the Confederation have to say about the apparently obvious signs that your nation is in league with the Blakists' self-proclaimed jihad? The inflammatory remarks made by the late Sun-Tzu Liao, which forced the disbanding of the Star League, certainly set in motion the horrific events—perpetrated by the Blakists—that have touched every major Inner Sphere realm save yours and that of your Free Worlds League neighbors. Of course, the Free Worlds has its hands full defending itself from the Lyran juggernaut along the border, in possible response to more devious League actions."

[Habeas winces and seems ready to say something, but doesn't.]

[Bosworth]: "With the Confederation, however, it seems suspicious that your nation has remained relatively unscathed during all of this. Recent polls taken on random worlds indicate that almost sixty percent of the Inner Sphere population believes Sun-Tzu Liao was in collusion with the Word of Blake, and that the Confederation is still following that path even after his loss on Sian. What do you have to say about that?"

[Sung]: "Apparently obvious? *Shí-fén gǎn-xiè!* I expect such prejudice from a Federated Suns mouthpiece, not our 'impartial' moderator! Earlier, you alluded to some of the early Word of Blake attacks on a few of our border worlds, and now you speak as if those Capellan citizens did not actually bleed and suffer and die. While *at the same time*, you seem to excuse any possible—possible!—collusion by the Free Worlds League because they happen to be involved in a border clash

"Need I remind you, Mr. Bosworth, that we are suffering a great deal at the moment from Davion depredations? And that no one yet knows the status of our staunch Canopian allies, with all communications severed? We are very certainly 'scathed'.

"Why is it, *sir*, that a Capellan life is worth so much less in your mind than those of other nationalities?"

WHERE IS KATHERINE?



(12 September 3068)

Donegal [DBC] – It was a classic story of (stylish and tasteful) rags to riches. Katherine (or Katrina, as she preferred to be called) Steiner-Davion's rise from obscure member of the Federated Commonwealth court to (almost) undisputed ruler of not one, but two nations!

We'll let the historians bicker over the details of who did what (and to whom, and when), and dodge the legal wrangling over whether Katherine (or should that be Katrina?) should have been able to take the throne of the Federated Commonwealth (or is it the Federated Suns?). Neither will we delve into the actions her big (figuratively speaking) brother took to remove her from power.

Instead, the burning question is: where is Katrina (or Katherine?) now? What with all these incidental nuclear strikes, orbital bombardments, and chemical and biological attacks, the disappearance of the glamorous Katherine (or whatever) went largely unnoticed and unremarked, except by those in the Inner Sphere fashion industries.

Well, now we at DBC can reveal that our beautiful heroine (or should that be evil usurper?) has run off and joined the Wolf Clan (no, not that one, the *other* Wolf Clan). Yes! No less a personage than Khan Vlad "the Barbarian" Ward apparently spirited the (still stylishly attired) Katherine off Arc-Royal and into the Clan Occupation Zone, for reasons the lecherous and lascivious among us can only hope to guess at.

Must fashion houses across the Inner Sphere now accept that their winter collections could become a legitimate target for a Clan Trial of Possession?

Transmission Altered

"Was that where we made our mistake? Thinking Victor was the more likely of the two to ensure that the prophecy would be fulfilled? Certainly we had to be wary of Katherine's motivations. Already she had led the Lyran half of the Federated Commonwealth to secede, then made another grab for power while her brother's back was turned. Should we have aided Katherine instead? Or would her greed for power have been just as big a stumbling block as Victor's corruption at the hands of the heretic Focht and his puppet Primus? Ah! Yes! Mori! We know your secrets now, and when the time is right we will use them to shatter the abomination you and Focht corrupted all the blessed Blake's labors to build. Your lies blinded so many of our brothers and sisters. But now, Mori! But now, Focht! Now they will learn the truth! They will flock to join us. They are the key we will turn to unlock the glorious future that awaits humankind. Take heart! Blessed Blake's will be done!"

Alteration Ended

AFTERSHOCKS

[Bosworth]: "Capellan lives are of equal worth to any other human life across the human-occupied sphere. How dare you suggest that a loyal member of the ComStar media would assume otherwise?"—[holds up a hand to stem Sung's reply]—"However, when your own government appears to be acting in collusion with the worst evil we have ever known—worse than Amaris and his atrocities!—then we, the other human citizens in this universe, have every right to make the assumption that your government is helping them, even if you have border disputes with rogue March lords. We all remember the late Chancellor's double-blinds and his flagrant abuse of the office of First Lord in St. Ives. Because of his own prior history, it is easy to make the logical leap that the Confederation puts up a brave front against the 'Davionistas' to avert suspicion of collaboration with the Blakists on other fronts. Witness the fact that you and the Free Worlds League have yet to terminate your HPG contracts with the terrorists, for starters. And if this deception proves true—and I say 'if' most strongly, Mandrinn—then I feel sorry for the average Capellan citizen who has to bear the shame of the late Sun-Tzu Liao's actions. Because your nation, along with the Free Worlds League, would then be reviled in history as dark allies of the most truly evil organization humanity has ever known.

"Please, Mandrinn. Prove us all wrong. That is why we invited you two"—[gestures towards Graham and Sung]—"to give your nations the opportunity to correct our assumptions.

"Are you willing to do that? Or would you care to prove that what we assume is correct?"

[Sung]: "It is not what you 'assume' that I take issue with, *moderator*, but what you believe! This myth of ComStar's supposed impartiality notwithstanding, the pro-Davion bias in your rebuttal just now might as well have been scripted by the Federated Suns' ministry of propaganda and disinformation! What you coin as a 'flagrant abuse of the office of First Lord' was, in point of fact, a restrained response to an unprovoked and unwarranted assault against Hustaing, its people and the person of the Chancellor. And your suggestion, that the Confederation's need for working HPGs is superceded by any requirement to demonstrate our innocence—which is what *should* be assumed until proven otherwise!—is disingenuous at best. You wish for us to suffer additionally under the burdens of a voluntary communications interdiction? To put ourselves fully at the mercy of George Hasek's warmongering? Has it not occurred to you, to any of you, that the Confederation is effectively held hostage until and unless we can solve this problem?"

"When I believe I am talking to an open-minded man, I shall make every effort to prove our case. Until that time, I must assume we were invited here, Mr. Graham and myself, to be publicly scourged in a further attempt to vilify any nation that dares stand up to the Davion machine.

IMMORTAL SPIRIT SIGHTING

(20 October 3068)

New Syrtis [INN] – The master of the *Merchant*-class JumpShip *Atlantia* reports recently sighting the *WBS Immortal Spirit* in the Hobson system, just one jump from New Syrtis. Unfortunately, analysis of the *Atlantia's* sensor data was inconclusive.

The *Aegis*-class heavy cruiser started life as the *THS E. Presley*, launching from the Greenock shipyards over Terra in 2382. Mothballed in 2531, she was reactivated in 2582 and refitted extensively for service in the new Star League Defense Force. The *Presley* remained in distinguished service with the League for close to two hundred years, until the start of the Amaris Civil War, when she was presumed destroyed over Epsilon Indi along with the rest of Admiral Amanda Braso's 568th Armed Transport Flotilla.

However, the *E. Presley* was only disabled, not destroyed, and her lifeless hulk was left adrift in a long elliptical orbit from which the Word of Blake presumably recovered her in 3059. Refitted and re-christened the *Immortal Spirit*, she was scheduled to launch from the Titan Yards in 3064. However, rumor has it that she may actually have launched some time in 3063. The vessel subsequently vanished, originally thought destroyed by a catastrophic engineering casualty related to her rushed deployment.

There have since been numerous unconfirmed sightings of the *Spirit*, ranging from Hazeldean to Memphis. Many expected the elusive *Spirit* to appear among Blakist naval elements unleashed across the Inner Sphere,

but while the fanatics have deployed perhaps a dozen WarShips of all classes beyond Terra, the *Immortal Spirit* has yet to make an appearance.

Transmission Altered

"The affront of those unbelievers! Their blasphemy called for swift action. In the blessed Blake's very words, 'The spirit of justice is immortal'. Sure and terrible was the justice visited upon those who would misuse the name of the one foretold. Even though it jeopardized everything we had worked for, such a great risk still had to be taken. And it worked! Never before had we gone so far! Where once we had only employed JumpShips, now in a brief moment of glory a WarShip proved the truth of Blake's words! We have unlocked Blake's wisdom! We have been shown the way! Not even the Ruins of Gabriel can compare to the strength Blake's words give us. A great and terrible duty has been laid upon us. We must use our might against the very people it was supposed to serve—and in so doing we shall save them from the darkness. Was this how it was for Kerensky? Choose between fighting to save something from the ruins, or walk away? Would he have stayed to fight had he known what was to come, had he known how the Clans would twist and corrupt everything he believed in? But unlike Kerensky, our path—the path laid before us by blessed Blake—is clear. These so-called Successor Lords had their chance to aid us. They rejected what we offered and betrayed us all. Now they must pay."

Alteration Ended

AFTERSHOCKS

"And you may keep your pity, Mr. Bosworth. The average Capellan citizen lives with a great deal of shame, but little for the Chancellor or his actions. Pro-Capellan fervor is higher than it has been in the past several decades, ever since our rape by the Federated Suns. You cannot fight the lessons of history!"

[Bosworth]: "A simple and direct question then, without any possible bias—perceived or otherwise. Why did Chancellor Liao not attend the Star League Conference on Tharkad?"

[Sung]: "For the very argument he put forth before the Star League Council in his holo-address. Which you earlier called 'inflammatory remarks,' but which Peter and Yvonne Steiner-Davion seconded when they heard the truth of the Chancellor's wisdom.

"Simply put, the Star League had served its purpose, which was never to serve as a unifying and all-encompassing government, but merely as an alliance of convenience through which the Inner Sphere ended the Clan threat—a vital goal that First Lord Liao saw through to its final conclusion. As the past two terms have proven, the office has now become the brass ring of small-minded leaders and savage tyrants. It took Victor Davion's impassioned plea to stop the near-acclamation of Katherine Steiner-Davion to the office, and one can only imagine the terror such stewardship might have brought on the Inner Sphere.

"In the end, without a pressing mandate for the Star League's continuance, Chancellor Liao made the decision to serve his own people rather than continue to drain away resources better spent on domestic issues. Any attempt to demonize him for such priorities will paint the Federated Suns and the Lyran Alliance with the same brush!"

[Simms]: "Or more accurately put, Sun-Tzu is done raping the Star League for all it's worth, so now it's time to get back to pillaging the other members of this Trinity Alliance. I keep hearing about how wonderful that alliance is, but it seems to me you got the troops you needed to conquer the St. Ives Compact, and the only thing the Taurian Concordat got out of it was dead sons, a weakened government on the verge of collapse and the loss of a quarter of their worlds to revolution."

[Sung]: "The choice of local military commanders to refuse the *lawful* ascension of Protector Grover Shraplen to their seat of government has nothing to do with the Capellan Confederation. We would consider rendering assistance in this matter, but the simple truth is that *we have not been asked*. Not that I expect a Federated Suns' *fù-nü-gǒu* to understand anything about sovereign borders."

FORGOTTEN WARRIORS

(25 October 3068)

Orestes [INN] – To the mournful wail of pipes, the flag of the Star League and the banner of the Royal Black Watch Regiment were lowered on Orestes for the final time last week. Surrounded by chaos and destruction, the Black Watch remained in the Free Rasalhague Republic at the invitation of Elected Prince Regent Christian Mänsdottir. Recently, however, Colonel Neil Campbell announced that he is pulling his troops out of the Republic. Not surprisingly, Black Watch warriors have remained tight-lipped about their intended destination, but speculation on Orestes is that the regiment will try to break through to Northwind or link up with Precentor Martial Davion's forces.

With the presumed destruction of the First Royal BattleMech, the 21st Striker and the 19th Cavalry regiments on Dieron, and no word from the 71st Light Horse on Huntress, the Black Watch and the 151st Light Horse are the only SLDF troops remaining in the Inner Sphere. Whether they will pledge their loyalty to an Inner Sphere government, become mercenary commands once more or even join the Com Guards remains to be seen.

Transmission Altered

"We can never trust any mercenary who refuses our coin. The Dragoons proved that. From the moment they arrived in the Inner Sphere, they began to obstruct us in executing our duty to carry out Blake's will. Like the pebble

that starts an avalanche, they disrupted the delicate balance of power. They treated us with disturbing disdain from the start, an attitude that spread to far too many other mercenaries. We should have moved against them when they announced their Clan origins, rallying the Successor States against the spies in our midst. But all too soon the battle of Tukayyid came upon us, and then Focht and Mori murdered Myndo Waterly. Ah! Primus Waterly, your Operation Scorpion was a stroke of genius! If not for the traitors in our midst, the Inner Sphere would have come under our stewardship. But the time had not yet arrived! As Blake foretold, the Inner Sphere could only enter a new golden era through three transfers of power. It fell to the faithful who recognized the evil of Focht and Mori to reclaim the birthplace of humanity from the heretics. Mori! Your time grows short! And then blessed Terra lay once more in the hands of the true followers of Blake. But always the Dragoons were there! Sitting on Outreach, they were a thorn in our side. Always interfering as we worked to fulfill the blessed Blake's vision for the worlds around Terra. At last we were forced to take steps to put Wolf and his Dragoons in their place. They retaliated, but we thought we were ready for them. Then they attacked Mars! How did they know exactly where to strike? Clearly the Dragoons posed an even greater threat to Blake's vision than we thought. We had no choice but to burn out their den. Their fate awaits all who oppose the will of Blake!"

Alteration Ended

AFTERSHOCKS

[Bosworth]: "Please! Countess!" [pause] "Mandrinn Sung, certainly it is not a crime for leaders to take care of their people first over the needs and wants of those outside their influence. So no, we will not demonize the late Chancellor Liao or his choices.

"But neither will we deify him as others have done. Speaking of which, what *is* the current status of the Confederation government? After the accident on Sian earlier this month, we haven't heard much out of Sian except—"

[Sung]: "Accident? Accident!? As much as the Kentares Massacre was a civil debate, perhaps! *Zi-jin Chéng*, our capital city, was struck from orbit in a cowardly, unprovoked assault meant to assassinate the Eternal Light of the Confederation and leave the Capellan people bereft of leadership. The Celestial Palace is no more! Pounded beneath a WarShip's guns. Tens of thousands are dead from this one demonic act, which you call an accident. We call it an atrocity against the Capellan people!

"Fortunately, *Sang-jiang-jun* Talon Zahn moved quickly to assume interim control as this crisis was thrust upon us. In consultation with House Master Ion Rush and several political leaders within the Confederation and outside it, he worked to strengthen our borders and oversee the massive humanitarian efforts to search for survivors and identify bodies. He has kept the Capellan state alive.

"How easy it is to decry the Word of Blake for their treatment of New Avalon, which has been horrendous, we agree! But to then stand by while the butcher Hasek employs the same tactics against a neighbor state that has only endeavored to defend itself is unconscionable!"

[Simms]: "You and your Confederation are just like any delusional paranoid. You're quick to place the blame on the Federated Suns without a *shred of proof*, without a *single bit of logic* to back up your psychotic rants—"

[Sung]: "Sensor logs! Video! Reports of the invading battle tactics! How much more—?"

[Simms]: "Let me make this absolutely, positively clear—neither Duke Hasek nor the Federated Suns is responsible for this attack on Sian, a fact supported and confirmed by every other major power in the Inner Sphere. I think it's more likely that Sun-Tzu tried to go his own way when the Blakists refused to help him put down St. Ives' bid for freedom, and found his homeworld scoured by the wrath of Blake in response. The rest of the Confederation must be so compromised by Blakist agents that the Word of Blake hasn't had to launch any further attacks."

[Sung]: "From one side, the Confederation is accused of working hand-in-fist with the Blakists. Now you suggest that we have been compromised. Do you think no one can see the hypocrisy in such conflicting statements? The Word of Blake needs neither our complicity nor any great conspiracy to undermine our defenses. Not with George Hasek as their willing ally of convenience."

[Bosworth, incredulous]: "Mandrinn Sung! You're suggesting that Duke Hasek is in league with the Word of Blake, inciting border terror actions to divert attention away from their other activities? It is true that several worlds near Terra have been captured by Blakist forces...do you really think a Davion lord would ally himself with the most murderous group the Inner Sphere has ever known? Where is your proof, sir?"

[Sung]: "*Where is hers?* You demand proof that the Confederation has not entered into a devil's pact, even though we have crossed *no* borders nor shown *one measure of support* for the Word of Blake's actions. And in the same hand, you blithely accept this *wang-badan* Davionista's claim to have evidence from *all other* Inner Sphere powers that they were not involved in the terror attack on our capital! What evidence?! Does the Draconis Combine monitor every WarShip under Hasek's thumb? When did ComStar offer such a statement of support? It must be missing from our files!"

"Has House Steiner offered such credit?" [Looks at Habeas, who fidgets as if to respond.]

"Has the Free Worlds League?" [looks at Graham]

"Now we see the bias inherent in the system! A deliberate and concerted effort to forever paint the Confederation with a black brush, ignoring four decades of evidence that we fight only to reclaim what is ours, taken from us by force against the overwhelming will of the Capellan people who take pride in their Chancellor and their nation, and who will forever resist any effort by outside terrorists—whether cloaked in the robes of nobility or neutrality—to divide us against each other for no other reason than a political smokescreen for aggressive military action that benefits only—"

[On a gesture from Bosworth, audio is cut. Sung, his voice now an incoherent mumble, tries to continue for a few seconds, then stops. Simms' attempt to respond is likewise a mumble. Sung kicks back his chair, glowers past Bosworth, pulls his jacket straight and exits the room.]

[Simms, voice muffled but picked up through Bosworth's mike]: "As I said, the truth speaks for itself."

[Bosworth]: "Well now, I want to apologize to our audience. Such behavior from our panel is regrettable, though considering the issue at hand, understandable." [turns partway to face Graham] "We need to turn our attention now to the Free Worlds League, which seems to be exempt from all this madness. Mr. Graham, could you please inform our audience and us why the League appears to have escaped the heinous atrocities that have plagued the rest of the Inner Sphere?"

[Graham]: "One can hardly call the Lyran Alliance's unprovoked assault on our territory 'exemption from the madness,' though the foolhardy nature of that endeavor has become apparent to the Steiners." [Nods at Habeas, whose expression quickly darkens.] "As for why we

AFTERSHOCKS

have been spared other assaults—perhaps the perpetrators realize that the League is the one Inner Sphere state not weakened by years of war and internal strife. For once in its history the League stands united.”

[*Habeas, scornful*]: “*Lächerlich!* Hardly foolhardy, nor unprovoked! Unprovoked is what *your friends* did to Tharkad! Foolhardy is what *your ships* did to Skye! A-and don’t try explaining *that* away as some ‘rogue element,’ either, after that line of pig waste you just spouted about having a ‘united’ League!”

[*Graham*]: “And to think I used to respect you as an historian... but here I am seeing you in your true light, a propagandist in the same mold as Misha Auburn. Apply Occam’s Razor here: who has the most to gain from the Alliance-League conflict? The statesman who has, for three decades, promoted justice and sought the peaceful path, or the opportunist regional duke seeking self-aggrandizement after his schemes failed in the civil war? Was it or was it not agents of Robert Kelswa who murdered Helen Thrall in an effort to precipitate war? What evidence has the duke—who, it is alleged, murdered his way to power in Skye—provided for this? Claims of ‘Mechs painted in Sirian Lancer colors? Very reliable. Like Sarna or New Avalon for those of us old enough to remember those masquerades in the Steiner-Davion war of aggression.”

[*Habeas, red-faced again*]: “Justice and the peaceful path? To punish one man for an admittedly serious lapse in judgment, your Captain-General and the Capellan Chancellor launched a war against the entire Terran Corridor, taking advantage of a political rift in perhaps the greatest check on Clan ambitions we had at the time? You could have simply withheld war materiel, cut trade, publicly called the Archon-Prince to account, approached the matter like civilized men for whom the lives of billions are entrusted, but instead you sent troops across the borders in the name of wounded pride!” [*blusters on, oblivious to any attempts to interject*] “And as to the murder of Helen Thrall, a known opponent of your own *esteemed* ruler, don’t you *dare* try to pin that on us while your allies rain nuclear fire on Tharkad and Donegal. Duke Kelswa-Steiner at least provided undeniable holographic and material evidence of who attacked Skye, while *your* agents simply claimed that General Thrall’s killers—never caught, from what I’ve been told—‘may have been’ Free Skye, or ‘may have been’ Loka! Who *does* profit from this conflict indeed, when even Duke Kelswa-Steiner had to know his troops were outgunned on the border, but could not let another League aggression—a historical imperative of House Marik since the days of the Age of War—go unanswered, even with Tharkad under fire?”

[*Graham*]: “Once again you forget historical fundamentals. It was a war of aggression, *launched by Hanse Davion on his own wedding day because of his personal vendetta against the Liaos*, that led to the illegal occupation of League and Capellan worlds. Operation Guerrero merely restored to the Free Worlds and the Capellan Confederation territories that belonged to them by historical right and interstellar law. A limited war fought for limited gains, not the hundred million dead and six hundred million wounded by Hanse Davion’s efforts

WILLIAM BLANE MISSING?

(25 October 3068)

Orestes [INN] – Largely through Primus William Blane’s tireless efforts, the Word of Blake gradually managed to shed its popular image of religious fanaticism. Yet so much has happened since that day on Tharkad, and nobody has commented on Primus Blane’s absence from the last fateful Whitting Conference. Indeed, neither Blane nor may other members of the Conclave have been heard from since the Blakists launched their first devastating attacks all over the Inner Sphere. Has Precentor Martial Cameron St. Jamais done away with the Conclave and seized power? As a member of the Toyama sect, the Precentor Martial has the support of Precentor ROM Alexander Kernoff (a fellow Toyama), making such a power play a distinct possibility.

If so, this would not be the first time a member of the Blakist hierarchy has been conveniently removed. When ROM discovered that Klaus Hettig was a ComStar agent, it eliminated the influential Expatriates sect and robbed William Blane of his primary brake on Toyama influence. To this day, ComStar denies that Klaus Hettig was one of their agents. The

truth will probably never be known, as Hettig was conveniently “shot while trying to escape” before he could be brought before the Conclave to answer the charges in person.

Has Primus William Blane met a similar fate?

Transmission Altered

“*Lies! All lies! The evidence convicted the heretic Hettig beyond all doubt! Armed with the wisdom of Blake, ROM saw through Focht’s clumsy attempt to insert an agent into the highest echelons of our organization. Rest assured, the other agents Hettig attempted to infiltrate into our ranks were identified and dealt with. As for William Blane, the light of Blake’s prophecy has been revealed to him! Blane has chosen to relinquish his office and retire from public life to write his memoirs. Now the challenge of bringing the blessed Blake’s work to fruition falls to us. Heed the call! Raise the blade of Blake’s wrath and smite those who would deny humanity the future Blake foresaw! Strike them! Strike them now!*”

Alteration Ended

AFTERSHOCKS

to assuage his ego. The same man who, remember, used a sick child to blackmail the Free Worlds into providing military support. A sick child whose death was covered up—and may have been ordered—by Victor Davion for political expediency.”

[*Simms, microphone reactivated*]: “Bold words from a nation too afraid to send its own sons and daughters to defend all of humanity against the Clan invasion, yet more than happy to sell arms to the Federated Commonwealth so that *its* sons and daughters could die. Remind me, how much did your economy grow thanks to the contracts Thomas Marik negotiated with Hanse Davion?”

[*Graham, under his breath*]: “And how likely are the Lyrans or Fedrats ever to pay?”

[*Habeas*]: “—Or what about Marik not even risking League troops against the Lyran state—which had already declared its neutrality upon Katherine’s secession—and instead left the job of carrying out his act of personal revenge to mercenaries, a profession both he and your Blakist friends claim to disdain?”

[*Graham, with a dismissive gesture toward Habeas*]: “Let’s not forget it was your own ‘darling Kate’ who sundered the vaunted Federated Commonwealth, not Thomas Marik or Chancellor Liao, no matter how much you’d like to blame outsiders for your problems. Katherine Steiner-Davion was by all accounts a matricide, which Duke Kelswa’s father allegedly facilitated before his own rather convenient removal from the political scene by an assassin’s bullet. And not six months ago your present Archon slew his own great-aunt to clear his path to power. And I thought the Marik family had their problems.”

[*Habeas, snarling*]: “No, they’re just the ones who raised fratricide to an art for—”

[*Graham, sighing*]: “As for your ‘incontrovertible’ evidence, that can be replicated by any holostudio on Solaris, or Skye for that matter. Where is the incontrovertible proof he’s been promising all this time—?”

[*Habeas, raising his voice*]: “We have—!”

[*Graham, barreling on*]: “If it’s so damning why hasn’t he produced it rather than claiming the attackers were so skilled that they left not a shred of evidence behind them—?”

[*Habeas, louder*]: “Plenty of salvage was ta—!”

[*Graham, ignoring Habeas*]: “Is it not *more* likely that he has *no evidence*, but finds it more convenient for himself and what passes for his military commanders in the Alliance to let this misguided war rage out of some misplaced desire to find a ‘common cause’ to reunite the Alliance after five years of civil strife?”

[*Habeas slams both hands down on the table, shouting*]: “If you would *shut up* and listen for once, *Vollidiot*, you may realize that this is not the floor of the Marik Parliament! You can’t get your way by filibustering away the facts here! And the *fact* is that we have half a regiment of dead Sirian Lancer BattleMechs and the corpses of their warriors—all killed in battle or dead by their own hand when their avenues of escape closed—lying on Skye, just waiting to be extradited home! We also have numerous blast craters there, caused by naval weapons fire that I’m sure any ballistics expert—even those in that Blake-run bureaucracy you call a nation—could tell you are authentic!

“And *then*, while you’re at it, why don’t *you* visit the mass graves caused by those same attacks, and be sure to stop by on Donegal to see what’s *left* of Chekswa, where your *friends* saw fit to raze a city and an institute of higher learning—all of no military value whatsoever—with a five-kiloton nuclear weapon, killing more than a hundred thousand innocent men, women and children in that strike alone!

“And while you’re at *that*, Mr. Graham, why don’t you visit Tharkad and have a personal chat with your Captain-General’s fanatical bedfellows, the same *Schweinehunde* who now busily bomb planets across the Inner Sphere—*except*, of course, for those where their wondrous ‘Primus-in-Exile’ waves his banner!”

[*Graham, narrowing his eyes at Habeas but speaking calmly*]: “I am reminded of the Season of Saint Bartholomew. You know it? An ancient historical episode in which the rulers of a nation beset by religious strife sought to bring harmony by eliminating the heretics who wished to plunge the nation into war with its neighbors. The season began with a series of sanctioned—if brutal—acts, but though its goals were limited, matters quickly ran out of control and a widespread massacre took place, part religious intolerance and part political opportunism, blackening the name of the original perpetrators. Now, I’m not justifying the Blakist action in any way, far from it, but from a historical perspective a lot of what has happened recently is opportunism.”

[*Simms*]: “Opportunism? Opportunism?! That’s like saying the Amaris Civil War was a minor hiccup in the market. Would you like to say that to the families of the millions...”

[*Habeas*]: “*Um Gottes Willen!* It’s also a virtual admission of guilt from where I sit! By your example, the Blakists are carrying out such ‘sanctioned attacks’ against us all, to purge us ‘heretics’ from the Inner Sphere, just because we don’t worship their goals or proclaim them our saviors—and *your rulers* are the ones doing the sanctioning!”

[*Graham, sighing*]: “You hear what you want to hear, don’t you? I said it reminded me, not that I approved. Surely you understand the difference. I can understand their reasoning, twisted as it may be, but a lot of what followed cannot be laid at the Blakists’ door.



AFTERSHOCKS

```

o f l e L N c x j y a X G c R c L o n g L i v e W o B s h K y q j j h g j Y B R o D D L O R G N m v M
a u U Y P T s x G d L T X H d t f S b R H q 0 Q N h h U M j y e M r p j R 0 n z u J c D q s X D a F B
n A g o k i m g S M a Y r w S B p L V 0 m N z h 0 Z X K I m p 0 s t E r r u m d h v v K s a u x X z F
a C Y m E x a I I n t e R d i C T C a n o P u S l a s Y R C w b d C P k Q x T s p a q x A x X K X Z B
K o x R G r e o L n T j C P Z C s w L d o T T P f q W M Z T y l R u X p j z u W G q M r n m M L o v b
n W R a W l r U z N a I t n o i t A t I p A c E d S n 0 a T E q H J p m Y B Y F z U m p D j J i g d B
T c M b s Z D N M T C K i z 0 b v j E W s j L l F k u G H V z G t 0 G D W J J m a r s d e f e n d e d
J x U I Q t e s U p k t r 0 y R N b Q H u K U r z c M w o 0 G N Z g r Q b S V h c D F W a x z U g s e
C g H w C C n p L v i C i r V C i a 0 S U b e h E W r a t h 0 f B l a k e e q T D F W E U T x t z b W p
H r N U I l i T z B N E p a a s g F i i B a t I r C T s h l q w r V s d j W k c 0 E F i h f w I R I K
c z y X w h r e b P W s P S t D g v o Z p B L v a I i n d F q n m C x R f L J B m y N R C t V x n E z r
g x D D m M e X f G h j l S x o d c c R p o A D z b m Y U w x t q f g Y y q u c S A F R 0 Z 0 v D t o
T I D E A C v p M G A B a m a R C h n P v g n B N S U G u h B i b k f b I s h l o o H y W q W i e S k
l v L R p K l b B s d K t o D m L t B H P o f H p n w a d r a e l c u n A U g E E b P s o k Q n e Q 0
i I t D Q U o t z B o j r C c U K I l L F P V Z W T w B T F u 0 m F H r X r n X R G G r L g P c s L u
s U V u X H W M F b w Y o Y t G S s m w U v P f 0 0 G 0 g d y y c K B F U E N K o t v Q f c n i B V Y
a M q E f R v b W e n J m 0 q e b F y R p U r J c M T 0 U E G R c j N V a I w G h R L W k C M b I G X
r m R C q y z I S G P s m R v k n r z r L W i u d o t w i u x B l a k i s t H e g e m o n y D l b T e
d D e T a L o S i f d F I T P i q e H t y C m B Y T F D e B q M e U Q i s R P V C G q o N q K e H H q
g k T f V x r L a A R e H S i r B d g i M J u u v j S c z T I B e t w c q I v x V h j e d l l P Q x z
g y C I c 0 X c n H R b Z E y t g r L r v i s B X b Y t Z S e r i m b a s e s o p e r a t i o n a l l
Y E I c m z o G X 0 q m E D w S R i y 0 V K M b 0 B I e e P L L b g A r N t s d r o W e h T t s u r T
q G W u p D P a I r r H e R e t i c l T m T o p a q j M 0 R K v S m q J h W n d b u C h b A W A c d F
e 0 P J N q K n y e d k g 0 u E p k v N f I r C x R q E U n L e a s H t H e m a N e i D 0 m i N i a N
E W s d e E t t J D u o U Z x u g S U V a D i q l f E a s 0 P T T e n C h R G k R i B s a h P H 0 L z
y p u q n i b F n t x Z j z E J p t S o F o i a x v y l P V Z x g I Z j S t z r q L v G a g y X U G S
V D n b a g H B t K e z o M 0 X c E e R Z T o s z b f m T T q v H J w H R o x H a s s Y b P Q Z S n i
s n i n U r z k K e G K n j f X d i g c A b A v E n G E z W Y f I t H a h n Y t W w v c b E K A
N q o x f v i x x s g d c f l Z t n r m s I K B 0 A a R u o a s t c R S q N k T A B b z a I Y M v p a
y B j T p L m L y d T Z Z F I H F e C s Y o u R v w P d j B Z L T c U w B E n D M V l e d i f n i T x
L D s o n f v n R a n X F h r p h r K 0 Y e r o a 0 u D n i h h J j r e H T c C R H F i a q G Z L K a
x K r P S w g h S Y D b U y k q e j z A B e i i a u p j c s p j U z A n e h f U C R a m x C o G Q i 0
X 0 e h f U L i K T o s R G v R V W N i r T t o k p s s V M n L N y F C R o t i A R T B o T R m Y t V
S Y h f f w J P r E x R a l B u l Q d E q a a 0 a R h g i o i p G K q k K m j v W 0 C d c t J L m t J
P s t Y K d T N X m P U b e J Y A A Y A r v S H a M E d c t Z W k R b U g a a S 0 M 0 r l r N h v e V
R k o R u Z g i o h N 0 x i k F r J Q r r K p W Q h z S t h S q r w u M u s t 0 B M v f Y o r L I r M
C y r N f R d R g U h S b r J o i Z C t V 0 y x Z e x L o e y h B F V d X M x V l a n W Q p a M W y L
k 0 b J P w R p b h p i p b l H v e H h X c p E K F z h r r v K P f a k r a J c M k V W y e c j I t c
F s n E s I f P e Y j a M a q Y A m C u Y v g i G i j t i D F k d P N h c r P P L e l B H R R K I g X
d A e P c W w k u D c r I G y e b o a r r q e M j v v l s V g d N D a E E i d u A T Z S A Y i D p Y o
U M l n e X w M 0 M G R N Q e Q G U Q L J A M w H e V j d p t I h m o h J k m H r h W J B l x f b d b
m t l o e W M s d n e e h t o t u Q J i A H v S K W q W e r C D C N y w p I n U e e G u U r j Z T u X
G l a l m o g w J w c T a T j Q q P C v o E E T I o j E a z p K L c L i k s z i Q m B e Q E L p m k k
u a f a V 0 C i p B D G J o X k o j S e C z d e r E r F d i d a B S Z f w A X R e P i M e t y R a v N
E c P v a S Q v P D K z L T c B J S G s f K u Y h l X L W B o f i G 0 v T F E s j a r m d A m t X U q
e l L A m e h T L L i K h N H d r y j j n I M 0 0 d Y N M p W A J w E K W a w o j y B b y w u w v S j
f k S w w r i X b E f i C r n z c k K 0 K L W e L s s u r b s j m S W o L k Z W f a a b k Y R x t q I
t x U e l p W t N e i h t u L p J l R b S A C s J a r d i n e j I U l J q e p D T X B G Q h U C J d R
r u M N x i i i A j Z X V B M l K S H j t R c d s e T i G T K p v E M z S j q Y c T H t d H o l C v c
b W c d g 0 l T L E K e J N h F G T z g a z M P A D U Q E e q d T R a i T o r S s h A L l S u F f e R
g E x p g u w x p a S s e m a l F n I n r u b E U I m k w f N c r T L m r i P I A f k X R Q W D I i V
I E K P C S U G T H e N Y T u F u A J X Q x o Y V S a M y A w n A J d j x L I u d l F X d c u f N U
v Y F P X X d J a x b g v i i p p Y a T s d X j k J I S Z d d m h I Q o F U l W l v T K r L 0 p u j x
e S M s e v i l r e t s a m x T N P a a d s W t N F l z Z j t C s c e w T T x U n F m q w W V J b S F
H s p R F y N w r Q V a U Y m m S D s d N d R M G K C U k T X h F o J o i n T h e C a u s e w o K N A

```

>>>Transmission terminated.<<<

connection/DAWN OF THE JIHAD/section14: CHAOS UNBOUND

CHAOS UNBOUND





CHAOS UNBOUND

The information presented in this section can be used to create scenarios for *Classic BattleTech*, *AeroTech* or *Classic BattleTech RPG* games set during the Jihad.

Players should possess the core rulebooks for each type of game system they wish to play—*BattleTech Master Rules, Revised (BMR)*; *AeroTech 2, Revised (AT2)*; and *Classic BattleTech RPG (CBT: RPG)*; also known as *MechWarrior Third Edition*, all published by FASA Corporation and/or FanPro, LLC—in addition to any other add-on products they may want to use. Complete record sheets for all BattleMechs, vehicles and aerospace craft that players can use to recreate Jihad scenarios appear in *BattleTech Record Sheets: 3025 & 3026, 3050, 3055 & 3058, 3060, Upgrades, 3067* and *AeroTech 2: Record Sheets* (all published by FASA Corporation and/or FanPro, LLC). Illustrations and game statistics for most of these units appear in the various *BattleTech Technical Readouts* (published by FASA Corporation and/or FanPro, LLC.) For those interested in running *Classic BattleTech RPG* games, the *Classic BattleTech Companion (CBTComp)*, published by FanPro, LLC includes details about factions, life paths and skills that can apply to Jihad-era campaigns with minimal adaptation.

Finally, players and gamemasters may use *HeavyMetal Pro*, *HeavyMetal Vee*, *HeavyMetal Lite* and *HeavyMetal Plus* software packages (available from RCW Enterprises) to print their own *BattleTech* record sheets. The *HeavyMetal Aero* package allows players to print their own *AeroTech* record sheets, while the *HeavyMetal Battle Armor* package allows players to print battle armor record sheets.

As always, the following rules supplement existing rules. They add variety to and enhance game play, but should not give unfair advantage, and so gamemasters and players should all agree on any supplemental rules before using them in play. Similarly, players should feel free to modify any rule that seems inappropriate for their campaign and/or for the era. All of these rules are considered Level 3 and may not be used in tournament play.

Mapsheets Terrain: When a terrain type such as Urban, Wooded or Mountain is mentioned in these rules, the reference is to the Terrain-Specific Mapsheet Tables (see p. 107, *BMR*). If a rule specifies Urban Terrain, for example, it specifically means the maps in Table 7: Urban Terrain Table on p. 107, *BMR*. Alternatively, players may use the expanded Random Terrain Table on p. 82 of *Combat Operations*.

Unless specifically stated otherwise in a track, the number of maps used in play is up to the players involved. However, in general it is recommended that players use a ratio of one map per four units.

Terminology: The following rules use the term *unit* as it is used in the *BMR*, to refer to a single battlefield unit such as a 'Mech or vehicle. *Force* denotes a large combat formation such as a regiment.

Types of Scenarios: When these rules mention a scenario type such as Breakthrough, Hold The Line or Hide and Seek, they refer specifically to the various types of scenarios in *Creating Scenarios* (see p. 104, *BMR*). For example, if a rule states, "use the Breakthrough scenario," it means the scenario on p. 105 of the *BMR*.

CHAOS UNBOUND: DAWN OF THE JIHAD

CHAOS UNBOUND:
DAWN OF THE JIHAD

Chaos Unbound is an open-ended campaign setting using the breaking events of the Jihad as its basis. As players progress through the whole campaign arc—with one arc per Jihad sourcebook—they discover information that relates to events unfolding around them. *Chaos Unbound* allows the players to experience the Jihad in a fashion unlike fiction or a sourcebook. They can experience it firsthand, as participants.

Because *Unbound* is open-ended, it is flexible enough for any faction, force, era or even setting. Though the campaign's primary focus is to bring a player group's force through the opening stages of the Jihad, the events depicted in the tracks could just as easily occur during the days of the original Star League, the Third Succession War, or even during the Great Refusal. With some ingenuity and manipulation, gamemasters can adapt the core of each track to fit whatever setting their homegrown force prefers.

Players may bring an existing force (or part of one) into the campaign. If the players don't have a force, they can create one using the *Creating a Mercenary Force* rules from *Field Manual: Mercenaries, Revised* (beginning on p. 137); using a listed unit from any published sourcebook; or by using the Force Faction Tables from *Combat Operations* (beginning on p. 106 of that book). How thoroughly players flesh out their force is entirely up to them; this campaign works as easily with generic units as with highly detailed ones.

Piloting and Gunnery Skills: Forces generated by randomly selecting units should begin *Chaos Unbound: Dawn of the Jihad* with Piloting Skill 5, Gunnery Skill 4.

Note: The Warchest Point System (see p. 135) allows for incremental advancement of skills. While it is possible to balance opposing forces by using force ratings similar to those of the players, it may be more enjoyable watch player characters advance in skill over time. In that case, limit the number of Veteran/Elite pilots in the player group.

CHAOS UNBOUND: DAWN OF THE JIHAD

HOW TO USE THIS SECTION

Chaos Unbound provides an open-ended campaign framework that easily allows gamemasters and players to run through it in its entirety using forces of their own creation. Each track provides a backstory that fits into the overall campaign plot. Likewise, each track is set up as a general framework to assist gamemasters and players in creating the opposing forces and adding other battlefield effects specific to that track. In addition, using the new Warchest Point System, player groups may choose what direction the campaign takes and may even switch between various rule sets, such as *AeroTech 2*, *Classic BattleTech RPG* and the standard *Classic BattleTech* rules.

Because the player group decides which route to take between tracks, this campaign can be replayed often, with different tracks, forces and even outcomes every time. Gamemasters and players decide how much detail they wish to go into and may use the Linked Scenario system beginning on p. 78 of *Combat Operations* to create sub-campaigns within the track framework. Ultimately, the route, game play and depth of detail are up to each group of players.

TRACKS

Each track in *Chaos Unbound: Dawn of the Jihad* has a fully developed plot line centered on a single event, but with the opportunity for additional sub-events as players and gamemasters deem necessary. Additional rules allow each event to be run as a stand-alone scenario or as part of a full-fledged and flexible mini-campaign. Together, the tracks presented here cover the first year of the Jihad.

The *Warchest Point System* section (see p. 136) describes in detail how many Warchest Points a track costs, additional bonus options that may be used to add difficulty (and as a result, more WP) and optional objectives that net the players additional WP if attained. Bonuses only accrue if the bonus option is applied to the track and players attain at least a Partial Victory.

The *Additional Hooks* section describes possible side plots and adventures in addition to the core event. Based loosely on the *Combat Operations* linked scenario system, these hooks can provide ideas for additional scenarios that can add as much or as little depth to a given track as desired. The *Aftermath* section shows additional goings-on as an end result of the track. Finally, the *Next Track* section indicates the next track options from which the players may choose.

Using the Tracks

Chaos Unbound: Dawn of the Jihad essentially follows the standard *Classic BattleTech* scenario format. It outlines the main event for each track with a brief fictional introduction, *Game Set-Up* (with subsections for each rule set) and *Special Rules*.

Each track defines the force opposing the players based on a percentage of the players' force. This percentage must be applied to whatever system the gamemaster uses to balance the forces.

We recommend the Battle Value System (see p. 152, *BMR*), but gamemasters should feel free to use any system they prefer, such as balancing based on tonnage, C-bill cost and so on. We also recommend using the appropriate Random Unit Assignment Tables published in various sourcebooks to assist in designating forces, though no gamemaster should feel restricted to that medium. More detailed recommendations and guidelines on force selection may be included in each track.

Random Unit Assignment Tables appear on pages 111–114 of the *BattleTech Master Rules, Revised*; pages 206–231 of *Classic BattleTech Field Manual: Updates*; and pages 94–96 of *AeroTech 2, Revised*. Additional assignment tables for a given faction can be found in the appropriate *Field Manual*.

Player Force Size

Though this campaign is designed primarily with company-sized or smaller forces in mind, forces of any size and composition should find it equally challenging. The Base Force Size Multiplier, used when calculating the support points a player's force receives from its Warchest between tracks (see p. 137), will adjust for forces of any size. In addition, the plot of *Chaos Unbound: Dawn of Jihad* assumes that the players are a mercenary force. However, with some manipulation by the gamemaster, any type of force—House, Clan, pirate or even corporate security—can participate in the campaign.

Because *Chaos Unbound* is designed to be flexible, players may use any type of group in lieu of a mercenary force if they so desire. For example, if the players choose to use a House force, that particular force might be detached from its parent command to serve as a ready reaction force. Or Clan players can detach forces from standard commands to assist the Clan Watch in intelligence-gathering efforts. Ultimately, gamemasters and players decide the details. Once the players have determined their force's origins, the gamemaster need only spend a little time adjusting various elements to tailor each track to the players' campaign, such as the setting, the identity of the opposing forces and even the time frame.

Opposing Forces

Most tracks list the players' force and the opposition in terms of percentages as opposed to a specific roster. This allows individual campaigns flexibility and keeps each track fair and balanced within the story line. When determining percentages from the players' group, the deployed force should represent a percentage of the total force the players have on hand. The players' total force encompasses all units at the players' disposal, whether 'Mechs, vehicles, aircraft, battle armor or infantry platoons, not counting supplemental forces assigned by an employer or granted in the scenario rules unless specifically stated otherwise. All tracks base their percentages on this total pool when determining how large a force the players may bring into a scenario. The listed percentage the players may deploy is the

CHAOS UNBOUND: DAWN OF THE JIHAD

maximum component of the players' total force that should be used in a given scenario. Players may elect to take fewer forces at their own discretion.

Gamemasters should always calculate the size of opposing forces using the players' deployed force, never the total force the players have at hand.

Assigning Units

The specific makes and models of most units a given force may field—whether supplemental forces provided by the scenario or the opposing force—may be determined using the appropriate Random Assignment Tables provided in the appropriate faction's *Field Manual* (or *Field Manual: Updates*). Players lacking access to these sources may alternatively use the standard Random Assignment Tables starting on p. 111 of the *BMR*.

In setting up forces for the track Another Day, Another C-Bill, the players determine that their total force comprises twelve 'Mechs totaling 20,000 BV (not counting Piloting skills) and worth 10 million C-bills. The gamemaster decides to use BV as the standard for building the players' force, meaning that the players may not exceed 5,000 BV in selecting their units. Alternatively, if the gamemaster decides to use a numerical standard, then the players may select up to three units from their entire force. If the gamemaster instead uses C-bills as a standard, then the total value of the players' force may not exceed 2.5 million C-bills.

*Once the players' force is determined, the gamemaster figures out the attacking force's composition. If he used the BV system for the players, he must also use BV for the attacking force. The track states that the Attacker must not exceed 75 percent of the Defender (players' force), and so the opposing force cannot exceed 3,750 BV (or as close as can be made). Because the gamemaster did not account for Piloting skills in the players' force selection, those skills also will not factor into the composition of the attacking force. The gamemaster sees that the 51st Panzers are a Veteran unit, and so assigns each attacking unit a Veteran skill set using the tables on p. 114 of the *BMR, Revised*.*

Maps

Unless otherwise described in a track, use a number of mapsheets equal to the number of sub-forces (the Base Force Size) the players will deploy. This is accomplished by calculating how many lances, Stars or other sub-forces the players can make using their preferred organization method. Round fractions up. For purposes of this calculation, a platoon is considered equal to a lance.

You decide to deploy 10 'Mechs in Another Day, Another C-Bill. You prefer to organize in lances, so your Base Force Size is 2.5, rounded up to 3. This means the players will use three

mapsheets in the track. If the player had preferred to organize by Star, his Base Force Size would have been 2, and he would be using two mapsheets instead during the track.

CAMPAIGN SPECIAL RULES

The *Special Rules* section of each track indicates which special rules, if any, apply in that track. The gamemaster may use any of the following rules in addition to those given for a track if he believes they will add flavor and depth to the campaign.

Force Special Abilities

If players opt to use an existing force previously published in a *Field Manual*, they may use that force's special abilities (if any) throughout the campaign at the gamemaster's discretion.

Forced Withdrawal

Under the Forced Withdrawal rule, crippled units must retreat from the battlefield (when damage has rendered them useless or they are in imminent danger of being destroyed; see *Crippling Damage*, below). A unit making a forced withdrawal must move toward the edge of the map board designated for the scenario. However, a unit need not spend Running, Flanking or Maximum Thrust MP; it can move backward if the controlling player wishes. Also, a unit equipped with MASC need not engage that system when forced to withdraw.

Withdrawing units may not directly engage an enemy unit, though they may add their firepower to help cut it down. Any enemy unit that closes within range of a weapon or physical attack by a withdrawing unit may be targeted as well. The following guidelines cover the many circumstances that may occur; within these guidelines, the gamemaster's decision is final.

Crippling Damage: Any non-player unit that suffers crippling damage must withdraw from the map board. (Clan units must follow any Clan honor rules that apply.) Unless otherwise stated in the *Special Rules* section, crippling damage is defined as follows:

- A BattleMech or OmniMech is considered crippled when a side torso location is destroyed; the 'Mech takes two engine critical hits; one gyro and one engine critical hit; or loses the use of its sensors. Internal structure damage in three or more limbs and/or two or more torsos, or four or more pilot hits, also renders a 'Mech crippled, as do the loss of all the 'Mech's weapons to damage or ammunition depletion. If all of a 'Mech's weapons are destroyed and it can no longer move, the 'Mech is considered destroyed. The pilot of a destroyed 'Mech may eject normally.
- With the exception of infantry, all of a unit's weapons are considered destroyed if it loses all weapons with a range greater than five hexes or if it can no longer cause more than 5 points of combined weapons damage.

CHAOS UNBOUND: DAWN OF THE JIHAD

- A ProtoMech is considered crippled if all its weapons are lost to damage or ammunition depletion, or if the pilot suffers four or more hits. A ProtoMech Point will not begin to withdraw until three or more of its component ProtoMechs are either crippled or destroyed, at which point the entire Point must withdraw.
- A vehicle is considered crippled if it loses all its armor in a single location or if all its weapons are destroyed.
- An aerospace unit is considered crippled if it suffers a critical hit to its engine or fuel tank; if all its weapons are destroyed; if the unit loses more than half its original Structural Integrity; or if its pilot/crew suffers four or more hits.
- An infantry platoon is considered crippled if it loses 21 or more troops (16 or more for jump platoons). If deploying infantry squads, a squad is considered crippled if it loses 5 or more troops.
- A battle armor unit (Point or squad) is considered crippled if it loses half or more of its members.
- Vehicles and BattleMechs that are immobilized—usually through motive, leg or gyro damage—are shut down and typically abandoned (though abandonment places the crew at the mercy of the battlefield). Only the most fanatical crews or those in dire circumstances will continue to fight. Likewise, only orders from the highest possible source will prompt an immobilized element not to withdraw from combat.

Salvage

Salvage is the taking of destroyed/crippled equipment remaining on the battlefield at the end of a track. Use the *Scavenging* rules from page 90 of the *BMR*. In linked scenarios, salvage may not occur until the end of the mini-campaign, given the fast and fluid battles outlined in *Chaos Unbound: Dawn of the Jihad*.

In general, and unless a track's special rules state otherwise, players who achieve at least a Partial Victory in a track may claim all battlefield salvage in any area where their units participated. Players may not claim salvage after battles in which they did not participate.

Salvage may be sold at half the unit's normal list price. Alternatively, vehicles, 'Mechs and other salvaged units may be repaired using the Warchest system, or by converting Support Points to C-bills and using the appropriate rule set to buy such repairs by spending the C-bill cost of all repaired or replaced equipment.

WARCHEST POINT SYSTEM

The *Warchest Point System* is an abstraction of the rewards and opportunities that arise out of combat. More than merely a monetary concept, the Warchest also represents factors such as renown, contacts and being at the right place at the right time. It represents opportunities, whether to participate in a particular battle, fight under certain environmental modifiers or acquire a BattleMech.

Note: The War Chest nomenclature also appears in *Field Manual: Mercenaries, Revised* when generating a mercenary force. However, that system does not affect the *Warchest Point System* in *Chaos Unbound*.

GETTING STARTED

Regardless of how the group comes to the table, the players' force begins the *Chaos Unbound* campaign with 1,000 Warchest Points (WP).

Warchest and Tracks

Each track has a WP cost that covers the transportation, incidental costs, connections and reputation required to participate in that track. This cost appears in the Warchest section of each track and must be paid before beginning the track. In addition, all tracks have objectives with a WP value listed in parentheses. Players gain (or lose, if the WP value is negative) those points if they complete that objective.

Finally, each track includes a set of optional bonuses with a WP value listed in parentheses. Players gain those points if they choose to subject themselves to the listed environmental or operational situations. A player may elect to use all, none or some of the listed optional bonuses. Players only gain WP from optional bonuses if they attain at least a Partial Victory for the track.

All these points go in the Warchest. Between tracks, players may use their WP to increase personnel experience, repair and rearm, and purchase other group abilities or equipment. All WP expenditures must occur before the beginning of the next track. Players may not spend WP during a track, even if it is split into a mini-campaign. Keep in mind that the next track must also be paid for from the Warchest.

Warchest Debt

If the players lack enough WP to purchase any tracks available to them, they may go into Warchest debt in order to participate in the next scenario. Players may NOT purchase services and equipment on Warchest debt.

As the players gain WP during the track, they can use these points to pay off the debt until the Warchest rises to a positive number. If debt still exists after that scenario, players must sell off assets until the force can purchase its next scenario. Players may not go into Warchest debt twice in a row.

If a force is so far in debt that it cannot pay for a new track, the gamemaster may decide that the force is too damaged to maintain fighting cohesiveness. That force is then "retired" for the remainder of the story arc in *Chaos Unbound: Dawn of the Jihad* (but may be brought back for additional story arcs in future Jihad-appropriate sourcebooks). Another option is to have the force spend a large amount of time repairing and refitting, forfeiting an entire track in order to carry out the necessary repairs. If a gamemaster decides on this course of action, the players may re-enter the current cam-



CHAOS UNBOUND: DAWN OF THE JIHAD

paigned arc at a point beyond the track where they got stuck. To do this, choose a track from the options presented under the Next Path guidelines for the track the players would have carried out. In addition, the gamemaster will select one of the optional bonuses listed in the *Warchest* section and apply it to the track, but the players will not receive the bonus WP. If the players or gamemaster select additional options, the players receive WP for them as normal.

WARCHEST POINTS BETWEEN TRACKS

In order to use WP between tracks, players must convert them to Support Points (SP). To do this, first determine the Base Force Size Modifier. This modifier remains constant throughout the campaign, even as the players' force expands or decreases in number. To find the modifier, players should calculate how many sub-forces they can make using their preferred organization method (lances, Stars, or Level IIs). Round fractions up.

A player force contains thirteen 'Mechs and prefers to organize in Stars. Its Base Force Size Modifier is 3 (5 units per Star, 2.6 Stars in the force, rounded up). A player force of thirteen Mechs and twelve battle armor Points, would have a Base Force Size Modifier of 5.

Next, determine the force's Technology Rating Modifier as shown in the Tech Rating Modifier Table. Round fractions to the nearest whole number. Players who do not know their force's rating can determine it using the Technology Rating rules on p. 155, *Field Manual: Mercenaries, Revised*. Alternatively, they can assume a D rating for purposes of determining Support Points.

Finally, multiply the available WP by the Base Force Size Modifier and then by the Technology Rating Modifier to determine how many Support Points the players have available.

A B-rated mercenary unit has a Base Force Size Modifier of 5. You wish to convert 100 WP into Support Points. Multiply 100 by 5 and then by 1.5, which equals 750 Support Points.

If desired, players can then convert these points to C-bills for use with more detailed systems of record keeping and support. The *Warchest* system is intended as a quick and easy way for players to track their logistics, rather than attempting to encompass all possibilities in the *BattleTech* universe. Players interested in using units or possibilities not covered by the *Warchest* system are encouraged to convert Support Points to C-bills and use the various rule sets to provide the level of detail they desire.

When converting Support Points to C-bills, multiply the Support Point total by 10,000. Likewise, C-bills can be converted to Support Points (divide the total C-bills by 10,000). Players in turn can convert Support Points to WP; simply divide the to-

tal Support Points by the Technology Rating Modifier and then by the Base Force Size Modifier.

Purchasing

Players can use Support Points to make repairs and to purchase new units or personnel. When repairing or purchasing units, use SP Activity Cost Table 1. For personnel, use SP Activity Cost Table 2. All new personnel are considered Green.

TECHNOLOGY RATING MODIFIER TABLE

Equipment Rating	Technology Rating Modifier
A	2.0
B	1.5
C	1.25
D	1.0
F	.5
Clan Front-line	2.0
Clan Second-line	1.5

SP ACTIVITY COST TABLE 1

Activity	Support Point Cost
Repair 'Mech or aerospace fighter*	= Tonnage
Repair vehicle*	= Tonnage/2
Reconfigure OmniMech, -Vehicle, or -Fighter	= Tonnage/4
Purchase 'Mech (Level 1)	= Tonnage x 10
Purchase 'Mech (Level 2)	= Tonnage x 20
Purchase ProtoMech Point	= Tonnage x 5
Purchase Vehicle (Level 1)	= Tonnage x 5
Purchase Vehicle (Level 2)	= Tonnage x 10
Purchase Battle Armor	= No. of suits x 50
Rearm Unit (Level 1 ammo)	= 5
Rearm Unit (Level 2 ammo)	= 10
Rearm Unit (Level 3 ammo)	= 50

*Players can only repair 'Mechs, vehicles and aerospace fighters that have not been *Truly Destroyed* (see p. 88, *BMR* and p. 57, *AT2*, respectively).

SP ACTIVITY COST TABLE 2

Activity	Support Point Cost
Hire new MechWarrior*	= 3
Hire new aerospace pilot*	= 3
Hire new vehicle crew*	= 10
Hire new battle armor squad/Point	= 10
Hire new foot infantry platoon	= 100
Hire new motorized infantry platoon	= 200
Hire new jump infantry platoon	= 300

* Does not come equipped with weaponry, vehicles or equipment. These must be purchased separately.

CHAOS UNBOUND: DAWN OF THE JIHAD



Support Points can also be converted to C-bills to allow for the purchase of other components not expressly covered by these rules, such as DropShips, JumpShips, support vehicles and their attendant crews.

SKILL ADVANCEMENT

Between scenarios, personnel that participated in the last scenario may advance their skills. Those that did not participate in the last scenario may also advance their skills, but at twice the Support Point cost.

Personnel may only advance each skill set one level at a time. For example, a MechWarrior can improve his Gunnery or Piloting skills by one level, or improve both his Gunnery and Piloting by one level, but he may not advance either skill by two or more levels. For skill advancement between scenarios, use the Skill Advancement Table.

When using *CBT: RPG*, ignore the Skill Advancement Table and instead convert Support Points to Experience Points (XP). Each SP is equal to 1 XP. Assign Experience Points to personnel as the gamemaster deems appropriate. Then use the rules on page 210, *CBT: RPG*, to determine the character's skill advancement.

SKILL ADVANCEMENT TABLE

Activity Point Cost	Support
MechWarrior/ProtoMech Gunnery Skill	= 10
MechWarrior/ProtoMech Piloting Skill	= 8
Aerospace/Aircraft Pilot Gunnery Skill	= 8
Aerospace/Aircraft Pilot Piloting Skill	= 10
Vehicle/Support Vehicle Crew Gunnery Skill	= 10
Vehicle/Support Vehicle Crew Piloting Skill	= 5
DropShip/JumpShip Crew Gunnery Skill	= 10
DropShip/JumpShip Crew Piloting Skill	= 12
Battle Armor Squad/Point Gunnery Skill	= 8
Infantry Platoon Gunnery Skill	= 10

ENDING THE CAMPAIGN

Once a player group has completed the campaign, they may follow the directions described in the final *Aftermath* section. Now all they need to do is wait for the next Jihad-related sourcebook!

Alternatively, gamemasters may create additional scenarios or plots based on information gained during the campaign and proceed with the players from there, returning to the next arc whenever they feel ready to do so. Each arc can be run as a stand-alone campaign, but the real fun happens when the players go through the entire *Chaos Unbound* story as future material is released.

CHAOS UNBOUND: THE SETUP

Interstellar Expeditions is a private organization devoted to historical research and interstellar archaeology. Technically not a corporation, IE is a closely aligned federation of interdependent groups, some professional and some part-time hobbyists. These groups hire out their services to private individuals and organizations. Services include research into family trees and family history, research on and discovery of lost settlements, special stellar and terrain cartography services, archaeological expeditions and surveys, and anthropological and archaeological analyses of artifacts. Various IE groups provide additional service related to archaeological and historical research and discovery, including setting up expeditions and managing and operating dig sites. IE operates within local laws and the guidelines set down by the Interstellar Archaeological and Anthropological Society. IE is a for-profit organization that uses its proceeds to fund its own expeditions and operations, as defined by its senior leadership.

Interstellar Expeditions hired your mercenary force to perform a broad range of tasks, including escort, security consulting, investigation and various opportunities that may present themselves. Your force essentially acts as a troubleshooter for IE. The details of this contract will be provided as they become relevant in a track.

IE frequently hires mercenary commands to do a variety of tasks for them as well as for many members of the IE council, often without informing other council members. Transportation is provided and salaries are paid through a ComStar-approved bank on Capolla. The contract covers all incidental costs, including standard non-military supplies, salaries, fuel, taxes and port fees. In return, the mercenary command agrees to go wherever IE needs them.

Structured into the contract is mercenary command's right to accept short-term contracts that may work in conjunction with IE or its hiring member's requirements: for example, a planetary militia may need training or a planetary government may hire the mercenaries ad-hoc to defend a world against a pirate raid. As long as the mercenary command covers the requirements of the IE contract, the council usually turns a blind eye to the mercenaries' other activities, provided they do nothing criminal. Contract termination is swift if the council finds proof of criminal activities or piracy.

Players may begin *Chaos Unbound: Dawn of the Jihad* at one of three starting tracks: *Look Who's Coming to Dinner*, *FUBAR* or *Another Day, Another C-bill*. The players may then progress as they see fit, provided they select only one of the options given in *Next Track*.



LOOK WHO'S COMING TO DINNER

LOOK WHO'S COMING TO DINNER

It was business as usual. Go in on the DropShip, pay the port bribes, dispatch a quick raiding force and blow the crap out of the target warehouse complex. Bing, bang, boom.

If only contracts survived contact with reality.

We arrived, nothing went wrong. We disembarked, hardly anyone said anything. We showed up overlooking the warehouse lot and got jumped. How were we supposed to know two Demolishers were just sitting there, waiting for us?

Who sold us out? Because we're going to take it outta their hide, that's for damn sure.

SITUATION

Keid Interplanetary DropPort

Keid, Chaos March

29 September 3067

IE's first job for your unit requires you to conduct a stealthy raid on some warehouses owned by Kallon Industries. A retributive strike for some incident in the Periphery...like you care. Money is money. The only thing that worries you is that Keid is a Word of Blake world—but IE assured you that the Blakists would look the other way as long as you didn't destroy anything beyond the target area.

Everything goes smoothly up until you approach the warehouse block. As your force starts targeting the long, flat buildings, several tanks burst through the walls and catch you at point-blank range.

Time to include some payback on that paycheck.

LOOK WHO'S COMING TO DINNER

GAME SET-UP

CBT: Use Urban Terrain maps. Place ten medium Level 1 buildings (CF 25) across the battlefield, with the Defender secretly designating four of them as the target warehouses. The buildings must be at least five hexes apart and at least four hexes from any map edge.

AT2: Lay out a minimum 1 x 2 map grid using Urban Terrain maps (Heavy Urban/Coastal if using *Combat Operations*). Place ten medium Level 1 buildings (CF 25) across the battlefield, with the Defender secretly designating four of them as the target warehouses. The buildings must be at least five hexes apart and at least four hexes from any map edge. It is recommended that players use the *Low Altitude Operations* rules (see p. 33, AT2) and *Aerospace Units and BattleTech* (see p. 40, AT2) rules for this track.

RPG: Gamemasters should set up an enclosed warehouse area with minimal security measures. Each building is of Medium construction (CF 25) and one level high. Roll for Encounters using the Industrial Modifier (see p. 221, *CBTComp*) every game hour.

Attacker

The Attacker is the players' deployed force, which consists of no more than 25 percent of the players' total force.

Defender

The Defender is a small mercenary security force hired by Kallon to foil an expected attack on the warehouse yard. The

Defender's force equals 75 percent of the players' deployed force and includes only vehicles and infantry units. Forces may be rolled from any Mercenary Random Assignment Table and are considered Green.

WARCHEST

Track Cost: 300 WP

Optional Bonuses (all bonuses cumulative):

+100 Blizzard: Per rules on p. 153, *CBTComp*

+100 Electrical Storm: Add a +1 modifier to all rolls involving electronic systems (including all Piloting, Gunnery, Sensor Operations, bioware and so on).

+150 Overwhelming Force: Change the Defender's force to equal 125 percent of the players' deployed force.

Victory Bonuses (bonuses not cumulative):

+150 Partial Victory: Completing one objective

+200 Total Victory: Completing both objectives

OBJECTIVES

1. Fulfill the contract. Destroy all four target warehouses (designated by the Defender at the beginning of the track).

2. Claim some payback. Destroy or drive off all opposing forces defending the warehouses.

LOOK WHO'S COMING TO DINNER

SPECIAL RULES

In this track, the Defender's force operates under the *Forced Withdrawal* rules (see p. 135).

AFTERMATH

After the sound of the last shot fades over the smoldering remains of the Kallon warehouses, you pick up the wail of sirens. Lots of them. Scanning the area quickly, you notice that some of the nearby buildings caught fire from an explosion. Your contract mandates staying out of view as much as possible, so you fade back toward the DropShip as the multi-story office buildings burn in the settling twilight. You hope fervently that the occupants got out when they realized a fire was raging under their noses. It may be business, but it's still ugly when bystanders get hurt.

ADDITIONAL HOOKS

Kallon sets plans in motion to find out who blew up their warehouse facility, especially considering that some less-than-legal hardware had been stored there. The company will want retribution (all under the table, of course) and may show up to harass the players at another time.

Expansion Ideas

Gamemasters can pursue the players using any remaining forces in a Chase or Gauntlet scenario. A Defend scenario can be used if the player group decides to make a stand against Kallon's retribution, or against other pursuers such as planetary security or any on-world mercenary garrison forces. For a challenge, run the retreating players through a Chase scenario in Urban Terrain (Heavy Urban if using *Combat Operations*) with reinforcements attempting to intercept the fleeing mercenaries.

NEXT TRACK

Vacationing in the Wasteland, The Skye is Falling!, Payback

ANOTHER DAY, ANOTHER C-BILL

ANOTHER DAY, ANOTHER C-BILL

Shells fell all around the stately Mercantile Building as the Avanti hoverlimo slid into the underground parking entrance. The attack from TempTown was in full swing, hard-luck mercenaries striking out at the Dragoons and other allies in a desperate bid to join up with Waco's Rangers, just outside of North Sticks.

Unfortunately, the Mercantile Building stood in the mercenaries' way.

Four uniformed security guards hustled their charge into the waiting limousine. Dameon Guillome, Vice President of Blackwell Industries, had picked the wrong time for a meeting with the Spaceport Guild over wage issues regarding Blackwell's commercial shipping and storage.

Slapping the side of the limo, two of the guards stepped back, allowing the secured vehicle to move out. Two Badgers joined the Avanti as it cleared the West Boulevard exit, taking standard escort positions with one ahead and one behind. The battlefield hadn't rolled fully into the downtown district yet, but it was only a matter of time, if the military comm bands were correct. The only decision now was whether the small convoy should head overland to Blackwell's complex or try for the DropPort and fly out instead.

Either way, it promised to be a tense ride back to the office....

SITUATION

Colchiss and High Streets

Downtown Harlech

Outreach, Chaos March

15 October 3067

The Vice-President of GM Blackwell Corporation needs to get back to the security of the company's Outreach offices. Your force happened to be on hand, finishing some business for your employer in the mercantile district, when fighting broke out near TempTown. Reacting quickly, Blackwell hired you on a short-term contract to escort their VIP back to his office. Since extra cash is always good and it didn't interfere with your current contract, you took the job.

ANOTHER DAY, ANOTHER C-BILL

GAME SET-UP

CBT: Use Urban Terrain maps in a Chase format.

AT2: Use any number of terrain maps (except Urban) laid out in a Chase format. The *Low Altitude Operations* rules (see p. 33, AT2) are in effect for this track. In addition, because of heavy dog fighting above Harlech and the surrounding area, all units are restricted to Altitude 4 or lower. Units going above Altitude 4 are considered destroyed and removed from the game. Also, Dragoons Air Code #532-A restricts all air traffic over Harlech to Velocity 6 or less, to avoid the possible collateral damage such passage can do to the surrounding buildings. GM Blackwell has an image to protect and even in the heat of battle will obey the Air Code for the sake of civilians.

RPG: Gamemasters should prepare a chase-style game through downtown Harlech. For information on Harlech, use the information provided in *Field Manual: Mercenaries, Revised* or the *Chaos March* sourcebook.

Attacker

The Attacker's total force consists of elements of the 51st Dark Panzer Jaegers mercenary command and should equal 125 percent of the Defender's deployed force, not including the Blackwell contingent. The Jaegers are out to capture the VIP first, or kill him if necessary. Equipment ratings should be on the D or F columns of the Mercenary Random Assignment Table (see p. 122, *Field Manual: Mercenaries, Revised*). The rampaging mercenaries are considered Regular.

Place the Attacker's units in the first quarter of the playing area opposite the Defender's starting edge.

Defender

The players' deployed force may not exceed 25 percent of its total force composition, representing the sudden nature of the contract. Depending on the game system used, place the VIP in the following unit with listed escorts. This force is considered the Blackwell contingent.

CBT: Heavy Hover APC, escorted by two Badger A vehicles.

AT2: KR-61 Long Range Shuttle, escorted by two TR-7 Thrushes

RPG: Depending on whether the group chooses to go via air or ground, use the appropriate force listed above. In addition, the players may instead decide to go on foot, in which case use the minor NPC Soldier statistics for the bodyguards (see p. 207, *CBT: RPG*).

WARCHEST

Track Cost: 325 WP

Optional Bonuses (all bonuses cumulative):

+50 Rainfall: Per rules on p. 153, *CBTComp*

+50 High Winds: Per rules on p. 153, *CBTComp*

+150 Hasty Departure: To represent the suddenness of this contract, reduce ammo loads for all ballistic and missile systems

(including personal weapons) by 75 percent with a minimum of one round.

Victory Bonuses (bonuses not cumulative):

-200 Total Defeat: Completing none of the objectives.

-100 Partial Defeat: Mr. Guillome is killed. This bonus can be combined with Partial or Total Victory conditions.

+175 Partial Victory: Completing one objective.

+400 Total Victory: Completing all objectives.

OBJECTIVES

1. Safety first! Get Mr. Guillome to safety by making sure he exits the opposite end of the map. (Gamemasters running the RPG will need to keep a map handy with a delineated finish point for this objective, or set a fixed number of kilometers—no less than 10—the players must traverse).

2. No quarter. Destroy all opposing forces so they cannot link up with Waco's Rangers.

3. Watch the paint! At least two units of the Blackwell contingent must survive the track.

SPECIAL RULES

The following rules are in effect for this track:

Committed

None of the attacking forces will withdraw from the field, but will continue their attempt to capture or kill Guillome. The Blackwell contingent likewise will not withdraw until Guillome is safely away.

Capture

The VP of Blackwell Corporation is considered captured if his vehicle is crippled or trapped and an enemy force can extract him (represented by placing an enemy unit in the same hex as the VP's vehicle and keeping it there for one full turn).

AFTERMATH

The fighting in TempTown grew worse, with several down-and-out mercenary companies and "lone wolf" pilots eventually tracking through downtown to join up with Colonel Waco and his allies in North Sticks. Shortly after nightfall, the Dragoons Beta Regiment responded to the threat and began hammering the ad-hoc mercenary commands, with a brutal block-by-block penetration that raged on even as your DropShip lifted from Harlech.

Seems your mercenary brothers are getting desperate for work. Or suicidal.

ADDITIONAL HOOKS

Now that you're with Blackwell for the moment, would you care to return to the DropPort escorting some valuable equipment? We don't want it falling into disreputable hands....

ANOTHER DAY, ANOTHER C-BILL

While the battle rages in TempTown, someone wants to know what the hell happened to start this conflagration. A down-and-dirty covert mission may yield some clues.

Expansion Ideas

A long, multi-part Chase mini-campaign can extend this track, with enemy reinforcements converging on the car chase. Balancing out the defenders with additional forces from the players' supply can extend this mini-campaign for two or three Chase-style scenarios. Alternatively, the players can be hired to escort Mr.

Guillome the rest of the way to the Blackwell complex through the badlands, moving the chase from the city to the rocky hills surrounding Harlech proper.

NEXT TRACK

Payback, The Skye is Falling!, Running from the Devil

FUBAR!

FUBAR!

"Get a move on, Berry Three, we don't want to lose you out here."

"Roger that, Lead."

"Captain, something strange is going on over the milband. Switch to Channel Four-Tango."

>>[click] ...again? There's been a strike from where?<<

>>Orbit. Don't know what yet, all comms to the Den have been severed. Civvie bands reporting major power loss in Avalon City.<<

>>Mobilize! Mobilize! Incoming raiders! All units, report to auxiliary command posts!<<

"All right, people. Change of plans. Come about to nav point Charlie, we'll be going around the long way."

"Lead? This is Berry Two. I'm getting sensor readings up ahead. No IFF tags and their active fire control is hot. Orders?"

SITUATION

Rural Route 92, Fox Province

New Avalon, Federated Suns

5 December 3067

It was supposed to be a routine outing; get the new guys accustomed to their gear and scope out the lay of the land. IE sent you here to help straighten out the local yokels so they don't go shooting cattle if a raid ever does make it to the heart of the Davion empire. When you heard the brief chatter on the military band, you knew your command needed to get the sheep back, but you wanted to stick around to see if you could help. Anything that wiped out Avalon City's comm grid was big enough to need it.

Those blasted cadets should've known better, floundering around out there without proper ID codes. Mistaking your cargo carriers for terrorist bombs might be understandable. If *your* homeworld had been surprised like the Feddies were, you'd have been ready to shoot the mail carrier, too. You're just glad you didn't kill the whole lot of them, not with all those DropShip drive flares appearing in the dawn sky.



FUBAR!

GAME SET-UP

CBT: Use Hills or Forest Terrain maps, set up lengthwise.

AT2: Use Hills or Forest Terrain maps, set up lengthwise. One randomly determined sheet should represent the convoy's start position. Use the *Low-Altitude Operations* rules (see p. 33, AT2)

RPG: Hilly Terrain outside a large industrial complex. The gamemaster should have a delineated combat zone and a general layout of the complex handy, if necessary. All troopers use statistics for the minor NPC Soldier (see p. 207, CBT: RPG).

Attacker

The Attacker consists of air and ground elements of the Second NAIS Cadre in the middle of deploying to a preset rally point. Coming across what they believe are unknown forces near Avalon City's major industrial complex, they open fire.

The Attacker's total force should equal no more than 75 percent of the Defender's deployed force. At least one junior commander should be present, with the relevant skills (Gunnery 3, Piloting 3 for CBT/AT2 forces, or follow the *Secondary NPC Template Table* on p. 218, CBTComp, for RPG scenarios). Roll for the Attacker's equipment on the Federated Suns Random Assignment Table (Tech Level C).

The Attacker enters from the map edge opposite the Defender. The Attacker's objective is to keep the Defender from exiting the Attacker's home edge while trying to re-establish communications with their superiors.

Defender

The Defender consists of elements of the players' mercenary force and the Micron security cadre they are currently training. The Defender's deployed force should consist of no more than 25 percent of the players' total force complement, accompanied by twice that number of Micron security cadre personnel. The security forces are Green; roll for appropriate equipment on a Federated Suns Random Assignment Table (Tech Level B). The Defender enters from a map edge of the players' choosing.

In addition, depending on the game type, equip the players with the following materiel. The forces listed below do not count toward the Defender's deployed force. Each unit is considered Regular. All of the listed vehicles are company property, on loan for training purposes.

CBT: One Maxim Hovercraft and two tracked APCs.

AT2: One Yellow Jacket gunship and two Karnov UR transports.

RPG: Depending on the type of game, use at least one light escort vehicle and one heavier transport vehicle.

WARCHEST

Track Cost: 275

Optional Bonuses (all bonuses cumulative):

+100 Fog: Per rules on p. 153, CBTComp. For AT2 games, Fog equates to low-level clouds that affect units at Altitudes 1 and 2.

+100 High Winds: Per rules on p. 153, CBTComp.

+150 Buzz Bombs: A pair of FedSuns conventional fighters or VTOLs enters after 1D6 turns from the start of the track. Pilots of these craft are veterans of the recent FedCom Civil War and will automatically attack the Defender's force. The Defender may choose any two conventional fighter designs from *Record Sheets: AeroTech 2* or select two VTOLs on any Federated Suns Random Assignment Table.

Victory Bonuses (bonuses not cumulative):

-150 Total Defeat: Completing no objectives.

+225 Partial Victory: Completing two objectives.

+300 Total Victory: Completing all objectives.

OBJECTIVES

1. Defend yourselves and your charges. The players' deployed force should suffer no more than 50 percent casualties. A unit is considered a casualty if it is crippled, wounded or destroyed at the end of the track. Units may safely leave the battlefield and are not considered destroyed if they exit the Attacker's home edge after Turn 8 (they are in training, after all!). Units withdrawing under the *Forced Withdrawal* rules are not considered destroyed for purposes of determining objectives.

2. "Try not to kill the Davions; they're only following orders." Destroy no more than 25 percent of the Attacker's force.

3. Protect your cargo haulers from destruction. Lose no more than one transport vehicle.

4. Training, training, training. This is "real-world experience" for your charges. Each unit of the security cadre must make at least three successful attacks.

SPECIAL RULES

The following rules are in effect for this track:

Forced Withdrawal

The Micron security forces and the Second NAIS Cadre are unused to heavy fire. Both of these forces follow the *Forced Withdrawal* rules (see p. 135).

Time Limit

Beginning with the End Phase of Turn 12 (or 24 Combat Turns in the RPG), the Attacker rolls 2D6. On a result of 9 or greater, communications with the Attacker's commanding officer are re-established and the Second NAIS is informed of "friends" in the area. The Second begins to withdraw and cease firing as the higher-level commanders sort out the mess. Once communications are re-established, the track ends. Make this roll during the End Phase of every turn after Turn 12 until it is successful.

AFTERMATH

Sorting out the paperwork for the mishap took longer than the firefight, apparently. Soon, however, your group was released

FUBAR!



from duty at the complex and told to mount up, as the next job was only days away. IE planned on keeping you hopping, but for what they pay, it would be worth it.

Of course, the extra bonus payments from the NAIS Review Board certainly didn't hurt.

ADDITIONAL HOOKS

Micron is suitably impressed with your tactics and defense of their employees (assuming the players won!), and wondered if you'd like to carry out a little side operation to derail a competitor....

Expansion Ideas

Gamemasters can make this track a protracted fight through the hills surrounding Micron, maybe even into the industrial com-

plex. Use the Recon Raid or Probe scenarios, followed up with a Chase and possibly a Stand-up Fight scenario. Players should keep track of running damage and expenditures for any linked scenarios, as there will be little time for repair and rearming. Salvage may occur only at the end of the track.

NEXT TRACK

Vacationing In the Wasteland, The Skye is Falling!, Running from the Devil

PAYBACK



PAYBACK

*Earthwerks, Ltd. Corporate Complex
Grand Base, Sian Commonality
Capellan Confederation
14 May 3067*

The quiet night was shattered as Engine Line Building No. 4 went up in a fireball, the new GM assembly line destroyed beyond repair. Fire sirens went off in surrounding neighborhoods, calling volunteer rescue workers out of their beds to battle the inferno.

Eighteen hours later, the fire was finally extinguished. Twenty plant employees were dead or missing, thirty-two more had varying degrees of injury. The most grievous harm, however, was the total destruction of Earthwerks Ltd.'s improved GM 280 VOX assembly plant, which would further delay the already behind-schedule production and shipment of new CTF-4L Cataphracts to front-line Capellan forces.

It took five months, but the highly trained ex-Maskirovka Special Investigative Team finally discovered the perpetrators of the sabotage. They launched plans to exact retribution...and to help put other, more important wheels in motion.

SITUATION

*Zenith Point
Styk, Styk Protectorate
Capellan Confederation
18 December 3067*

Earthwerks, Ltd.'s Special Investigation Team finally discovered who engineered the destruction of an Earthwerks GM assembly plant on Grand Base. Apparently, Styk-based Tao Mechworks hoped to delay Earthwerks' production of CTF-4L *Cataphracts* enough that the CCAF Strategios might reassign the contract to Tao. Tao has an established success record with its new line of CDR-7L "stealth" *Crusaders* and would like to court more CCAF business. Your employers have assigned you to carry out Earthwerks' retaliation strike on Tao's research and development center—Building TM-834X-C, located on Fire Island. The secured corporate complex lies outside the planetary capital of Styk.



PAYBACK

GAME SET-UP

CBT: Use Urban Terrain maps (Light Urban, Heavy Urban or Coastal if using *Combat Operations*).

AT2: Use rules for *Low Altitude Operations* (see pp. 33-44, AT2). The gamemaster must designate one hex as the target hex. This hex contains the buildings that are the players' objective and must lie within 3 hexes of the Defender's starting edge.

RPG: Player characters should expect to infiltrate a small, secure complex to carry out their objectives.

Attacker

The Attacker is up to 50 percent of the players' total force. The Attacker enters from the north.

Defender

The defending force is made up primarily of Tao Mechworks security, with a small percentage from the Syn Hussars, a Capellan unit currently serving as Styk's garrison. The Defender's total force should equal the Attacker's deployed force, 75 percent corporate security and 25 percent Hussars. Roll for Tao security forces on the FedSuns and/or Capellan Random Assignment Tables using B-rated equipment; roll for the garrison using the C column of the Capellan Random Assignment Table. The Defender's force is Regular.

The R&D center is a heavy Level 2 (CF 75) building. The complex has one hardpoint for defense in addition to the well-equipped security force. Examples of appropriate hardpoints are an LRM-10 missile turret (for *CBT/AT2* games) or a security guard tower with four support machine guns (for an *RPG* game).

When using *CBT/AT2* game rules, the Defender places his forces first, locating all the corporate security units within five hexes of the objective building. The Hussar units are placed within three hexes of the east map edge. The hardpoint should be located north of the objective building and at least two hexes away from the nearest building hex. A communications array tower (light Level 4 building, CF 15) should be located within ten hexes and to the east of the objective building. In addition, place at least two other Level 2 buildings (any CF) within one hex of the objective building.

WARCHEST

Track Cost: 500 WP

Optional Bonuses (all bonuses cumulative):

+250 **Dusk/Dawn Combat:** Per rules on p. 152, *CBTComp*

+250 **Rainfall:** Per rules on p. 153, *CBTComp*

+300 **Overwhelming Force:** Defender adds Capellan troops equal to 25 percent of the Attacker's deployed force strength.

Victory Bonuses (bonuses not cumulative):

+500 **Partial Victory:** Completing one objective

+650 **Total Victory:** Completing all objectives

OBJECTIVES

1. Destroy the R&D building. Completed if done without causing damage to the surrounding buildings (not including the communications array).

2. Spare the Hussars. Do not cripple or destroy any Hussars forces present.

3. Cut them off! Destroy the communications array.

SPECIAL RULES

The Capellan forces will not fight to the death for a company facility, and so the *Forced Withdrawal* rule (see p. 135) applies to the Syn Hussars.

AFTERMATH

Forty-five minutes later, your communications officer begins receiving scattered reports of civilian unrest in downtown Styk near the Capitol building. Apparently, People For Freedom—an underground pro-Davion group—has staged a demonstration on the Capitol steps. Their appearance shows that not all is well on Styk, contrary to the official Capellan line. On the encrypted frequency used by the Syn Hussars, you note increased radio chatter, and you see elements of the force you just faced down in the R&D complex move off toward the downtown area.

Soon afterward, you catch news reports of heated clashes between the Liao militia and the civilian protesters. At least three police officers were injured and the crowd is growing hostile. Three Hussar 'Mechs appear, which only inflames the crowd to the boiling point. The largest concentration of protestors is milling around the Word of Blake HPG compound, where they scale the fence and rush the installation. Civilian police fail to stem the tide of humanity and the 'Mechs seem reluctant to step in as the mob begins to burn the compound and the nearby Ministry of Labor complex.

Several hours later, as your DropShip begins its outward trajectory, you hear scattered reports of explosions in downtown Styk. The news reports are disjointed, but it sounds as if several hundred civilians are dead and a raging firefight has consumed the government complex.

Looks like you got out of there just in time.

ADDITIONAL HOOKS

What else is in the Tao facility—anything you can sell on the black market and score some bonus cash? Or sell to the highest bidder? You know the Feddies are in the market for that sort of knowledge.

Expansion Ideas

Any type of scenario can work as a preamble to this one, using more of the Syn Hussars and their standard patrol routes. The gamemaster can use additional scenarios such as Probe, Chase or Extraction as the players move to leave Styk.

NEXT TRACK

Running From the Devil, Vacationing In the Wasteland

VACATIONING IN THE WASTELAND



VACATIONING IN THE WASTELAND

5 January 3068: Garrison duty. Not a bad thing after the past few weeks. Get in, get out. We've taken moderate damage so far, but enough that our employer decided we needed to spend a month or two on this godforsaken rock guarding a hole in the ground. Not the ideal vacation, but we heard a Canopian Pleasure Circus is in the area. Maybe they'll have mercy on us and swing by.

8 January 3068: Heard today from planetary control of an unknown force inbound; should hit dirtside in less than a day. Don't know if they're headed this way, but it's probably best to get the boys and girls ready for a party.

At least it's something to do....

SITUATION

Middle of Nowhere, Contard Mining Property

Acamar, Federated Suns

8 January 3068

The bosses upstairs decided you needed a break from the intense fighting lately and sent you to Acamar. The local mines are important—so they say—and they're paying you, so you really have no complaints. It's just hard to create diversions, especially in the frozen tundra.

All that changed with an alert about pirates inbound on a raid, projecting a course right near the Contard facility where you happen to be sitting. Rather than wait for them to approach, you've decided to ambush the pirates and turn them back before they hit the facility. The question is, do you hit them before they land or after they disembark?

VACATIONING IN THE WASTELAND



GAME SET-UP

CBT: Use the Badlands/Hill Terrain tables. The gamemaster must designate one heavy Level 2 (CF 75) building as the objective. The building must lie within three hexes of the Defender's starting edge.

AT2: Use the Space maps or the white hexmaps found on the back of most *CBT* mapsheets.

RPG: Gamemasters should be prepared for the player group to strike the pirates before landfall or as they disembark, or to set the ambush at the facility itself. If the players choose the latter, the mining facility is a medium-sized compound, with several small buildings, a large equipment shed and the covered entrance to the mines. The players' force can use at least four ConstructionMechs and some exoskeletons. Keep in mind that Contard Mining will not look kindly on extensive damage to the compound.

Attacker

The Attacker is the Lafayette Legion, a new pirate band made up of disgruntled Liao expatriates originally from Liberty. Stealing a JumpShip and a few DropShips, they've begun raiding border worlds along the Chaos March and the Federated Suns—mainly worlds that used to belong to the Capellan Confederation.

The Attacker's force should equal 100 percent of the Defender's deployed force. Make all equipment rolls on the Capellan

Confederation/Federated Suns Random Assignment Tables, with an equipment rating of C or lower. All defending forces are Regular. The Attacker will fight until at least half his force is destroyed before attempting to withdraw.

CBT: The Attacker enters opposite the Defender's home edge. All special equipment (if any) is turned on.

AT2: The Attacker should consist of at least one DropShip and any escorting fighters (if possible). They enter opposite the Defender's home edge with a Velocity of 3.

RPG: The attacking NPCs are military, with only 10 percent of the total force made up of specialized archetypes. The Attacker's force should include at least one battle armor unit per eight player characters.

Defender

The Defender's deployed force may not exceed 75 percent of the players' total force. The Defender may designate up to two hidden units to begin the track.

CBT: The Defender sets up on one half of the mapboard, with hidden units placed anywhere in the playing area. The side where the rest of the players' units are placed is considered the home edge.

AT2: The Defender determines his entry side and starting velocity. All units begin along the first hex row of the Defender's declared home edge. The Defender may set up the hidden units anywhere in the playing area.



VACATIONING IN THE WASTELAND

RPG: The Defender may set up to 25 percent of the players' deployed force in hidden positions. For detection purposes, add a +6 modifier to any enemy detection rolls against those hidden units.

WARCHEST

Track Cost: 400 WP

Optional Bonuses (all bonuses cumulative):

+100 Blowing Snow: Per Blowing Sand rules on p. 153, *CBTComp*

+150 Lethargy: To reflect a period of inactivity, apply a -2 modifier to all Initiative, Piloting and BOD/DEX rolls.

+150 Harsh Conditions: All equipment may malfunction because of lax technical crews and brutal weather. For any weapon system that fails its to-hit roll (or has a Margin of Failure) by more than 3, roll 1D6. On a result of 5 or 6, consider that weapon jammed/misaligned and unable to fire for the rest of the scenario.

Victory Bonuses (bonuses not cumulative):

+250 Partial Victory Completing one objective

+400 Total Victory Completing all objectives

OBJECTIVES

1. They must not pass! Keep more than 50 percent of the attackers from exiting the Defender's home edge.

2. Intelligence is information. Capture or cripple at least one Attacker unit for interrogation. A unit is considered captured if it is crippled or destroyed but still has a cockpit and/or a pilot at the end of the track.

3. No remorse. Keep all enemy forces from exiting their home edge.

SPECIAL RULES

The following rules are in effect for this track:

Prior Knowledge

The Defender receives a +3 Initiative bonus for the first two turns (four turns if using RPG rules) to reflect the surprise of the ambush.

Forced Withdrawal

The Attacker operates under the *Forced Withdrawal* rules (see p. 135).

AFTERMATH

The battlefield hadn't even cooled from the ferocious energies you expended when the call came in from the higher-ups. A resupply shuttle due in-system in a week includes a set of new orders. R&R is over; something major is happening in the Lyran Alliance, contact with Tharkad is lost and powerful people are pounding some major war drums. IE needs all available forces to be ready for action at a moment's notice.

Time to mount up. A storm is breaking on the horizon and it isn't pretty—meaning more work, and more importantly, more money.

ADDITIONAL HOOKS

Interrogation of the captured pirate reveals a central clearing-house in a nearby system, used by three small pirate gangs staking claims in the Chaos March. Rumor places a secret FedCom supply depot in the system, which might be worth checking out if you have the time.

Expansion Ideas

The ambush can be stretched out using Recon Raid, Probe, Stand Up and Fight! or Hide and Seek scenarios. The gamemaster can also play this out in combination with AT2 to represent the pirate force's initial atmospheric insertion and possible landing.

NEXT TRACK

Running From the Devil, Golden Goose



THE SKYE IS FALLING

THE SKYE IS FALLING!

Journal Entry #201

The bosses hired us out to the Alliance. Looks like they stumbled across something big on Skye, and they need us to baby-sit the site. Dunno why. Skye's probably the safest rock in the Theater.

Journal Entry #215

Figures. Fate goes out of its way to give us a hard time. We just got word from Duke Kelswa-Steiner that Free Worlds League forces are making a hard burn for the atmosphere. He told us that with his first sentence; the second pressed us into his personal service. I have no idea what terms he considers valid, but with a couple of Kelswa-loyal RCTs on planet, it seems unwise to argue contracts.

SITUATION

Vector 9B, en route to Sirian Marker-4

Bugbottom Swamp

Skye, Lyran Alliance

5 February 3068

The Sirian Lancers, along with other Free Worlds League and "mercenary" forces, have launched a first strike against Skye, apparently in retaliation for the assassination of General Helen Thrall. A general call went out from Duke Robert Kelswa-Steiner for all available Skye forces and area mercenaries, including most corporate contracts.

A small, unknown combined-arms force has set up camp in an abandoned Commonwealth air base nearby and has been running bombing raids against the planetary capital. Skye Command wants that air base destroyed and all those fighters eliminated.

THE SKYE IS FALLING

GAME SET-UP

CBT: Use the Flatlands Terrain maps.

AT2: Using Flatlands Terrain maps (and/or Coastal if using *Combat Operations*), set up an area at least three mapsheets in size. Gamemasters should use the *Low Altitude Operations* and *Aerospace Units and BattleTech* rules (see p. 33 and p. 40, *AT2*, respectively) for this track.

RPG: The airbase is a temporary field base. Situated in open terrain, it has little surrounding cover. Minimal security measures are in place, along with roving patrols. Roll for an encounter every fifteen game minutes.

Attacker

The Attacker's deployed force consists of up to 50 percent of the players' total force, plus the additional Lyran lance (if used). The Lyran lance consists of elements of the Fourth Skye Rangers RCT. A Veteran lance, its equipment comes from the B column of the Lyran Random Assignment Table. The Attacker enters the battlefield from the east.

Defender

The Defender comprises elements of a Word of Blake air wing with support units, all disguised as Free Worlds-employed mercenaries. The defending force equals 50 percent of the Attacker's

deployed force, with another 50 percent on standby (fighters waiting on the runway and/or 'Mechs and vehicles parked in "ready five" mode). Determine equipment using the Free Worlds League Random Assignment Table (B column) for three out of every four units. Roll the remaining force using the Word of Blake Random Assignment Table (B column).

The Defender must first delineate the airbase runway, selecting at least twelve non-water hexes in a row that do not change elevation (or two six-hex rows within two hexes of each other that meet these requirements, if the mapsheet does not permit a straight twelve-hex run). These hexes are considered Paved.

In addition, the Defender places six light Level 1 (CF 10) and one medium Level 2 (CF 40) buildings near the runways. The buildings should stand within three hexes of each other and at least three hexes away from the map edge. A communications tower, represented by a light Level 5 (CF 15) building is placed within four hexes of the end of one runway.

Defending forces begin the track on the board. Units designated "standby" must be placed on a runway hex or in a hex next to a building. The Defender must declare standby units before the start of the track. All other units may be placed anywhere on the battlefield. If using *AT2* units, active units may begin at an Altitude of 3 or less with a Velocity of 4. If playing the RPG version, the gamemaster should have a map handy for player reference.



THE SKYE IS FALLING

Beginning with the End Phase of Turn 2 (and at the end of every turn thereafter), each unit still on standby rolls 2D6. On a result of 9 or greater, that unit starts up and may begin movement in the following turn. Aerospace forces on the ground must take off using the *Liftoff* rules, p. 54, AT2.

WARCHEST

Track Cost: 600 WP

Optional Bonuses (all bonuses cumulative):

+200 Under-Gunned: The Attacker may opt to not use the Lyran support forces.

+100 Geysers: Per the rules on p. 152, *CBTComp*. In addition to rolling for eruption and duration, roll 1D6 – 3 to determine height. Any AT2 forces caught in or flying through an active geyser blast should make a Control Roll with a +2 modifier. Failure sends the unit out of control for the next turn. Gamemasters should secretly place two geysers for every lance (or equivalent) in the Attacker's deployed force.

+200 Poor Intelligence: The Defender is more heavily armed than originally thought. Add 25 percent more units to the Defender's total force size.

Victory Bonuses (bonuses not cumulative):

–200 Total Defeat: Completing only one or no objectives

+500 Partial Victory: Completing two objectives

+800 Total Victory: Completing all objectives

OBJECTIVES

1. Obliteration. Destroy every building at the base.

2. Salt in the wound. Destroy every unit that began the track in standby mode.

3. "Frugal" is the word of the day. Minimize your damage by keeping your casualties (destroyed units) to only 10 percent of the players' deployed force.

4. Just plain mean. Destroy every flying/jumping unit possessed by the Defender.

SPECIAL RULES

The following rules are in effect for this track:

Salvage

The *Salvage* rule (see p. 136) applies only if the attackers achieve at least three objectives and control the battlefield.

Forced Withdrawal

The Defender's entire force operates under the *Forced Withdrawal* rules (see p. 135). Units leaving the battlefield in this manner are considered destroyed when determining objectives.

Gift

If the players attain a Total Victory, the Skye government gives them one unit rolled from an appropriate Lyran Random Assignment Table at Tech Level A.

AFTERMATH

The duke of Skye certainly knows how to reward those who come to the aid of his province. Accepting the gift graciously, you spend a few days recuperating before IE completes the dig and your contract is declared fulfilled. Loading up, you can't help but notice the increased activity in the DropPort's military sector—troops getting organized, 'Mechs lined up like giant metal men. *Lots of 'Mechs.* Weren't the Skye units supposed to be licking their wounds so soon after the FedCom Civil War?

Looks like the duke knows how to reward those who attack him, too.

ADDITIONAL HOOKS

Information downloaded from the airbase's communications array by a special commando squad reveals that not all Skye citizens are loyal to the Lyrans—or to Duke Robert Kelswa-Steiner. It seems SAFE has been active recently among the citizenry. Care to accept a side contract for some wetwork?

Those "mercenaries" seemed fishy, didn't they? Looks like the Word of Blake is in the business of masquerading as other factions, including mercenaries. How much would people pay for that type of information?

Expansion Ideas

The players may execute a Probe scenario to determine the disposition and layout of the base before the actual strike. Possible follow-up scenarios can include Chase, Hide and Seek or even a Recon Strike as the base is abandoned and the "mercenaries" retreat off-planet.

NEXT TRACK

Golden Goose, Running From the Devil, Falcon Ptomaine, Game On!



RUNNING FROM THE DEVIL

RUNNING FROM THE DEVIL

A war zone. Forget what the newsvids are saying, it's a bloody war zone at the seat of the Combine's most powerful district, especially now that Luthien's been cut off.

Fighting is rampant. An ugly gantlet in space, with the Blakists and Combine aerospace task forces playing cat and mouse in the asteroid field between the star and the planet. We needed a longer burn-in time to avoid any entanglements.

Maltex has us running in a load of Hatamoto-Chis for the Combine. The district's supply network is in so much disarray that the various manufacturers are scrambling to hire mules wherever they can. We were rotating stations for IE when the CO took a side contract to deliver the company of assault 'Mechs to the beleaguered Combine forces on-planet.

No problems dropping off our cargo—coming in on the night side helped us avoid a tangle with that Blakist cruiser in orbit—so we're prepping to lift when this Sho-sho approaches us with a desperate plea....and some cash, of course.

SITUATION

Scales of the Dragonet Mountains, Pearl District

Dieron, Draconis Combine

8 April 3068

Everything on Dieron is a mess. Hit-and-run raiding, mass assaults against the capital and a huge forest fire are only part of the dire situation.

A Combine officer approached your CO and set up a quick contract for an out-system run. A convoy carrying some important cargo and intel is due inbound to the makeshift drop zone and they need someone to escort it out. Your force is approached as one of the few not currently engaged, and the officer promises you a large sum of C-bills if you can get the cargo safely to the zenith point, where a ready JumpShip waits.

RUNNING FROM THE DEVIL

GAME SET-UP

This track has two parts. Players may opt to run either part, or for a more intense experience, play both parts. Part A involves intercepting the convoy on land and escorting it to the drop zone for loading. Part B covers the trip out-system, where the DropShip is in danger of interception by a Word of Blake recon flight.

CBT: Use any Terrain Maps and lay them in Chase format (Part A).

AT2: Place Space maps (or the white hexmaps on the back of most CBT mapsheets) end to end. In addition, use the *Asteroid* rules on p. 47, AT2 and scatter 1D6 small, 1D6 medium and 1D6 large asteroids between the two maps. At least half the asteroids are stationary (Part B).

RPG: The part the players decide to play will determine the type of game the gamemaster needs to prepare. In Part A, the players receive two heavy vehicles if they do not have any (roll on the Combine Random Assignment Table). The gamemaster will need to delineate an operational area for the battle and determine appropriate boundaries. For Part B, the players are allotted the *Condor* (upgraded) for transportation. The *Condor's* crew rating is Veteran.

Attacker

The Attacker contains elements of Word of Blake forces on-planet and in orbit. The Attacker's total force should equal 75 percent of

the Defender's deployed force (including additional Combine units) for the ground battle and 100 percent of the Defender's deployed force (including additional Combine units) for the space battle. The Attacker's force is Veteran; determine equipment from the Word of Blake Random Assignment Table (Tech Level B or lower).

Part A: The Attacker enters from the west (behind the convoy) at the beginning of Turn 3. The attacking force should include at least one squad of Purifier battle armor.

Part B: The Attacker enters perpendicular to the Defender's starting position on the furthest mapsheet at a Velocity of no less than 7.

The Word of Blake forces are fanatical, and will fight in both battles to the last man or when their objective (a Daimyo HQ van for Part A, a *Condor*-class DropShip for Part B) is destroyed or exits the map area.

Defender

The Defender's force consists of the players' deployed force and an escaping Combine convoy. The players may use up to 50 percent of their total force for this track. If the players have their own DropShip, they may use up to 75 percent of their total force. Players without a DropShip receive an *Okinawa*-class vessel on loan from Maltex for Part B. The Combine convoy units, loaded into a modified *Condor* DropShip, need not use any of the players' transport assets. All Combine troops are considered Veteran.



RUNNING FROM THE DEVIL

Part A: The player's deployed force enters from the east. The Combine convoy enters from the west. The convoy consists of:

- 1 HQ 67-K Daimyo
- 1 Pegasus Scout hovertank
- 1 Sprint Scout VTOL (laser variant)
- 1 Saracen hovertank (MRM variant)
- 1 Maxim heavy hover transport
- 1 squad of Kage battle armor (flamer-equipped, which begin the track loaded aboard the Maxim)

Part B: The Defender's deployed force enters the map across one of the short sides at any Velocity below 5. The Combine force consists of:

- 1 *Condor* (upgraded) DropShip
- 4 AHB-443 *Ahabs*

WARCHEST

Track Cost: 500 WP (Part A or B)/850 WP (both parts)

Optional Bonuses (all bonuses cumulative):

+150 Sand (Part A): Treat all clear Level 0 terrain as Sand, per the rules on p. 153, *CBTComp*.

+150 Malfunctioning Drive (Part B): One of the Defender's DropShips (randomly selected) suffers drive problems. Reduce the unit's Safe Thrust Rating by half (rounding up) and recalculate its MaxThrust.

+200 Overwhelming Force (Parts A or B): Change the Attacker's deployed force to equal 150 percent of the Defender's deployed force.

+150 Mines (Part A): The Attacker may pre-designate five command-detonated minefields before the start of the track.

Part A Victory Bonuses (bonuses not cumulative):

- +200 Marginal Victory:** Completing one objective
- +400 Partial Victory:** Completing two objectives
- +600 Total Victory:** Completing all objectives

Part B Victory Bonuses (bonuses not cumulative):

- +200 Marginal Victory:** Completing one objective
- +400 Partial Victory:** Completing two objectives
- +600 Total Victory:** Completing all objectives

OBJECTIVES (PART A/PART B)

1. Survival of the fittest. The objective vehicle for each part must survive (Part A: Daimyo, Part B: *Condor*).

2. Glory to the defenders! Two or more of the Combine's escort forces must survive each part (not counting the objective vehicles).

3. Duty above honor. None of the Combine forces are destroyed.

SPECIAL RULES

The following rules are in effect for this track:

Asteroids (Part B)

Place 3D6 asteroids on each mapsheet. See the Asteroid rules on p. 47, *A72*.

Gift

If the players attain a Total Victory, the Kurita government gives them two units rolled from an appropriate Combine Random Assignment Table at Tech Level A.

AFTERMATH

Covered in grease and streaked with sweat, the technician slammed the maintenance hatch shut and hit the wall communicator. "All done. Light it up, we're ready to go."

"Acknowledged." Seconds later the jump siren sounded in three short blasts. While tying themselves down in the cramped engine room, the cleaner of the two on-station technicians looked at his companion. "So why is the Old Man in such an all-fired hurry? We're pretty safe at the moment, no Blakist fighters nearby. Why the hot-load when we could've waited another fourteen hours?"

"Something to do with the Dropper that hooked up a few hours ago. Seems she's got some valuable cargo."

"Oh yeah? Fancy flying, that crew. Dodging space rocks like in that classic film we saw the other month...What was it called again?"

"*Star Racers of Galax*. One of the engine crew came through here awhile ago, looking for some spares. Scuttlebutt says the Coordinator's on that ship. Hurt bad, too."

"Oh, man. I hope to hell it isn't true—first Luthien, then here. Now Teddy K? What the hell has this universe come to?"

ADDITIONAL HOOKS

So what's in that thing, anyway? A quick-and-dirty operation to explore the contents of the *Condor* DropShip (or even enter the *Daimyo* HQ) without the Combine knowing could net nothing—or some good intel for your employer. Of course, all those DEST and ISF guys hanging around make it hard to see if it's the Coordinator, his heir or even another high-ranking official.

Capturing a Blakist and transporting him or her to the proper authorities would make an interesting trip in and of itself. Who knows what the fanatic might know—or try to do!

Expansion Ideas

Gamemasters can link an expanded Chase scenario to Part A or B. Or someone might set up an ambush down the road to take down the rescuers, if they made it through the first gauntlet. Or maybe the Blakists hang back and hit the base when the players' force arrives, or when the JumpShip as docking begins...or maybe the Blakists want to strike a deal for the contents of the objective vehicles.

NEXT TRACK

Golden Goose, Game On!, Full Metal Press, Falcon Ptomaine

GAME ON!

GAME ON!

"Commander, I'm getting some odd reports over Solar Five."
 "And just why are you monitoring a games channel?"
 "Um... 'Information is ammunition?'"
 "You're bucking for more latrine duty, aren't you, soldier?"
 "Sorry, sir. But Solar Five is reporting riots in the streets of Solaris City."
 "Again? What are these people on, three-year cycles?"
 "Roger that, sir."

SITUATION

Grid 45Y18X, Tangerine Desert
 Solaris VII, Lyran Alliance
 16 June 3068

IE has dispatched your force to Solaris, but not for the fun and games. One of IE's smaller member groups, Yoris University Amalgamated, has made a significant find buried beneath the dark sands of the Tangerine Desert. Your job is to protect the site until decent transportation assets can arrive to load up the new find and transport it offworld. After that, you and your mercs can spend some time amid the glitz and sham that make up the Game World.

Even if the Game World is under siege.

GAME ON!

GAME SET-UP

CBT: Use Flatlands/Badlands Terrain maps in a minimum two-by-two grid. The gamemaster should place two Light Level 1 (CF 5) buildings in adjacent hexes anywhere on the map grid. The buildings should be at least five hexes from the map edge.

AT2: Use Flatlands/Badlands Terrain maps in a minimum two-by-two grid. The gamemaster should place two Light Level 1 (CF 5) buildings in adjacent hexes anywhere on the map grid. The buildings should be at least five hexes from the map edge. Gamemasters and players are encouraged to use the *Low Altitude Operations* and *Aerospace Units and BattleTech* rules (see p. 33 and p. 40, AT2, respectively) for this track.

RPG: Gamemasters should prepare for a desert battle in this track. Both buildings are large tents, one being the dig site and the other containing partitions for sleeping/eating quarters. Possessions are minimal, and only six personnel are on-site. No vehicles or heavy weapons are present. The gamemaster may have one medium-sized support vehicle present, if desired.

Attacker

Unmarked elements of a Word of Blake assault force that dropped onto the planet a few hours prior have dispatched a smaller force to capture the site and kill all personnel present. They will fight to the death.

The Blakists' deployed force should equal 120 percent of the Defender's deployed force, using the A column on the Word of Blake Random Assignment Table. The attackers are a Veteran com-

bined-arms force, with an equal mix of aerospace, BattleMech and vehicle/infantry units. The gamemaster should randomly determine the Attacker's starting edge.

Defender

The players may use up to 50 percent of their total force for this track. Personnel at the dig site are civilians and have no military training.

The Defender begins with 75 percent of the players' deployed force within six hexes of the two buildings. The other 25 percent may begin anywhere in the playing area as hidden units.

WARCHEST

Track Cost: 900 WP

Optional Bonuses (all bonuses cumulative):

- +200 Sand:** Per rules on p. 151, *CBTComp*
- +200 Winds:** Per rules on p. 153, *CBTComp*
- +300 Blowing Sand:** Per rules on p. 153, *CBTComp*

Victory Bonuses (bonuses not cumulative):

- +600 Partial Victory:** Completing one objective
- +1,000 Total Victory:** Completing both objectives

OBJECTIVES

1. Protect and secure! Keep the site buildings from being destroyed.

**GAME ON!**

2. Time is of the essence. Keep the Attacker from capturing the site by crippling/destroying or driving off all the attacking forces.

SPECIAL RULES

The Attacker operates under fighting withdrawal rules. At the end of twenty turns, if the Word of Blake has not destroyed or captured the site, they begin to pull back in response to reports of incoming Yoris DropShips. Units withdrawing in this fashion may still fire on their opponents without restriction, and after Turn 20 are not counted toward Objective #2 for victory determination.

AFTERMATH

Whoever said archeology isn't dangerous was a fool. By the skin of your teeth, you managed to salvage some of the site after the Word of Blake's deadly attack. Speaking of which, when did they show up on Solaris VII? Didn't ComStar have this planet's HPG under its protection? Of course, considering your less-than-public approach to begin with, it's not like you were really paying that much attention.

Whatever the reason, the Games are on hold in the wake of more rioting in Solaris City. It seems this time no one knows what's going on—reports over the radio bands say some unknown

DropShips and 'Mechs just hot-dropped onto the Factory complex in Montenegro, ruining a great grudge match event.

Looks like R&R will have to come later. IE wants you to leave the hot zone and move on to another assignment....

ADDITIONAL HOOKS

Just what did YUA discover? Rumor has it that the dig site is where the original *Phoenix Hawk / Sentinel* battles occurred, but why would YUA need three *Buccaneer* DropShips to cart off records and files? Maybe because the site used to be a Defiance Industries R&D lab, complete with computer reports and working prototypes of new laser technology....

Expansion Ideas

Gamemasters can stretch this track into a series of Hide and Seek clashes in the Tangerine Desert, with the players intercepting the Blakist force before it reaches the YUA base camp. Players can attempt to redirect the Blakist force away from the base camp to save the site from destruction. Gamemasters who choose this route will need to alter Objective #2.

NEXT TRACK

Falcon Ptomaine, Final Curtain?

GOLDEN GOOSE**GOLDEN GOOSE**

Personal Log #326

An ideal situation—our high-up muckety-mucks want us to steal a computer core from a contractor that ripped them off. Nothing truly important in the core; apparently it's just a lot of accounting data. This is more about revenge than a surgical hit. Though I wonder, given that these orders came after we'd been assigned to help the Illician Lancers raid Tsingtao in the name of the Federated Suns. Why such a prestigious force needs help from grunts like us I'll never know. All I see right now is being able to take a few months off and hit the Pleasure Circus on Daniel if we can double-score this mission.

After all, getting paid twice for one job doesn't happen often....

SITUATION

Inbound Trajectory

Tsingtao, Capellan Confederation

28 June 3068

Company higher-ups have "attached" your force to the Illician Lancers, who are conducting a high-impact raid on Tsingtao for Duke George Hasek. However, your services weren't leased out just for good intentions. Apparently your bosses want you to conduct a side raid to steal a competitor's computer cores—specifically, those owned by Shun-lin Networking, Inc. The cores can be stolen from a few locations on- and above-planet, so you're getting paid by the Davions to hit a world you were already assigned to hit. Twice the pay, onetime risk. Always a good thing for a mercenary.

GOLDEN GOOSE

**GAME SET-UP**

CBT: Use Mountain and Wooded Terrain maps. Place one heavy Level 1 (CF 70) building somewhere on the mapboard, preferably near a Heavy Woods hex. The building should be at least seven hexes from the map edge.

AT2: Use at least two Space maps for this track. Place one marker toward one edge to represent a space-borne facility. The facility has a Velocity of 0 and the following statistics: SI 4, 30 armor, no weapon bays. In addition, use the *Atmospheric Operations on the Space Map* rules, p. 18, AT2. The facility may not be placed in an atmosphere hex but should be within two hexes of the Space/Atmosphere hex row. The station is considered stationary for the duration of the track.

RPG: The players (or gamemaster) can determine whether to hit the mountain base or the one in space. Both facilities are small—they have enough room for a squad of marines and a three-person technical staff. Computer and site security are high (minimum TN of 16 to avoid sensors or hack the computer network) and the gamemaster may feel free to develop the facility as he chooses, though there should be only one entrance/exit. The company requires the entire computer core, not just a data dump.

Attacker

The Attacker may comprise up to 50 percent of the players' total force. The other half of the team is operating with the Illician Lancers to keep suspicion down about the player group's little side trip. The Attacker begins the track on the map edge farthest from the facility.

Defender

The Defender comprises a mix of planetary militia and mercenaries hired by the local government. Each of these forces should equal 50 percent of the Attacker's deployed force, resulting in a total deployed force strength that matches 100 percent of the attackers. When determining forces, locally hired mercenaries roll on the B column of the Mercenary Random Assignment Table; for the militia, roll on the C column of the Capellan Random Assignment Table. The mercenaries are Veteran, the militia Green. If the defending force includes vehicles, care should be given when determining the motive type, as the militia will deploy only vehicles that make sense in the terrain being used (for example, re-roll any hover forces for the militia if using any Heavy Woods maps).

The militia force enters the area at the beginning of Turn 5, while the mercenaries are placed anywhere on the battlefield within eight hexes of the facility at the start of the track.

WARCHEST

Track Cost: 700 WP

Optional Bonuses (all bonuses cumulative):

+300 Ambush: Change the Defender's militia force to 75 percent of the Attacker's deployed force. Half the militia force begins

the track as hidden units (if using *CBT* rules) or may begin at any Velocity anywhere on the Space maps (if using *AT2* rules). For *CBT: RPG*, consider them well hidden with a +4 bonus to detection TNs. The mercenary force remains at 50 percent of the Attacker's deployed force.

+200 Mines: As an added defensive measure, the area surrounding the selected facility is seeded with minefields. For *CBT*, add four 10-point conventional minefields; for *AT2*, add four hexes of space mines (see *Combat Equipment*, p. 22); for *CBT: RPG*, the gamemaster determines the type and number of minefields.

+200 Electromagnetic Interference (EMI): Tsingtao's unusually powerful magnetic field fluctuations sometimes cause havoc with ground and close-orbit electrical systems. At the beginning of each turn, roll 1D6 for each powered vehicle, Mech, fighter or armored infantry. On a result of 1, powerful EMI adds a +2 modifier to all ranged weapon attacks for that turn, and all rolls on the Missile Hits Table (regardless of the weapon system used) suffer a -2 modifier. During the turn, all ECM systems in use double their effective range, while all active probes are effectively disabled. The facilities are shielded from such phenomena and remain unaffected, as do units inside the facilities.

Victory Bonuses (bonuses not cumulative):

+300 Marginal Victory: Completing one objective

+500 Partial Victory: Completing two objectives

+900 Total Victory: Completing all objectives

OBJECTIVES

1. Retrieve the core. To accomplish this in *CBT* games, one attacking unit must end its movement next to the building hex and remain stationary for five complete turns. This may be shortened to three turns if an ECM is in use around the facility at the same time to assist in defeating the computer security. In *AT2* games, one attacking unit must dock with the facility and remain stationary to it for five complete turns. This may be shortened to three turns if the attacking unit is a small craft with a Marine complement on board. In an *RPG* game, the players must seize the computer core, defeating a Tech/Electronics TN of 18 to physically remove it from the system (in addition to any efforts to subvert building or system security measures).

2. Defeat the defenders. Destroy, cripple or forcibly withdraw every defending unit.

3. Destroy the facility. Ideally, the players' force should do this *after* seizing the core.

SPECIAL RULES

The planetary militia is comprised of regular citizens, not hardened soldiers, and so the *Forced Withdrawal* rules (see p. 135) apply to these units.

GOLDEN GOOSE

AFTERMATH

Burning out from Tsingtao, you happen to catch the weekend business report. Though not normally your speed, the slick announcer mentions something about Shun-lin, the company you just stole a computer core from:

“—announced today the total data failure of their inter-communications network. While not normally worth a major announcement, Shun-lin representatives stated that because of the network failure, the company has lost the new genetic codes for the pesticide protocol needed to hold back the Chaultapec Virus. Scientists are warning citizens to start stocking up on non-perishable items for the coming winter. The Chaultapec Virus is deadly to native wheat, used in making bread products and the ever-popular Tsingtao beer. In the wake of this news, Tsingtao Bottling’s stock dropped 110 points on the planetary market—”

ADDITIONAL HOOKS

Shun-lin, the company you just ripped off, figures out what happened rather quickly. They launch a strike at the players, attempting to retrieve the stolen data. Or they interfere with the handoff, sparking a running firefight.

The other half of the players’ force is still operating with the Federated Suns raiders, and they face unexpected opposition from the planetary militia. Why? Perhaps an important official is on the planet, or the raiding party stumbles onto a secret Maskirovka base.

Expansion Ideas

Gamemasters can use several scenario types to create the Federated Suns raid on ammunition and supply facilities located on Tsingtao. This action occurs simultaneously with the player group’s computer-core raid, using the other half of the players’ total force. In addition, if the Confederation gets wise to the computer theft, then Capellan authorities may authorize pursuit of the players.

NEXT TRACK

Full Metal Press, Falcon Ptomaine

FULL METAL PRESS

FULL METAL PRESS

[Scout Four]: “Uh, boss, pickets reporting some long-range fire from Hill 21445. Isn’t that where the Feddie troops are?”

[Base Alpha]: “21445? Damnation. Who do they think we are—”

[Baker Three]: “Sir! Baker Three reporting. I’ve got a mass push by the Confederation militia. Looks like they’re angling our way.”

[Base Alpha]: “What the hell? They plan to fight this out on our doorstep?”

SITUATION

*Colmar Myomics Scrap Facility HH-2, Trachen Plains
Minnacora, Capellan Confederation
5 July 3068*

Fighting around the complex you’re protecting has gotten brutal fast. The Confederation forces called in some heavy reinforcements to hammer at the stubborn Davions for their assault on the Capellan world of Minnacora, and reports all around you show the widespread destruction inflicted by the two armies.

Apparently, word has gotten out that the complex you’ve been diligently guarding houses some major stockpiles of ammunition and spare parts—which is partly true. The warehouses are jammed full of Mech parts, but it’s all scrap from bad production runs, failed prototypes and outright destroyed units turned in for quick cash by mercenaries like yourselves. Just because they store it here before shipping off to the smelting pits doesn’t mean you’re sitting on gold.

Doesn’t matter to the soldiers outside, though. The Confederation has been threatening legal action against Colmar Myomics for several environmental regulatory infractions, and the AFFS troopers—well, they don’t like the idea of Capellan ammo dumps, so they’ve been blowing up any they find, real or suspected.

At the moment, neither side seems to care that your force is a non-combatant. You’re sitting on ground the other folks want. And you’re being paid to keep everyone from setting foot on that particular patch of clay.

FULL METAL PRESS

**GAME SET-UP**

CBT: Use Urban/Woodland Terrain maps. Designate (or add) six Level 1 medium buildings (CF 40) near each other on one map sheet. There should be at least one hex between each building, and the buildings should stand at least four hexes from the edge of the map.

AT2: Use at least one Space map (or two white hexmaps). One edge is considered the planetary surface, with the center hex of the last row designated as the target area. This track uses the *Atmospheric Battles on the Space Map* rules from p. 18, AT2.

RPG: The complex you're guarding is small, with four warehouses, a hangar and the office building. All are medium buildings (CF 40). The gamemaster should design a map of the facility and surrounding area. The facility has no hardpoint defenses.

Attacker

Two components make up the Attacker in this track—elements of the AFFS and the CCAF. Neither side will cooperate with the other—instead, they will attack each other on sight. Both forces will strike each other before attacking the Defender's force.

The AFFS force should equal 50 percent of the Defender's deployed force. These are Veteran troops; to determine equipment, roll on the C column of the Federated Suns Random Assignment Table. They enter the board on the farthest edge from the facility (or the target hex, if using AT2) at the beginning of the track.

The CCAF force consists of Green troopers and should equal 125 percent of the total AFFS force. At least three-fourths of the Capellan units should be vehicles and infantry, as these elements are a planetary militia. They enter along any map edge at the beginning of Turn 3 (except for the planetary surface, if using AT2). Roll on Column A of the Capellan Confederation Random Assignment Table.

Defender

The Defender should consist of up to 75 percent of the players' total force.

WARCHEST

Track Cost: 800 WP

Optional Bonuses (all bonuses cumulative):

+250 Better Troops: Increase the skill level for the AFFS and CCAF troops by 1 after total forces have been selected.

+200 Weapon Malfunction: On any failed weapon roll result of 2 (or Margin of Failure 5 or greater), consider that weapon jammed/damaged for the rest of the track.

+100 Fog: Per the rules on p. 153, *CBTComp*. For AT2 games, atmosphere hexes contain heavy clouds; follow the rules for Fog to simulate this effect.

Victory Bonuses (bonuses not cumulative):

+300 Marginal Victory: Completing one objective

+550 Partial Victory: Completing two objectives

+900 Total Victory: Completed if all the buildings survive and Objective 3 is attained

OBJECTIVES

1. Defend the warehouses. At least three buildings must survive the track. For AT2 games, standard bombing/strafing/striking runs are performed per *Special Maneuvers*, p. 34, AT2.

2. Minimal obligation. The players can fulfill the minimal obligations of their contract if only two buildings survive the track.

3. Doing a favor. Because Minnacora is a Confederation world, the Capellan government will consider it a favor if the players destroy all the AFFS forces—once things get sorted out, that is.

SPECIAL RULES

Forced Withdrawal rules (see p. 135) are in effect for the AFFS and CCAF forces.

AFTERMATH

Once things calmed down and everyone realized they were fighting over scrap metal—those who survived, that is—the battle moved further east. The Feddies stayed on-planet for just a few days, shooting things up, before lifting off—though your Chief Tech swears on his mother's grave he saw a lifting DropShip explode late one night as the Feddies burned out of the atmosphere. Capellan resistance apparently ended, too, since the Davion flag soon flew over the various government buildings.

Shortly afterward, IE recalled your force elsewhere. You happened to catch a report that a mysterious fire burned the facility to the ground shortly after you left. Apparently there was a natural gas leak from some pipes under the facility; all it took was one spark for the whole thing to go up in flames. Good thing nothing of value was there.

ADDITIONAL HOOKS

So why is a scrap metal yard so important? When underneath it lies a TSM production plant owned and operated by Cortide Magnetics, an IE council member—and rumored to have ties to Loki, or is it the NAIS? Of course, there's no visible proof of the plant's existence, but enterprising players might find a way... After all, the FedSuns forces made a beeline for the facility after landing. Did they know all about it?

Expansion Ideas

Using a Probe or Recon Raid scenario for the initial contact with either House force will alert the players' force guarding the facility that company is coming. Gamemasters may follow up with a Hide and Seek or Stand Up and Fight scenario, then with a Base Attack for a multi-linked scenario campaign.

NEXT TRACK

Final Curtain?



FALCON PTOMAINE

FALCON PTOMAINE

"Why is it that lately, no matter where we go, someone assaults us? Who the hell has it in for us, anyway?"

"Don't know, Sarge. Though you have to admit, it is beautiful here. And the beach isn't poisonous, for once."

"True. I thought I'd never wish for a quiet garrison contract. This constant action is tiring me out. Who knew our employer had so many enemies?"

"Well, it sure ain't ticked-off students. Hey, if they want to keep paying us primo cashola, who are we to argue? Hell, we could've been up on the Falcon border if we'd gone with the Kell Hounds."

"We are on the Falcon border."

"Oh. Really?"

SITUATION

Grant's Station Tango, Nuevo Roma

Tomans, Lyran Alliance

1 August 3068

A standard downtime clause in your contract with IE allows roughly two months rest every year. When you ended up close enough to IE's main research complex on Tomans—a sprawling university with its own mini-DropPort, seconds from a decent beach—your CO decided now was a good time to invoke that clause.

Officially, you're under a garrison contract, though IE recognizes the need for R&R. With the Falcons not too far away, it made sense to stay on guard. Only half your people were on leave when the Green Ghosts dropped in without calling first. People like that rarely get invited back.

FALCON PTOMAINE

GAME SET-UP

CBT: Use Urban Terrain maps (Heavy Urban, Coastal if using *Combat Operations*). The gamemaster should designate three buildings at least four hexes apart as the objective structures. If no buildings exist, the gamemaster may place up to three heavy Level 2 (CF 60) buildings on the map area.

AT2: Use at least two Space maps. Designate one side as the planetary surface and use the *Atmospheric Battles on the Space Map* rules from p. 18, AT2.

RPG: Rather than roleplay a large-scale battle, the players should consider themselves the on-duty security personnel at one of the university buildings. The building is two stories high and has minimal security. The player characters must protect it from a contingent of armored and unarmored Green Ghost infantry squads.

Attacker

The Green Ghosts have decided to drop in for a quick snatch-and-go. Roll for these Elite troops using the B column of the Federated Suns, Lyran or SLDF Random Assignment Tables, or (once per lance) on the Second-Line Clan Goliath Scorpion Random Assignment Table. The Ghosts' total force size should equal 50 percent of the Defender's deployed force.

Halfway through the battle—a point determined by a 2D6 roll result of 7 or greater, made at the start of any turn after Turn

5—Jade Falcons units arrive, conducting a planetary raid to test their newer warriors' mettle. One contingent targets the same area as the current battle. The Falcon force equals 100 percent of the Defender's force (as deployed at the beginning of the track). They are Regular Clan troops; roll for equipment on the Front-Line Jade Falcon Random Assignment Table.

The arriving Falcons, not bound by *zellbrigen* (dueling rules), may fire on either of the factions currently engaged in battle, with no preference toward either side. To determine which units the Falcons target, each Falcon unit should roll 1D6 on the turn of its arrival. On a result of 1–3, the Falcon selects a Green Ghosts target; on a result of 4–6, a players' target. Even though this roll determines which side the Falcon unit will fire on first, it does not define the particular unit to be fired on, and a Falcon warrior may ignore the result if fired on first by an element of the targeted faction.

Defender

The Defender can consist of up to 100 percent of the players' total force.

WARCHEST

Track Cost: 900 WP

Optional Bonuses (all bonuses cumulative):

+300 Rainfall: Per rules on p. 153, *CBTComp*.

FALCON PTOMAINE



+200 Dusk/Dawn: Per rules on p. 153, *CBTComp*. Games using *AT2* space combat can use the *CBTComp* rules as well; consider the system's sun to be on the rim of the planet, creating a blind spot of glare.

+400 Earthquake (ground only): Per the rules on p. 153, *CBTComp*. Tremor strength is a 3, with two aftershocks (the first at strength 2, the next at 1). To determine when the earthquake hits, roll 2D6 after Turn 4. The earthquake occurs on a result of 8 or greater. After the initial tremor, roll 2D6 every turn; an aftershock occurs on a result of 10 or greater. Once two aftershocks have passed, the earthquake subsides.

+400 Meteor Shower (space only): Prepare 2D6 asteroids to use as meteors. To determine when the meteor shower hits, roll 2D6 after Turn 4. The shower occurs on a result of 8 or greater. When the shower happens, divide the number of meteors in half. Each side picks a map edge and then enters a meteor at Velocity 6, alternating between the two sides until all the meteors have entered. Treat the meteors as asteroids under the optional *Asteroid* rules. p. 47, *AT2*.

Victory Bonuses (bonuses not cumulative):

- 700 **Total Defeat:** Completing no objectives
- +400 **Marginal Victory:** Completing one objective
- +750 **Partial Victory:** Completing two objectives
- +1,200 **Total Victory:** Completing all objectives

OBJECTIVES

- 1. Protect the academy.** Keep at least one designated target building from destruction or capture by enemy forces.
- 2. Begone, foul spawn!** Destroy all the Green Ghosts or force them to withdraw.
- 3. "Sharpen this!"** Destroy or cripple at least half the Falcon forces.

SPECIAL RULES

The following rules are in effect for this track:

Forced Withdrawal

The *Forced Withdrawal* rule (see p. 135) is in effect for the Green Ghosts.

Clan Honor

Though not following *zellbrigen*, the Falcon Star Colonel in charge of this force still believes his troops should fight with some honor. Therefore, no Clan units may conduct physical attacks until enemy units from either opposing faction make at least three successful physical attacks against the Falcons. After that, all bets are off, and the Falcons gain +1 to all subsequent Initiative rolls as well as being free to retaliate in kind.

AFTERMATH

Looks like trouble is starting to follow you guys around like a bad stench. A complaint by your CO to the IE liaison met with little result, though after this last debacle, for once they're not calling you up right after the last missile was fired. In fact, you hear little from IE for almost two weeks. Which is fine by you, as it allows your team to repair, recover and rest.

ADDITIONAL HOOKS

The Falcons are here to raid, testing defenses. Are they planning a follow-up attack? And just who are the Green Ghosts? IE would appreciate any leads you can dig up, considering that the Ghosts have hampered IE operations for years.

Expansion Ideas

Gamemasters who want to split this track into two or more continuous scenarios with the Green Ghost attack and a fast follow-up by the Falcons can use any scenario type. Players should track damage and ammunition across all linked scenarios, making on-the-spot field repairs and reloading if they have the right equipment. The players' force may claim salvage only after completing the entire track.

NEXT TRACK

Final Curtain?



FINAL CURTAIN?

FINAL CURTAIN?

Personal Journal #552

Planetary assaults are such nebulous affairs. Murphy rules these types of engagements with an iron fist. I've never joined one that went as planned.

Intel assures us that Giausar is only a supply world for the Lyran assault on the Free Worlds League. As part of the push to punish the LAAF for following Duke Kelswa-Steiner's foolishness, the League hired a bunch of mercs to lead the assault while the FWLM sits back and learns from us.

Stupid armchair generals. Paying for their greed with our blood.

Hopefully, Mr. Murphy is on holiday. Because I for one would like to spend the cash they're throwing at us for this operation.

SITUATION

*Task Force Gauntlet, Inbound vector TT-4**Giausar, Bolan Province**Lyran Alliance**2 September 3068*

IE didn't renew your contract when it ended a week ago. Looking for quick work and pulling in some favors from a few Free Worlds League government types, the CO signed you up to assist in a major push to seize Giausar from the Lyrans. Why doesn't matter—it's work, and with good pay at that.

The downside? Serving under the arrogant Knights of the Inner Sphere. Of course, they do lead from the front, so they're either really good at what they do or they're out to seize all the glory. Either way, they're your employer, so you do as they tell you.

It's all about the money, after all.

FINAL CURTAIN?

GAME SET-UP

This track is a straightforward planetary assault. Players may take part in any operation hitting the planet: main force, recon, decoy, strategic operations and so on. The gamemaster and the players decide what rules to use.

Attacker

League-hired mercenaries—including the players—are in the vanguard of the attack, along with the Second Battalion of the Knights of the Inner Sphere. All forces have assigned objectives, determined by the gamemaster. Because this is a planetary assault, the gamemaster should decide how large a force the players may deploy based on the Defender's total deployed force.

Defender

Defending Giausar is the One-Eyed Jacks mercenary command, led by Colonel Darrel "Ramrod" Duke, along with that command's aerospace wing, the AeroJacks. The Defender's total force comprises a BattleMech regiment and two aerospace fighter squadrons, all Veteran troops. Determine most of the Jacks' units using the C column of the Mercenary Random Assignment Table. To reflect Duke Kelswa-Steiner's efforts to capitalize on the Alliance's need for a solid defense against the League, the gamemaster may determine one in every five Jacks units (aerospace and BattleMech) using the A column on the Lyran Random Assignment Table instead.

Because this is a planetary assault, the gamemaster has full authority to determine both sides' deployed forces. We suggest the Defender's deployed force equal at least 75 percent of the Attacker's deployed force for any given scenario. The Jacks also have two *Union*-class DropShips and an *Overlord* for on-planet mobility and added firepower.

WARCHEST

Track Cost: 1,500 WP**Optional Bonuses (all bonuses cumulative):**

+400 Mixed Terrain/Weather (ground only): The gamemaster may select one appropriate Terrain Type/Condition and one Weather Condition from pp. 151–153, *CBT: Comp*, for this track. Alternatively, if using a linked-scenario campaign, the gamemaster may change the Terrain Type/Condition and/or the Weather Condition for each scenario.

+400 Orbital Defense (space only): The gamemaster places at least one space station (*Bastion* or similar size) at least three hexes "above" the space-atmosphere interface. The station's gun crews are Veteran. Fighters may launch from the station, if desired.

Victory Bonuses (bonuses not cumulative):

+1,200 Marginal Victory: Completing the first objective

+1,750 Partial Victory: Completing the second objective

+2,500 Total Victory: Completing the third objective

FINAL CURTAIN?

OBJECTIVES

1. **Bing...** Destroy or cripple at least 50 percent of the Defender's units.
2. **Bang...** Destroy or cripple at least 75 percent of the Defender's units.
3. **Boom!** Force the Defender to withdraw from the planet (attained by destroying or crippling 100 percent of the Defender's units).

SPECIAL RULES

The following rules are in effect for this track:

Salvage

If using a multi-linked scenario campaign, the players may claim salvage between scenarios rather than at the end of the track.

Forced Withdrawal

The *Forced Withdrawal* rules (see p. 135) are in effect for the One-Eyed Jacks. If the gamemaster is using additional Free Worlds League forces (such as the Second Knights of the Inner Sphere), these forces likewise operate under those rules.

AFTERMATH

The Lyrans seemed surprised at the amount of force the League shoveled onto Giasar—as if they didn't expect the League to pour over the border and seize a major supply world for the Skye/Bolan push into League space. No matter; the League troops just mopped up after the mercs did all the work. The salvage clause in your contract helped a lot—the League practically gave the salvage to all mercenary commands involved.

The odd thing was the sudden withdrawal of the Knights' Second Battalion, right in the middle of pushing the One-Eyed Jacks' right flank. Jacobi, in the communications van, said the Knights got an ultra-encrypted transmission during the battle. They packed up and left in the middle of the firefight, radioing to let us know the change of command to another League unit.

Stupid Knights. Guess they have no stomach for fighting down in the dirt. The Jacks fought tooth and nail, almost to the last man. Two of their Droppers made it past the League space cordon, so for sure by now the LAAF knows we're here.

Question is, for how long?

ADDITIONAL HOOKS

Because this is a planetary assault, the players can explore hundreds of different possibilities, from hot drops to pre-invasion recon to assassinations. The gamemaster can put the players through as much as he desires. The contract is a blanket one—assist in taking Giasar. How that happens apparently doesn't matter much to the League military.

Expanding this track into a larger campaign may involve the addition of allied units (such as elements of the Knights) to the players' force at the gamemaster's discretion. If so, and for any scenario in which the players and allied units face a One-Eyed Jacks force, the Jacks may use their special ability to create confusion between the non-integrated commands, winning a +1 Initiative bonus for every distinct force opposing them. Negate this bonus (and apply a -1 initiative modifier to the Jacks) if the players and their allies field at least one mobile HQ between them.

Expansion Ideas

Gamemasters can expand this track into a large-scale assault from arrival to endgame on Giasar. A small planetary militia exists, mainly as a harassing force. Gamemasters can include the Second Battalion of the Knights of the Inner Sphere, if desired, as well as three to four small mercenary companies. The gamemaster decides how long the battle runs and for what type of objectives—as long as the track objectives are met, the sky's the limit.

NEXT TRACK

None. Time for refit and repair while you await the next Jihad campaign!