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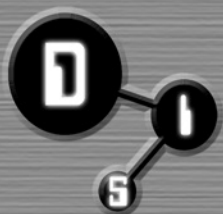


TABLE OF CONTENTS

THE SHROUDED BLADE	4	Desperate Getaway	45	EARLY 3070: BLAKE ASCENDANT	83
INTRODUCTION	9	Brett Pulls Back	46	Standing Alone	84
How to Use This Book	9	Alarion Offline!	46	To the End of All Things	84
About the Chaos Unleashed Campaign	9	Crumbling Lines	46	Capellan Barbarity Condemned Across the Sphere	85
A SPHERE IN FLAMES	10	The Dragon Besieged	47	Capellans Flee New Syrtis!	85
War Engulfs Inner Sphere	11	Ghosts of the Black Watch	47	Alone in the Dark	86
A War in Review	11	Enter the Word	47	Hasek Murdered!	86
The Dragoons Debacles	11	Cry of the Raven	48	The Sundered League	87
The Star League Failure	12	Victory, at Cost	49	Fractured Alliances	87
Dominos Falling	14	Bargained and Done	49	Fighting On!	88
The Clan Factor	16	Falling Stars	49	Warriors of the League Embrace Blake's Word	88
In a Handbasket	17	The Cat Stirs	51	Traitors!	89
Blake's Judgment	17	The Raven's Flight	51	Alliance in Flames	90
Blackout on Atreus?	19	Pasig Falls!	52	Solaris Home Defense League Holds Nowhere	90
LATE 3068: FIGHTING BLIND	21	And in Other News...	52	Falcon's Assault Kandersteg, Bountiful Harvest	90
War in the League	22	Buzz-Kill	52	Mopping Up	90
Betrayal on Atreus!	22	Caesar's Challenge	53	Culling the Flock	91
Entire <i>Sardis</i> Fleet Goes Missing	23	Nimakachi Plant Destroyed!	54	The Final Call	91
Captain-Generalcy in Doubt	24	Com Guards in Disarray	54	The Awful Truth	92
Retreat!	24	Rallying Cry	55	Losing Ground, Losing Hope	92
The Capellan Front	25	Chaos Unleashed, Part 2: Early 3069	56	The Dragon's Teeth	93
Confederation Strikes Back	25	My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean	56	The Honorable Choice	93
Allies Rally on Sian!	25	Seeds of Discontent	58	The Spreading Curse	93
Victory at Hand!	25	Brew-Ha-Ha	59	Hachiman Taro Destroyed	94
The Dragon Rallies	27	LATE 3069: DEATH FROM ABOVE	61	Council of Gems II	94
Dieron Free From Tyranny	27	Wrath and Fire	62	Galedon in Flames!	94
Benjamin Under Attack!	27	Wayward Brothers and Sisters See the Light!	62	And in Other News...	95
Luthien Armor Works in Peril?	28	Field Study Report (Confidential): Alarion	63	Rumors or Orders?	95
Death to Mercenaries, Revisited	28	Officials: Galax is Dying	63	Making Them Pay	96
Alliance in Turmoil	29	Summer's Nightfall	64	Protectorate Invasion!	96
The Show Must Go On!	29	The Sacking of Glengarry	64	Far Lookers March on Taurus	96
LAAF Rallies After Stunning Clan Assault on Graus	29	Surging Ahead	65	Lurking Dangers	97
Terran Corridor in Crisis	29	Against the Floodgates	65	Chaos Unleashed, Part 4: Early 3070	98
League Forces Shattered on Syrma	30	The Drive to New Syrtis	66	Click, Click, Boom	98
Skye Forces Claim Narrow Victory on Zebebelgenubi	30	Shattered Lines	66	Panic and Pain	99
And in Other News...	31	The Battle for New Syrtis	67	LATE 3070: THE TIME OF TRIALS	102
Damocles' Report to the Precentor Martial	31	The Advancing Hordes	67	Embracing Unity	103
Let the Spheroids Burn!	32	Wolf Watch	67	Khan's Orders	103
All Points Bulletin	32	Back to Basics	69	Tukayyid Free at Last!	104
Northwind Silenced	32	The Truth Revealed	69	ComStar Out!	105
Mercenary Cowardice Imperils Operation Reclamation	33	Dante Burning	69	Falling Back	106
The View From Galatea	33	For Vengeance or Justice	70	Davions Crushed in the Confederation	106
Blake's Hand is Everywhere	33	Tikonov Under Fire?	70	Confederation Troops Return Triumphant	106
Mercenary Traitors Rampage on Victoria!	34	Clash of Titans	71	Taurus Next?	107
Chaos Unleashed, Part 1: Late 3068	35	Word of Blake Invades Confederation	71	A Separate Peace	108
Leading Edge	35	And in Other News...	72	Long Live the Knights!	108
One for the Money...	36	Defiance	72	Fleet Advisory: Shiloh	108
Graveyard Shift	38	New Marik Captain-General Installed	73	Fading Lights	109
EARLY 3069: THE FOG OF WAR	40	"Does Peace Have a Chance?"	73	Sacrifices	110
Swordplay	41	Unexpected Surprise	74	Skye Still a Threat	110
Faith and Hope	41	Bloody Skye	74	Unleashing Hell	111
Hasek's Invasion Unravels	42	Fox's Teeth Still Sharp	75	Word of Blake Returns to Sian!	111
Chancellor to Wed!	42	"Payback on Betelgeuse"	75	Free Capella Dissolves	112
Striking Back!	43	Brett Offers Cease-Fire to Alliance	76	No Nobler Sacrifice	112
Galax Assaulted	43	Chaos Unleashed, Part 3: Late 3069	77	New Clan Invasion?	113
Kathil Attacked!	43	Brute Force	77	Assault on Arc-Royal Fails	114
Fists and Feathers	44	Living Dead Men	79	Tamar Attacked!	114
Restoration!	44	Stirring the Anthill	81	And in Other News...	114
Avengers Fall Back	45			Focht's Appeal	114



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Marian Raiders Hit Huntingdon, Hazeldean!	115	Free Worlds Reject ComStar Aid	125	Game Rules	130
Intel Brief: Mundo Nublar	115	Revenge Above All	125	Standard Nuclear Weapons	134
"Defenders of the Outback, Unite!"	116	Blake's New Program	126	New Vehicles	135
Bethel Assaulted, Irregulars Destroyed!	116	Autopsy Report: Mori, S.	126	SM1 Tank Destroyer	135
Pirate's Feast	116	Who Is "The Master"?	126	Condor Hovertank (Upgraded)	136
Testing the Waters	117	Tragic News for the Allard-Liaos	127	Ocelot	138
Chaos Unleashed, Part 5: Late 3070	118	Holding the Line	127	New DropShips: "Pocket WarShips"	139
Binge, Purge, Flush	118	Over and Out	127	Excalibur-class "Pocket WarShip" Upgrade	139
Celestial Calamity	120	Columbus Falls!	128	Mule-class "Pocket WarShip" ("Q-Ship")	141
Grim Death	122	Hear the Word of Blake	128	Tharkad-class Battle Cruiser (LCS <i>Invincible</i>)	143
TAKING STOCK	124	JIHAD HOT SPOTS: 3070 RULES ANNEX	129	RECORD SHEETS	145
Render Unto Caesar...	125	Nuclear Weapons	130		

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THE SHROUDED BLADE

NOTES

"Injuries ought to be done all at one time, so that, being tasted less, they offend less; benefits ought to be given little by little, so that the flavor of them may last longer. And above all things, a prince ought to live amongst his people in such a way that no unexpected circumstances, whether of good or evil, shall make him change; because if the necessity for this comes in troubled times, you are too late for harsh measures; and mild ones will not help you."

—Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince*, Chapter VIII

"And of all princes, it is impossible for the new prince to avoid the imputation of cruelty, owing to new states being full of dangers."

—Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince*, Chapter XVII

"The truly ambitious do not seize the throne; they push others to do so and then rule from the shadows."

—Conrad Toyama, *Commentaries*

Marik Palace**Atreus, Marik Commonwealth****Free Worlds League****9 August 3069**

Thomas froze midway through reaching up to the high shelf, the leather-bound book gripped in his right hand. He'd ignored the trace of whiskey in the air—he'd shared a glass here with Heather Alexander a couple of hours ago—but the faint whisper of cloth against cloth that sent icicles down his spine couldn't be explained away. He'd thought he was alone. Security should've guaranteed he was alone.

He fought the urge to spin and face the intruder, knowing any sudden movement might prove fatal. He pushed the book onto the shelf, then allowed his arm to fall, the movement slow and controlled. His mind raced through a host of scenarios. An assassin? It wouldn't be the first attempt since this contretemps began, though none had gotten through his security yet. One of the children playing? They knew better than to come into Daddy's study. One of *his* agents?

That possibility scared Thomas. *His* people were brutal, efficient and often inhuman, and the events of last October had made clear to all the lethal differences between Thomas and the Master. In fact, Thomas had waged a covert campaign against the puppeteer for some time, a crusade dating back to the Conference of 3063. Until last autumn it had been a hidden war, in which even many of the participants remained unaware they were taking part.

He turned carefully, making no sudden moves that might alarm the intruder. He scanned the room, but at first couldn't see where

the intruder lurked, let alone who it was. Then a faint movement in the shadows in the far corner caught his eye. From the leather armchair beneath the unlit floor lamp, a small dark figure watched him. Shadows moved and light flared.

"Sit down, Captain-General." The watcher gestured toward the other chair, his hand trembling with an agitation that threatened to spill some of the Stewart Malt he clutched. Thomas crossed the room with measured steps and sat as directed, resting his palms on the cold leather armrests.

"You used to call me Thomas, Paul. We were brothers."

"But you're not Thomas, nor are you my brother. *You* never were."

"We've discussed this before."

They had done so last autumn, after the Blakists made it known that Captain-General Thomas Marik was *not* a Marik by birth, but rather someone the Order—in its pre-Schism form—had created and installed. Political and social outrage had erupted across the Free Worlds League, yet in this time of war Thomas (he had worn that name so long it was easier to use than his own) had retained his office. Some called foul, naming him impostor and traitor. Others said his elevation proved that the Marik dynasty was a white elephant and any appropriately skilled individual could lead the Free Worlds. The entire situation could have gone to hell in a handbasket, but ironically his greatest support came from old political foes and those whom his enthronement had disenfranchised. Alys Rousset-Marik, architect of the Great Debate, called on the people to rally round her erstwhile uncle; Therese Marik, oldest child of Janos Marik, disowned but influential and the wife of warlord and hero Jeremy Brett, called on the populace to support Federal authorities; Paul Marik, the insightful but reserved Minister of Intelligence, briefly stepped out of the shadows to affirm his support for "the Captain-General." What had changed? Why was Paul sitting here now, looking as if his nerves were on a knife-edge?

A faint smile crossed Paul Marik's lips. He nodded. "I was prepared to see what you could do to hold the Free Worlds together. I've waited calmly for months, but not everyone is that patient. Some people have decided that your efforts are not enough, and that matters are better off in their hands."

"Kirc never was very patient."

"Regulus is the least of your worries, *brother*." Thomas saw the gun then, a compact Sea Eagle needler resting in Paul's lap. "You should've left matters alone. The world was none of your business."

"Him!" Thomas spat, and started to rise. Paul's left hand snapped up, leveling the weapon at the scarred man's face. "You sold out the League to a madman."

Paul glowered, sweat beading on his brow and his gun hand trembling. Thomas sank back into his seat. "Don't speak about him like that, you fraud." Paul's voice scarcely rose above a whisper. "The Master is a visionary. He can see what those shortsighted



THE SHROUDED BLADE

fools in the Star League cannot. He doesn't put self-interest above the needs of all."

"Oh, Paul." Sympathy tinged Thomas' voice. "I'd hoped you wouldn't fall prey to him."

"Wouldn't learn the truth, you mean." The gun shook as Paul vented his fury. "Wouldn't learn of your treachery. You brought this on the League. You and you alone. Now, because you tore up the plan, we have to practice triage, sacrificing part of the League so that some of it will survive."

"Paul, I—"

"Spare me your excuses, fraud. You were supposed to be *his* spokesman and agent in the Free Worlds, but you turned your back on him and ComStar."

Frustration made Thomas lean forward, causing Paul to flinch. Sweat rolled down his temple and onto his cheek. His free hand rose to wipe it away. The gun, still shaking, never moved from Thomas' face.

"I did what was best for the Free Worlds," Thomas responded. "Our people, *our people*, were not best served by becoming a ComStar puppet state. With all you know, you must be able to appreciate that."

"I don't care about ComStar. I don't give a damn about shoddy maintenance on Tharkad, or Combine bioweapons on Galedon, I care about the here and now. About our people. I care about your betrayal. That in your attempts to play elder statesman, you abandoned him, made him—"

"Have you met this 'Master'? In the flesh? Spoken to him face to face?" Thomas' eyes narrowed as he met Paul's gaze. "I thought not. If you had, you wouldn't be questioning my motives. Believe me, he doesn't care about the Free Worlds. At first, perhaps, but the last time we communicated it was clear he thought even Myndo Waterly was a bleeding-heart liberal. You know what this is in *his* eyes? This is Scorpion, writ large. His attempt to outdo the Primus *he* pretty much regards as a god, Toyama. He's using you. He—"

The safety snapped off. Thomas froze.

"I should kill you now." Paul's voice was cold and the gun didn't waver.

Thomas' mouth went dry, but he refused to avert his gaze, instead meeting the challenge in his brother's eyes. "I suspect..." He paused briefly, licking his lips and cocking his head to one side as if listening intently, a mannerism that had become his trademark in Parliamentary debate. "...That *he* wants me alive." *For now, at least, was the unspoken codicil.*

A smile tugged at Paul's lips and the gun dropped away from Thomas' face. "I'll give you that much credit. You do know how he thinks...now and then."

"And you still think I'm wrong to act the way I do? I know what he wants and what he'll do to achieve it. If you know that, why do you go along with him?"

"Blood is thicker than water, and with Cameron-Jones' declaration you have become a liability. If the League is to be saved, we need a Marik at the helm. A *true* Marik."

"And you think you're up to the job? Or perhaps *he* thinks the people will accept him for what he is?" A wry grin crossed his face as he saw Paul frown. "I thought not. You never were one for the limelight and his..."—he paused, searching for the right word—"...disabilities would count against him with too many people in the League. Oh, yes, I know about that. I was briefed as to why I rather than he took the throne."

Paul set down his whiskey glass and stood, motioning for Thomas to do likewise. He gestured toward the door with the pistol, his face a cold mask.

"My daughter will succeed you. She has long been a favored candidate."

Thomas let out a small laugh. "Corinne hates the idea of ruling as much as you do, or of going against authority. She even hesitated to join Alys' little clique." That group, opposed to Thomas' rule and seeking the repeal of Resolution 288, seemed so innocent now.

"She knows her duty. She will provide a focus for the true power of the Mariks."

"Oh, she'll love you for that, Paul." Irony dripped from Thomas' voice but Paul either didn't recognize it or pretended not to notice.

Paul reached for the door and pulled it open, motioning with the gun for Thomas to enter the outer office.

A pair of security troopers stood there, wearing FWLM battle-dress and cradling heavy needler rifles. He was surprised by their presence—for all their weight, they'd moved into position quietly. The scent of grease from the armor fought with the fragrance of the large vase on the side table. The grease was winning. Surely that was symbolic. The troopers wore the purple of the Mariks, but something was out of place. It took a moment for Thomas to identify it: The Marik Eagle emblazoned on their shoulders and on the pectoral armor plates of their vests stood before a silver broadsword, the sigil of the Word of Blake. He looked into the mirrored faceplate of the trooper on the left and saw a distorted image of himself looking back.

Oddly appropriate, he thought.

Paul slipped his pistol into a jacket pocket, then pulled out a comp-pad and keyed up various readouts. After two or three pages, he grunted and frowned.

"Not everyone cooperating with this little coup d'etat you've engineered, Paul? Some troopers remembering their oaths of office?" He glanced at the statue-like soldiers.

"They're Blake Militia, a gift, so don't hope they have any residual loyalty to you. And you really have no idea how ill-liked you are, do you, Captain-General? Of how little support you have in the military. I didn't need to engineer a coup. I just gave my approval and allowed matters to take their course. Adam simply made sure people we could trust were in the right place at the right time."

THE SHROUDED BLADE



Thomas pondered. Adam Tam, Chief Armorer. His Blakist sympathies were an open secret, but Thomas had thought—had hoped—he'd been isolated from them. Like Paul? The mistakes were compounding.

"And you expect me to meekly go along with things?" Thomas finally said.

"Not really, no." Paul slipped the pad back into his pocket and pulled out a comm unit. He thumbed the transmit button. "Bring them."

He turned to regard Thomas, his face impassive. Footsteps sounded on the creaking boards of the wood-paneled corridor, an innovation previous generations of security-conscious Captain-Generals had installed to warn them of approaching intruders. The antechamber's outer door opened and another armored trooper stepped through, leading a huddle of bedraggled figures. A second trooper followed the group.

"Thomas!" Sherryl Halas cried as she fell into her husband's arms. Her hair was in disarray and she appeared to have dressed in a hurry. She smelled faintly of lavender.

"Papa!" cried the two boys as they clutched at his waist, both still in pajamas. His youngest child, six year-old Jessica, clutched at Thomas' face from her perch in Sherryl's arms.

Paul watched the reunion impassively. "How touching," he said, deadpan. "As you see, any attempt you make to resist will imperil your wife and children."

Sherryl gave Paul a cold look. The boys, ten-year-old Janos and nine year-old Christopher, looked ready to attack their erstwhile uncle. Jessie, seemingly just woken up, appeared ready to burst into tears.

"My, how fierce." Paul reached out to ruffle Janos' hair, but the youngster jerked away.

"I won't let you turn Dormuth into a new Yekaterinburg, Paul." Adrenalin surged through Thomas' veins and he clenched his fists. How could he save the children and Sherryl? Would the guard expect an old man like him to put up a decent fight? Against one he might've tried, but two...there was no chance.

Paul looked him straight in the eye. "If you cooperate, none of you will be harmed. You have my word on that."

Political necessity, Thomas realized. He might be persona non grata, but Sherryl was Chris Halas' daughter, and Paul could ill afford to anger the powerful Duke of Oriente. Paul knew Thomas loved her, but not with the same passion he'd felt toward Sophina. Their marriage was a partnership, equal parts business and romance—Halas imperial ambition married to Thomas' desire for a political redoubt against certain revelations.

For now, as it happened.

Sherryl snorted and Thomas put a comforting hand on her shoulder. "Tell that to Heather Alexander," she said. She turned to

face her husband. "I saw some guards carrying her out of the Ops center as they brought us down here." She paused. "It looked like she'd put up quite a fight."

Thomas closed his eyes for an instant, remembering his Minister of Defense, then glared at Paul.

"Admiral Alexander and General Blake refused to cooperate. They were...dealt with." Paul's voice held no remorse, despite having worked with both women for several decades.

Cassie Blake, despite her surname, despised the Blakists, which had gotten her into hot water both professionally and in her private life, but it had also made her a determined supporter of the Captain-General and his agenda. Thomas wondered if Adam Tam had killed her. They'd loved each other and fought in equal measure. It had almost seemed they'd loved to fight.

"Enough of this," Paul said. "Escort the Captain-General and his family to the *Noble Vision*. Precentor Nathan is expecting them and will escort them to Mars."

The two soldiers who had arrived with Sherryl and the children saluted. One gestured for Thomas and his family to enter the Nightingale Corridor.

"One day you'll see the truth, Paul. One day you'll realize that rather than helping the people, you've destroyed the last chance to end the madness." *Do this and he'll win this Blake-forsaken Jihad*, he screamed silently. Despite his rising sense of terror, Thomas couldn't help the hint of a smile at the irony of the epithet he had chosen.

"So you say, impostor. Give my greetings to my real brother."

The second guard leveled his weapon at Thomas, nudging him in the small of the back with the muzzle. Grudgingly, Thomas followed his family into the corridor.





THE SHROUDED BLADE

Their twin captors led Thomas, Sherryl and the children through the winding corridors of the palace. Similarly dressed guards stood at intersections, demonstrating the extent of the coup and the iron grip of the Blakist occupation. That it had occurred so quickly and quietly shocked Thomas, as had its success despite all his precautions.

Paul's betrayal had been the weak spot. Having your Minister of Intelligence side with the enemy was just a *small* inconvenience, Thomas thought wryly. He'd certainly misjudged the younger man. Paul's intellect was well known, but so was his dislike of the spotlight and being in authority. Had it always been an act, or had Paul been playing politics for decades? Thomas thought through a succession of conversations over the more than three decades he'd spent in office. Had he been that blind to Paul's actions and his relationship with his real brother, or was that a recent innovation? Had Paul shown any sign of disloyalty or a hidden agenda?

Options raced through his mind. Could he persuade them to let Sherryl and the children go? Unlikely; his family was leverage. Could he fight his way out? His eyes flicked to the troopers. Fat chance. A rescue? Here? The modern palace was a fortress, or more accurately, a prison, designed to keep the enemy out. Now it effectively isolated him from rescuers.

And if they get us off-world to Mars? With that system smashing the Dragoons and ComStar's Case White, if he fell into that hole, none of them would ever escape. Could he get a message out before they left the Atrous system to someone who could act? Romanov, perhaps? Hell, did anyone even know he'd been taken? Would the Blakists acknowledge his capture, or might Paul continue to issue orders under his signature as if nothing had happened until it was far too late? Paul, for all his reserve, had considerable intelligence.

Thomas was so lost in thought that he didn't register the woman's approach until she was only a few meters away. Dressed in FWLM dress whites, she strode with authority down the passageway, a sheaf of documents clutched in her left hand while her right was folded behind her in the formal style favored at court. Chestnut hair cascaded over her shoulders, a trait she shared with her cousins Alys and Isis, but whereas the two younger women were slight and pretty, this officer exhibited a hardness that detracted from her appearance. She was still handsome, but her demeanor was cold and distant.

"Come to gloat, Corinne?" Sherryl snapped. Thomas rested a gentle hand on her forearm as if he feared she would attempt to strike the younger woman. "Or should I call you Captain-General?"

Corinne ignored her and stepped toward the right-hand guard. Her left hand came up, holding out the documents to the trooper. "Your orders," she said in an authoritative voice. Instinctively the soldier reached out to accept the documents.

Thomas heard the dull chink of metal on Perspex, then a faint "zing." His eyes narrowed as the sound registered and his brain tried to work out what it was.

The guard fell back, a thin wisp of smoke trailing from a neat hole drilled in the faceplate where the muzzle of Corinne's laser pistol had touched it.

Sherryl was still glaring at her pseudo-niece when Thomas' elbow came up. Though fifty years older than the trooper—at least—he had the advantage of surprise. His training, given many years before, made obvious the futility of striking at an armored opponent. The bulky torso and head armor protected the trooper from most physical harm, but you could always find a weak spot if you knew where to aim.

The blow caught the guard, whose gun was already moving toward Corinne, in the throat. Thomas yelled in pain as his flesh struck the ceramic plates of the soldier's gorget, but at the same time he felt a grim satisfaction as the blow drove the armor back into the soldier's windpipe. He heard a crunch and a gurgle as the impact crushed the trooper's trachea. The man fell back, dying, but unlike the guard Corinne had shot, he was not dead yet. His trigger finger tightened.

The stuttering whisper of the retort belied the carnage it unleashed. Even as Corinne twisted and fired at the second guard, Sherryl and the boys fell forward.

"NO!" Thomas screamed. *Not them. Please, not them.*

He fell to his knees, gathering up the nearest child. Christopher's eyes looked back, but they were glazed over. Blood soaked through onto Thomas hands. He grasped for a pulse. Nothing. Clutching his youngest son to him, mindless of the spreading pool of blood, he reached out to his other son. Janos looked peaceful, but his eyes too stared back sightlessly. Thomas sobbed. The room faded away and become a void. There was nothing left. Nothing for him. It had all been in vain.

"Thomas?" The voice sounded slurred and weak. Frozen, Thomas watched Sherryl struggle to push herself up. She coughed, and blood flecks spattered her lips. A wailing cry sprang from beneath her, and she fought to rise a second time. Corinne dropped to her knees next to the stricken woman, the pistol falling from her hands, and pulled the trapped child from beneath her mother. Blood soaked Jessica's nightdress. Corinne hurriedly checked the child for wounds.

"She's fine, Sherryl. Jessica's fine." Corinne forced the words out.

Thomas heard them, but they held no meaning. He rocked back and forth, a boy clutched in each arm, his face a sea of emotion. He paid Corinne no heed and seemed not to hear Sherryl or his daughter.

Dimly, he heard Corinne speak his name. "Thomas?" He couldn't respond. "Thomas?" Louder. Still no response. Then Corinne's hand came up and around, slapping his scarred face. His head snapped back and his eyes locked with hers. His heart skipped a beat, and a sense of relief rushed into the void. The pain remained, but now he felt a faint hope along with it. He tasted copper in his mouth and spat blood on the floor.

THE SHROUDED BLADE

"Sherry needs you. Jessie needs you," Corinne said.

Thomas stared at her, struggling to comprehend.

"I'm sorry, Thomas. It wasn't supposed to happen like this. None of it was, but your wife and daughter need you."

He lowered the bodies of his sons gently, brushing dark hair back from their eyes. Then he gathered up his whimpering daughter, clutching her to him with his left hand. Jessica looped her arms round his neck and buried her head in his shoulder.

"I'm so sorry, Thomas, I'm—"

His right hand shot forward, closing around Corinne's neck in a grip like a battle armor claw. She tried to pull free, but he squeezed harder. "You selfish bitch." His hand closed further. Her eyes bulged. "Not satisfied with the throne, you try to kill my family, too?"

Corinne could only gurgle. Her left hand clutched vainly at his grip on her throat, while her other hand struggled to recover the discarded pistol. She kicked him, but he barely felt it.

"Thomas, no," Sherry's voice, little more than a whisper, held urgency. Thomas pushed his niece away. She fell back, gasping for breath. With Jessica still hanging from his neck, Thomas recognized his wife's predicament. She had been shielded from much of the shower of polymer needles—by the boys, he realized to his horror—but the fringes of the cloud had shredded clothes and the flesh across her upper back. She was bleeding profusely, the ends of dozens of needles protruding from her skin. He knew enough to realize that with appropriate medical attention she might survive, but if they fled she'd be denied any chance of life. The desire to escape fought with the desire to save her. *If I take her with me, she dies. If I leave her, they'll use her against me. They won't stop hunting me, though, so could my enemy's home be the safest place for her?* If he left her there, would they think him leashed, while in reality he could quietly continue the war? Was it the sacrifice of a queen to allow the pawns to advance?

"Go, Thomas. Take Jessie and go," Sherry whispered. She understood. Both his wives had a keen grasp of political reality, and he loved them for it.

"I'll make sure she gets medical aid. No one will harm her. No one," Corinne rasped as she looked around for something to staunch the blood flow. "You have my word."

"That's worth nothing, girl. Yours and your father's both."

Corinne glared at him. "Every minute you waste is a minute less to save Sherry." She wiped bloody hands on her jacket, leaving gory streaks on the dress whites. She looked down and then stripped off the jacket, using it as an impromptu dressing. "And believe it or not, not everyone is against you. Yes, papa decided your time was up—something spooked him, something you were going to do, he said.

Thomas' scarred hand gripped one of Sherry's while he brushed hair from her face with the other. She tried to smile, but winced. "Did he say what?"

"Something about rogue Knights and 'Stevens,' whoever that is." Thomas raised his eyebrows, but made no comment. "By the time I found out, about an hour ago, it was too late to head things off. I couldn't stop the coup, but I can mitigate its effects. Dad wants me to be Captain-General, but I have no plans to cooperate with his friends. The Word will find Atreus much less hospitable than they hoped." A wry grin crossed her face even as she tried to staunch the blood flow from Sherry's back. "In fact, if I have my way it'll become a quagmire for them."

"Love, leave me here. Trust her," Sherry gasped.

Thomas leaned forward and kissed his wife's forehead. Her eyes closed. A faint smile played across her lips and her breathing became regular. He stood, then crossed to the boys, reached down and closed their eyes. He whispered a quiet prayer.

"Go," Corinne urged. "There's a shuttle on Pad Two that will take you and Jessie to the *Raptor*. Captain Bowen can still be trusted and he'll get you to safety. Duke Halas will take you in, you and his granddaughter both. Hell, even Alys won't turn you away now, though from what I gathered from Dad she may well have other problems on her plate. Chris Halas is your best bet, particularly as Dad knows I won't take the League to war against itself. There you'll only be facing Blakists." She glanced down at the two boys. "Whatever you choose, I'll make sure they receive a funeral that befits their status."

"Paul will kill you, or his brother will," he said. She looked at him quizzically. "You'll figure it out. And they'll use Sherry against me and Duke Christopher."

"I'll do what I can to shield Sherry. As for the other, Dad needs me. After all, how can I be held responsible for you overpowering two of his elite troops? Especially since, in the chaos of the coup, someone accidentally switched off all the security pickups." She glanced up at the camera that observed the corridor. "They won't be able to get that working for hours." This time her grin was genuine. "I turned them off before trying to rescue you, and the toaster-worshippers will spend ages working out which prayer to say to get things working right again. Now, go!" She gestured down the corridor with her chin.

Thomas rose from his crouch near the boys. He took a step down the corridor, then turned back and leaned down toward Corinne and his wife. "Keep her safe, and yourself." He bent down and kissed his wife one last time. Jessica reached down too, a small hand grasping toward her mother.

Then Thomas Marik, former Captain-General of the Free Worlds, rose and strode down the paneled hallway and into exile.

STATE OF THE SPHERE: 3070

Welcome to tonight's special report, "State of the Sphere: 3070", here on INN. I'm Michael Bosworth, your host. Before we begin, I'd like to thank ComStar's tireless engineers and communications specialists for working around the clock over these past eighteen months in an effort to purge the HPG network of the Word of Blake virus that has corrupted much of our recent programming. We here at INN know it has been an inconvenience to our audience, and while we have not fully re-established regular unfettered services, we have isolated and eliminated a fair portion of the interference.

Presented here tonight is a rundown of the events that have occurred across the Inner Sphere since our last report in October of 3068. While many of our own reports and newsfeeds over the past several months were hopelessly garbled and tampered with by the Blakists, our colleagues with the InterStellar Associated Press services have graciously allowed us to access their own material for this comprehensive review. In addition, unprecedented access has been given to us by many of the other state news and intelligence services, enabling us to bring you declassified reports and summaries from all levels of government. In cases where access remained restricted, other sources have been gleaned for information that may shed light on certain subjects. Whenever possible, we have tried to bring you all types of voices, so that we may all better grasp the Sphere-wide war the Word of Blake continues to wage, seemingly against all of humanity.

We have attempted to provide as much of the material as possible in chronological order, to give you, the audience, a sense of structure. Please understand that while we have tried to be as thorough and as selective as possible in making sure the material herein is accurate, some pieces may contradict others or even contain false or misleading information due to certain biases, opinions, slants and even outright Blakist manipulations. As we fight through this Word of Blake Jihad, we here at INN will continue to update and correct any misinformation.

Our review of the past few years of this terrible war begins with a rundown of the known events that occurred in the chaotic time between the Star League dissolution and the Blakist White-Out in late 3068.

—Michael Bosworth, INN Special Correspondent, Orestes, Free Rasalhague Republic, 3 January 3071

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Jihad Hot Spots: 3070 (JHS: 3070) is a sourcebook for *Classic BattleTech* that continues where *Dawn of the Jihad* (DotJ) left off, providing players and gamemasters with an ongoing first-hand look at the events of the Word of Blake Jihad from the closing months of 3068 through the end of 3070. To best reflect the continuing chaos and uncertainty of this period, the material presented in this sourcebook—and in subsequent *Jihad Hot Spots* books—will use the same format of compiled news articles, interviews and "first-person" material featured in *DotJ*. In addition, as the truth of events comes to light,

INTRODUCTION

this book and its successors will include a timeline describing those events known to be true from previous books, while also providing additional campaign scenarios and even new game rules and units based on developments in the appropriate time period.

Beginning with *A Sphere in Flames*, *Jihad Hot Spots: 3070* reviews the events that led up to and through *DotJ*, including those incidents nearly lost to HPG interference initiated by the Word of Blake on 25 October 3068. A review of known events—removed enough from the immediate chaos to be considered fact by nearly everyone in the *Classic BattleTech* universe—is also provided here.

The following sections take us forward in six-month increments, using the same basic format as *DotJ*, but with a more chronological focus. Each of these sections includes scenario tracks (called *Chaos Unleashed*) compatible with the *Chaos Unbound* campaign system outlined in *DotJ*. Gamemasters and players can use these campaign scenarios, which follow the *Chaos Unbound* system, for any number of one-off games. We chose not to reprint the campaign system in this book so as to provide more room for articles and "hard" rules later on. *Taking Stock*, the final sourcebook section, wraps up events through 3070, covering a few remaining key happenings between late 3068 and the end of 3070.

The final section, *Jihad Hot Spots: 3070 Rules Annex*, highlights new special rules and spotlights a few new units for *Classic BattleTech* game play whose introductions and/or use played a major role in the events preceding and featured within this book. Future *Hot Spots* books will add to these rules as the war continues, roughly approximating the pace at which new developments became widespread factors in the greater conflicts of the Jihad.

ABOUT THE CHAOS: UNLEASHED CAMPAIGN

The campaign tracks presented in *Jihad Hot Spots: 3070* (JHS: 3070) follow the same rules as originally presented in *Dawn of the Jihad* (DotJ). As such, to use the tracks in JHS: 3070, players will need the rules presented on pages 134 to 138 of *DotJ*; those rules can also be found on-line at www.classicbattletech.com.

Players and game masters (GMs) will also find these rulebooks handy, depending on the type of campaign run: *Battletech Master Rules, Revised* (BMR), *AeroTech 2, Revised* (AT2), *Classic BattleTech RPG* (CBT: RPG), *Classic BattleTech Companion* (CBTComp), *Maximum Tech, Revised* (MT), *Combat Operations* (CO), *Combat Equipment* (CE), *Interstellar Players* (IP), *FM: Mercenaries, Revised* (FMMercs), *Mercenaries Supplemental I and II* (MS1 and MS2, respectively).

If a track does not specify certain parameters, it is up to the GM to decide what is fair to their particular player group. The overall concept of this campaign is to present GMs with a framework that allows them to bring their players through the massive conflagration known as the Word of Blake Jihad. Player groups may begin this arc of the Chaos campaign with 1,000 Warchest Points, starting with the *Leading Edge*, *One For the Money*, or *Graveyard Shift* Tracks; all generic militias referenced in these tracks are non-Mech forces, using the D column of their parent affiliation's random assignment table.

connection/JIHAD HOT SPOTS:3070/section03: A SPHERE IN FLAMES

A SPHERE IN FLAMES





A SPHERE IN

WAR ENGULFS INNER SPHERE

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

We have also interspersed a number of related articles with this text, which will hopefully give you a better understanding of what was happening in each of the Inner Sphere nations when the Jihad struck.

—Michael Bosworth, INN Special Correspondent

A WAR IN REVIEW

Only one year has passed. In a few scant days, we will recognize the first anniversary of what many consider to be the "official" start of this so-called Jihad. Yet after only one year, should we truly be placing the blame for all our ills squarely on the shoulders of the Word of Blake? *[Ok, interesting take, Steve. I'm willing to see where this leads. -Ed]*

When looking at the evidence now, from a more objective distance, the issue of this Sphere-wide conflagration isn't that cut and dried. Many other events have occurred during this stretch of time, with less obvious connections to the "evil" Word of Blake. *[Bias here? Not sure that's really appropriate for a review piece. -Ed]*

One could even say that some evidence suggests Wolf's Dragoons are the true instigators here. *[Interesting. -Ed]*

MERCENARY BETRAYALS CONTINUE

(7 October 3068)

Galatea [DBC]—The MRBC has declared Mobile Fire a rogue unit. It has now been confirmed that Mobile Fire broke off negotiations to extend their contract and have taken service with the Word of Blake.

[Listen not to these lies! Know that the Word of Blake offers honest coin for faithful service. We salute the skill and courage of contract military advisors, and offer a wide and exciting variety of employment opportunities.]

With Mobile Fire abandoning their post, the LAAF has been caught flat-footed. A Blakist invasion force struck New Earth mere days after Mobile Fire jumped out of the New Earth system. Amid confused reports coming from New Earth has been news that the Blakists have repeated the atrocities they inflicted on Outreach, Tharkad and Dieron. Neighboring systems are also reported to be under attack.

[Still the unbelievers besmirch our reputation! Know for all time that we did not use nuclear weapons on Tharkad. Nor have Muphrid, Thorn and New Earth been subjected to the kind of intensive bombardment reported.]

The MRBC has reminded all mercenary commands that any who accept service with the Blakists will be branded rogue.

THE DRAGOONS DEBACLES

In mid-October of 3067, a large conglomeration of mercenaries incited a revolt against the Dragoons on Outreach. Led by Colonel Wayne Waco, the rebel forces engineered a sneak attack that wiped out much of the Home Guard and eventually killed Jaime Wolf. These "rogues" included several down-and-out units,

TIMELINE OF THE JIHAD

3066

(18 February) Word of Blake declares formation of Word of Blake Protectorate, including many Chaos March worlds.

(7 March) Wolf's Dragoons, the Northwind Highlanders and the Dismal Disinherited form Allied Mercenary Command (AMC) to stem rising Word of Blake influence in the Chaos March.

3067

(20 April) FedCom Civil War ends.

(8 September) With the recent deaths of four Clan leaders, the Northwind Highlanders exercise escape clauses in all current contracts and begin to return home for elections.

(10 October) Despite AMC efforts, the planet Hall joins the Free Worlds League. Blakist machinations are suspected.

(15 October) Commanded by Wayne Waco, rogue mercenaries in Harlech City on Outreach launch a surprise attack against

Wolf's Dragoons and the Hiring Hall. Roughly half of the on-planet Dragoons forces are destroyed by October 19th. Jaime Wolf is killed in battle. The Dragoons' subsequent "Condition Feral" assures no survivors among the primary attacking forces, including the Fifty-first Dark Panzer Brigade, Smithson's Chinese Bandits and Waco's Rangers. Evidence of Blakist influence is uncovered.

(November) The Second Dismal Disinherited mercenary regiment arrives on Outreach from Tall Trees. Maeve Wolf, en route to Outreach with the Dragoons' Alpha Regiment—recently released from its contract—orders Gamma Regiment to exercise its contract escape clause from Tikonov.

(28 November) The Star League Conference begins on Tharkad, with all Great Houses in attendance save Liao, and representatives from ComStar, Word of Blake, the Rasalhague Republic and the Taurian Concordat. After a scathing message delivered

A SPHERE

people relegated to Outreach's fringes by the Dragoons' own self-instigated class structure. *[Ok, that's your opinion. Strike that. If you can prove a pattern there, then do so—possibly in another article. –Ed]* Some of the more level-headed among them—like the Dark Panzer Jaegers and Smithson's Chinese Bandits—sided with Colonel Waco and attempted to address the problem the only way mercenaries know how, by war. The revolt failed, and both sides suffered gravely.

Rather than address the social and economic causes of the revolt, the Dragoons instead proclaimed that the Word of Blake was behind Waco's attack, offering scant proof in support. In what some might characterize as Clan-like hubris, they gathered their forces and headed off to strike the Terran system, recalling several commands that were under contract to other employers, invoking vague clauses that left many employers in the lurch. *[Granted, pulling units out on the basis of escape clauses is a way to manipulate the system, but in the Dragoons' defense, their celebrated leader was murdered, and only revenge would sate that wound. –Ed]*

THE STAR LEAGUE FAILURE

And then the Star League conference takes a downturn when Chancellor Liao decides he has no more use for the august Star League Council—meaning, to some, that he can no longer find a way to selfishly manipulate it further *[and Theodore didn't? –Ed]*—and quits the League. The Steiner-Davion children then astonishingly agree with Liao, and also decide to withdraw, because in their own family squabble they have destroyed trillions of C-bills of infrastructure, economic assets and military forces. Rather than call on the Star League for economic assistance—which is

WAS THE STAR LEAGUE SABOTAGED?

(26 January 3068)

Orestes [ISAP]—Guests left dangling on purpose, House Lords spewing insults, long-standing members stepping back for no obvious reason, WarShips of legend, the Word of Blake losing its last shred of sanity, unexplained reactor explosions: The last Star League Conference had it all.

And none of that mattered anymore as the Inner Sphere once more plunged headfirst into a dark age. Granted, when war is brewing, no one cares about what or who started it in the first place. And the Word of Blake makes a convenient institution to stick it to.

["Blake's spirit guides the fate of the universe. Those following his path are mere vessels of his will. Those believing in his path will be rewarded. Those opposing him will feel his disregard and they will be left behind."]

But are they really the true reason behind everything? Shouldn't we take a closer look at the aforementioned events? And what of the very plausible rumor about an attempt on First Lord Christian Mānsdottir's life? Though vehemently denied by his office, the First Lord's malady, while 'almost' well concealed, didn't stem from insufficiently prepared Grumian clams. Instead—so credible sources among the court claim—it came from a slow-working poisonous substance that had to be administered to the First Lord over an extended period of time during last year.

partly why it's there—they decide they're better off without anyone else's help. First Lord Mānsdottir, despite his illness (rumors of poisoning notwithstanding) made a valiant and noble effort to

TIMELINE OF THE JIHAD

by courier from Chancellor Sun-Tzu Liao, Princess Regent Yvonne Steiner-Davion of the Federated Suns and Archon Peter Steiner-Davion of the Lyran Alliance announce plans to withdraw from the League, citing internal matters. Despite a desperate bid to shore up the Star League by inducting the Word of Blake and the Taurian Concordat against a looming "no confidence" vote, the League formally dissolves.

(5 December) After a final threat from Word of Blake representatives, Blakist fleets attack Tharkad and New Avalon. The assault on Tharkad is spearheaded by the long-lost LCS *Invincible*, in Star League colors and crewed by Word of Blake. The opening volleys strike just outside Tharkad City and set off a catastrophic meltdown of the city's reactor. Initial reports, however, claim the Blakists loosed a nuclear device on the capital.

At New Avalon, AFFS WarShips attempt to interdict the inbound Blakist fleet and successfully cripple the attacking

flagship. Heavy fighting in space precedes a subsequent bombardment aimed directly at Avalon City. Both the Tharkad and New Avalon fleets subsequently drop ground troops on their respective capitals, estimated at nearly a full division each.

(7 December) In retaliation for the Harlech assault, Wolf's Dragoons leads a punitive AMC assault against Mars, consisting of Beta Regiment and Zeta Battalion, the Second Dismal Disinherited and Lindon's Battalion, augmented by Home Guard forces and the Dragoons WarShips *Beowulf* and *Athena*. The assault fails, with all forces reported lost over Mars one day later.

(15 December) Word of Blake forces blockade Northwind, reportedly destroying or capturing all Highlander transport assets.

(19 December) Luthien HPG falls silent.

(20 December) Word of Blake naval forces arrive in the Outreach system, destroy the Dragoons defending WarShips *Nelson* and



A SPHERE IN FLAMES

salvage the League by installing two new members—the Taurian Concordat and the Word of Blake—but alas, the historic vote not to disband failed to carry the required two-thirds majority. And thus dies, with a gavel's bang, the noblest experiment in human history since the original Star League. *[Waxing a bit dramatic there. Tone it down. –Ed]*

The Word of Blake, incensed that the House Lords would give up so easily, ordered their small WarShip fleets near both Steiner-Davion capitals into planetary orbit. Perhaps they thought that just by showing their massive naval might, they could help the Steiner-Davion leaders realize what they risked by selfishly disbanding the League. *[Interesting. I assume you have proof of this? Because you know you cannot make blind assumptions here. Forward me what you have. –Ed]* At Tharkad, a weapons misfire struck too close to the Estates General and ignited a nuclear blast. At New Avalon, the trigger-happy FedSuns navy opened fire on the approaching Blake ships, which returned fire in self-defense. Those incidents, like so many others in our human history, set off a firestorm. *[Ok, I think you're being a bit too presumptive here, unless you have explosive proof from recordings and whatnot that I'm not aware of. If I didn't know better, I'd think you were trying to make the Word look like misunderstood saviors. I'm going to recommend you either strike this or reword it. –Ed]*

Even so, if the Dragoons' self-serving attack on the Terran system hadn't occurred two days later, the Word of Blake probably would have been able to work things out despite the apparent errors. *[Now you're treading the line of propaganda. I've not heard*

anything of this, so you'd better have proof. –Ed] Instead, the mercenaries, operating under the mistaken belief that they are a nation unto themselves, launched a doomed operation against Mars. Even now—nearly a year later—the final fate of all the attackers remains unknown.

DESPERATELY SEEKING GABRIEL

(28 October 3068—System Error 0404—Backup Transmitted 20 November 3068)

Arc Royal [INN]—Last year, the Word of Blake unleashed an armada of WarShips on an unsuspecting Inner Sphere. The “Ruins of Gabriel” unquestionably played a role in creating that fleet. Whispers of a Star League cache or depot located in Lyran space circulated for years, but with the discovery of Camelot Command the issue was thought closed. Apparently, however, the Word of Blake discovered another SLDF facility.

“Blake's holy light guides our steps.”

Locating the Ruins of Gabriel and cutting the Word of Blake off from its resources is now a matter of the highest priority.

“The eyes of unbelievers shall be clouded. Only the Faithful may find the way!”

The Blakists recovered enough resources to kick-start the Free Worlds League WarShip program and provide aid to the Capellan Confederation.

“The time when we receive payment for our services approaches.”

In addition, the Ruins probably contributed to the Blakist efforts to increase their own fleet strength. Some reports estimate no less than fifty capital ships.

“Tremble before Blake's might!”

Inconsistent sighting reports, weird jump signatures—evidence is growing that the Word of Blake vessels have K-F drives whose performance is hitherto undreamed of. If this is true, then estimates of enemy fleet strength could be grossly exaggerated. But the implications are frightening. The ability to rapidly concentrate forces to achieve local superiority would effectively throw conventional strategic thinking out the airlock, much as the wide-scale deployment of lithium-fusion batteries did during the Reunification War.

“The Warriors of Blessed Blake shall fight with the strength of Five!”

What other technological marvels (or nightmares) could emerge from the Ruins? Wild stories of 200-ton BattleMechs or AI combat computers replacing MechWarriors may need to be reevaluated.

“As foretold, the anvil of knowledge is used to forge the weapons of redemption.”

TIMELINE OF T

Darius along with the planet's orbital stations, and hold off a last-ditch defense by the Dragoons flagship *Alexander*.

(21 December) Clan Nova Cat forces on Tukayyid and elsewhere in Combine space, including their attached WarShips, abruptly withdraw to the Irece Prefecture. Elements of the reactionary Black Dragon Society launch a coup against the Luthien government. Blakist ground forces land on Outreach, initiating a massive battle on both primary continents.

(24 December) General Helen Thrall, head of the Sirian Concordance, is assassinated, reportedly by Skye agents.

(26 December) Blakist forces unleash a devastating series of orbital bombardments and strategic nuclear attacks against the Dragoons and their allies on Outreach, reportedly annihilating all Dragoons on the Remus continent and devastating the mercenary unit's forces on Romulus.

A SPHERE

The Word of Blake struck back at the Dragoons and their allies with a devastating counterattack on Outreach. Shattering the defenders there with unexpected strength, the Blakists resorted to nuclear weapons on hardened Dragoons positions, to eliminate the threat of the renegade mercenaries.

DOMINOS FALLING

Meanwhile, around the Inner Sphere, other events unfolded even as the Word worked to pacify the civilian populations of Tharkad and New Avalon. The Black Dragon Society, sensing yet another opportunity for power, staged a coup on Luthien, seizing the palace and declaring Coordinator Theodore Kurita unfit for leadership. Units loyal to the Coordinator and to the Black Dragons clashed on the Black Pearl, shutting down the local HPG and doubtless terrifying the average Combine citizen. Pirate raids continued along the Periphery borders of all realms, along with the looming threat of the Wolf and Jade Falcon armies—two Clans who style themselves unbound by the Great Refusal of 3061. Agents allegedly from Skye assassinated General Helen Thrall on Christmas Eve, removing a stable voice in the FWL Parliament. *[All verifiable events. Good. Shows that it's not all about the Suns and the Lyrans. Stick to the facts like this and you'll be fine. —Ed]*

The beginning of 3068 saw the escalation of war as the House Lords threw off the restraints of the Star League that had previously bound them. Even ComStar jumped into the fray, attempting to seize power from their brethren in the Word of Blake.

In the Combine, rebel forces on Luthien galvanized after Coordinator Theodore Kurita disappeared while his delegation crossed into Kurita space. The Word of Blake, attempting to render

SOLARIS RESISTANCE BATTLES INVADERS

(30 July 3068—System Error 0404—Backup Transmitted 19 August 3068)

Solaris VII [VOICE OF FREEDOM]—For weeks now, the Solaris Home Defense League has successfully defended Solaran soil from the Blakist invaders. Thanks to the military genius of men such as Erik Gray, and with the valiant help of the men and women of the Silver Dragon, DeLon and many other stables, we have repelled the Blakists at every turn! We grow stronger with every day and every victory, and every free man and woman who joins our ranks! We hold secure the regions north of the—

["Terrorists. That's all these 'Solaris Home Defense League' thugs are. Erik Gray and his kin are nothing more but petty warlords, hoping to use this conflict as a means to become the overlords of this planet and turn it into their own private world, or one with a level of autonomy similar to that on Irian.

"One need only look at the carnage they inflicted on Solaris City. Through the childish and self-absorbed actions of these self-styled warlords, this planet's capital has been laid waste twice, and now it has been ravaged a third time. These war criminals do not represent the people of Solaris.

"In contrast, we offer the safety and hospitality of our refugee camps located all over the Greyland continent. If you desire safety, peace, warmth and food without the constant danger of being trampled by 'Mechs loose on the streets of Solaris, leave and join us.

"We strive to return peace to Solaris City, an effort handicapped by our desire to avoid civilian casualties and unnecessary damage. Our foes operate under no such restriction, and have casually thrown away the lives of those they claim to protect from us. How much longer will you tolerate their lies?"]

TIMELINE OF THE JIHAD

(28 December) The Dragoons flagship *Alexander* covers a general retreat from Outreach by surviving Dragoons and allied forces. The *Alexander* herself is destroyed. Blakist blockade of Outreach begins.

(30 December) Black Dragon forces gain control over Luthien. Blakist forces complete conquests of Epsilon Indi, Fletcher and Tall Trees.

3068

(1 January) Word of Blake naval and ground forces attack the Luthien system. Reports of Blakist support for the loyalists are unconfirmed due to a planetary blackout. Loyalist and Black Dragon forces engage the Word of Blake, sparking a three-way battle for planetary control.

(21 January) The Word of Blake WarShips *Deliverance* and *Blake's Sword*—last reported at Tharkad—appear at Tukayyid to at-

tack the Com Guard forces headquartered there. The Com Guard WarShips *Hammerstrike* and *Blake's Vengeance* are destroyed.

(28 January) Theodore Kurita suffers a stroke and falls into a coma while planning a campaign to reclaim Luthien. Hohiro Kurita, on Orestes at the time, does not immediately claim the throne. Blakist WarShips use coordinated orbital bombardment to cripple or destroy all Com Guard troops stationed on Tukayyid, as well as any SLDF units that rise to their defense.

(4 February) An allegedly renegade Free Worlds League *Eagle*-class WarShip (the *Percival*) raids Skye, and units sporting Sirian Lancers colors land on the planet to engage in a two-day battle with Skye forces. Duke Robert Kelswa-Steiner decries the assault, declares war on the League and calls all Skye-loyal troops to come to the Isle's defense. Word of Blake forces assault Dieron. Com Guard forces around the Terran system



COVENTRY BLOCKADE CONTINUES

(29 March 3068)

Coventry [DBC]—Their playgrounds are safe again, but how long until the children can watch the stars without fear?

Though the valiant Coventry Militia has driven the Word of Blake invaders from our home soil—gloriously shattering their ground forces in the effort—the danger seems far from over. Obviously unwilling to accept defeat, Blakist ships remain in-system, showing no intent to leave and continuing their illegal blockade.

["We offered a path to peace and prosperity to those deserving of it. We offer it again, for that very path to enlightenment can be a rocky one. Decide, or be still forevermore!"]

But even while the local aerospace defense is rallying its assets for a decisive excursion, one question is on everyone's mind: Can it really be that easy?

Despite all prejudices and appearances, the Word of Blake military command isn't ignorant and is well aware of Coventry's industrial importance. So their empty fleet still loitering around could be a harbinger of things to come.

["May Blake's wisdom come upon you in a blaze of light, people of Coventry!"]

May the universe have mercy on our souls.

humanitarian aid on the Combine capital, instead drew attacks from Loyalist DCMS and Black Dragon forces, plunging the heavily populated world into a three-way shooting war. *[Humanitarian aid? The record we have is the WOB commander declaring that he had arrived to assist the true loyalists of the Combine. Whether he meant one side or the other, we don't know. It looks to me like you're attempting to rewrite history here. I'm not liking this, Steve. -Ed]*

IN FLAMES

Seeking vengeance for a Lyran duke's attempt to influence Free Worlds League politics, Sirian forces launched a punitive raid against Skye. Unfortunately, the assault only brought further rage from the power-mad Duke Kelswa-Steiner, who promptly declared war on the Free Worlds League and—by action if not by words—took Skye out of the Alliance. Though he made no formal declaration of secession, the independent actions of this Lyran province speak loudly for themselves. Bolan Province followed suit shortly after its leader, Caesar Steiner, died in a suspected accident. *[Granted, the actions of Duke Kelswa-Steiner seem more in line with his own agenda for Skye. But I'm willing to cut him some slack, since at this time Archon Peter was MIA. -Ed]*

As for ComStar, Victor Steiner-Davion—who opposed Precentor Gavin Dow's dubious plan to invade Terra—failed to arrive to support his Com Guard troops as they invaded the Word of Blake homeworld. Thanks to failures of intelligence, coordination and leadership, the attack failed. Victor's late arrival, perhaps to claim victory after the fact, instead became a mad retreat from incensed Blakist defenders. *[That's a bit of a stretch. We know from the on-board press corps that the Invisible Truth was waylaid by a WOB attack. Again, it looks like you're trying to redefine history. I'm not pleased. -Ed]*

In the Chaos March, several worlds requested Word of Blake protection as war raged around them. To preserve their citizenry from further House aggression, the Word expanded its Protectorate to include most of the remaining Chaos March worlds, then followed up this action with pre-emptive strikes against major House stag-

TIMELINE OF THE JIHAD

begin gathering for Case White, a massive invasion aimed at Terra. The bulk of the Com Guard fleet and roughly eleven unengaged Com Guard divisions are called up for the offensive.

(10 February) The first batches of Blakist reinforcements reach Tharkad and New Avalon, extending the ground wars on both worlds.

(20 February) Contact with Precentor Martial Victor Steiner-Davion, personally assigned to lead Case White, is lost while he and his flagship, the *Invisible Truth*, are en route to the staging area.

(27 February) Caesar Steiner, Margrave of the Cavanaugh II Theater, is assassinated at his command post, allegedly by Free Worlds League agents.

(1 March) The Lyran Alliance's Bolan Province follows Skye's lead in declaring war on the Free Worlds and begins coordinating assault strategies with Duke Robert Kelswa-Steiner.

(9 March) ComStar's Case White invasion is launched.

(10 March) Bolan/Skye forces attack the Free Worlds League planets of Cascade, Megrez and Togwotee in the first wave of their invasion, codenamed Operation Überschatten.

(13 March) Due to widespread sabotage and an unexpectedly strong Blakist presence in the Terran system, Case White fails. (Reports of ground landings and nuclear attacks in Europe and North America remain unconfirmed.) The *Invisible Truth*, delayed until the 17th by an ambush, arrives too late to take part in the battle, and withdraws to report the total defeat of the Case White fleet, including all eleven divisions and more than twenty Com Guard WarShips. An estimated six Blakist vessels and a division of ground troops are thought to have been destroyed as well.

(14-17 March) Blakist raiders, supported by WarShips (or DropShips mounting capital weapons), attack the key Lyran industrial worlds of Donegal, Coventry and Hesperus II.

PROTECTORATE MILITIA FORMED

(1 August 3068)

Caph [VOICE OF TRUTH]—The Blake Protectorate today announced the formation of the Blake Protectorate Militia. This action was greeted with parades on every world currently enjoying the Word of Blake's benevolent guidance and selfless protection. After last month's addition of Shiloh, the Protectorate currently consists of Acamar, Arboris, Bryant, Cor Caroli, Caph, Capolla, Epsilon Eridani, Epsilon Indi, Keid, New Home, Shiloh and Terra Firma.

Hailed as an important move to increase security and stability in the region, officials with the Caph regional government in Aswan embraced the formation of the militia. Staffed largely by locals, the Protectorate Militia consists of large numbers of mechanized infantry regiments, supported by armored assets. The official statement, signed by Precentor Martial St. Jamais, further confirmed that all Protectorate Militia detachments could rely on BattleMech support of unspecified concentrations.

Funded directly by the Word of Blake, the Protectorate Militia has had a positive effect on local economies, providing work for those building the facilities and supporting the troops. On Caph alone, it is estimated that the Protectorate Militia added more than 50,000 new jobs to a region long suffering from abysmal unemployment rates. This effect is expected to drop off when the infrastructure for the militia is completed, but the steady income for those serving in or those supporting the militia, as well as the trade expected to come from the new bases, will likely keep local planetary economies humming for quite some time.

E IN FLAMES

ing bases, to stem attacks from the various Inner Sphere nations and spare their Protectorate further predation. Dieron became a focal point of this effort as the Combine's massed army collided with a smaller Blakist force, but even the capture of Hohiro Kurita in April failed to thwart the misguided Kurita advance. *[I'm beginning to wonder if you're more sympathetic to the Word of Blake. Pre-emptive strikes? That assault on Dieron was blatant, naked aggression. The Combine wasn't massing any type of strike force there. I'm thinking we need to have a one-on-one meeting soon. —Ed]*

By midsummer of that year, Duke George Hasek—perhaps taking a page from Kelswa-Steiner's playbook—used vague phraseology from the old St. Ives Compact Accord to validate a massive incursion into the Capellan Confederation. Even though the Compact ceased to exist in 3063, and conveniently ignoring the fact that the St. Ives worlds had embraced Confederation rule, the Capellan March Lord struck far into Confederation space, close enough to Sian to launch a naval strike at that world in an obvious effort to kill Chancellor Sun-Tzu Liao. Yet even with their leader lost, the Confederation has rallied, and even now works to push the Davion forces back.

THE CLAN FACTOR

The Clans, of course, also took advantage of the fog of war enveloping the Inner Sphere. Clan Snow Raven, recently arrived from their faraway homeworlds, unleashed an orgy of destruction and raids against several Combine planets on the Outworlds Alliance border, bringing their apparent Outworlds allies into the campaign. Moving without opposition along the border, the

TIMELINE OF THE JIHAD

(20 March) Clan Wolf in-Exile sends a task force to Outreach to evacuate any remaining Dragoons survivors, successfully extracting more than two companies of troops and scores of civilians despite heavy Blakist resistance. LAAF troops redeploy in an effort to shore up the Free Worlds border, despite General of the Armies Adam Steiner's admonishment of dukes Robert Kelswa-Steiner of Skye and Alder Umayr of Bolan for launching their joint invasion.

(30 March) The second wave of the Bolan/Skye offensive takes the League worlds of Colfax, Sheridan, Thermopolis and Pingree.

(April) Numerous raids—many now believed to be the work of Blakist forces or their mercenary allies—hit Addicks, Edasich, Talcott and New Valencia.

(16 April) Hohiro Kurita leads a DCMS task force to Dieron to confront Blakist forces there.

(25 April) Demeter's government submits to Word of Blake control.

(20 May) Skye/Bolan forces take Preston, Rexburg and McAfee.

(16 June) Unidentified invaders—later determined to be Word of Blake troops—invade Solaris VII, quickly overpowering any initial organized defense in the absence of the Com Guard forces relocated by the doomed Case White attack. In the confusion of the League-Alliance war, no one is certain at first who is behind the assault, but with so many stables and free agents on the world, an underground movement quickly forms to wage an ongoing guerilla war against the Blakists.

(18 June) Hohiro Kurita is captured by Word of Blake forces on Dieron. His commanders report him as "missing, presumed dead".

(19-21 June) The Word of Blake invades and conquers Altair, Asta, Fomalhaut and Yorri, using a combination of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons.

(25 June) Kai Allard-Liao vanishes while on a military inspection tour of St. Ives. Capellan officials blame Davion agents.



A SPHERE IN FLAMES

Raven fleet hit hard, then disappeared back into the Alliance near the end of the year, certain to return.

Meanwhile, the Jade Falcons seized the opportunity to launch several quick raids against Lyran border worlds. With the LAAF in disarray since Tharkad's blackout, the Lyran forces suffered major setbacks, convincing the Falcons that they can not only raid with impunity, but possibly seize the day and renew their stalled invasion. [A stretch. The Falcons are more interested in raids—we've not seen a concentrated invasion pattern since '58. -Ed]

IN A HANDBASKET

And so, by the close of 3068, where do we stand? Lyran and League forces clash all along the Bolan and Skye borders, with even Solaris VII caught in the League's counterattack. Davion units hit Combine worlds, citing "lost POWs" as an excuse, while simultaneously fighting a losing war against the Capellans. ComStar's strength has waned, and the Clans are once more on the warpath. Every known power in the Inner Sphere is fighting its neighbors while, in the center of it all, the Word of Blake struggles to bring more worlds into its protective fold. Indeed, theirs may be the only campaign aimed at selflessly protecting the common man, while every other conflict today serves only selfishness and greed. It is obvious now that the Star League's demise was all of our losses, as—within one year of its ending—all hell has broken loose.

[Ok, I'm stopping this right here. I've reread this four times now and I'm getting the distinct impression that you're extremely sympathetic to the Word of Blake. Face it, Steve, they've started a massive, genocidal war, using WMDs on many worlds—which you've neglected to mention beyond Outreach. You don't even cover the massive

HPG virus that afflicted more than a hundred worlds, cutting many of us off from our families and businesses Sphere-wide. Instead, you constantly paint the WoB as some misunderstood organization that was attacked without provocation and that acts only in self-defense or to protect their fellow man! You're attempting to redefine history so that the Word comes off as the tragic hero, but that only works in fiction, not journalism. We report facts here, not fancy.

I've given you a lot of leeway with us, Steve, and I've warned you time and again to keep these opinions to yourself. But after what I've just read, I've no choice but to pull your current assignments pending a more thorough review of your performance by the bureau chiefs. Expect a visit soon. If I were you, I might start praying to the Blessed Blake for all the good he'll do you. -Ed]

—Transcript of INN Zollikofen Inter-Office communiqué dated 1 December 3068

BLAKE'S JUDGMENT

(11 November 3068)

Terra [VOICE OF BLAKE]—The purging of the Mori Heresy continues in victory! Thanks to one of our own, the Blessed Acolyte McGruder, the succubus herself, the Deceiver Primus formerly known as Sharilar Mori, is dead! With the help of the Sainted Parrdeau, McGruder was the executor of Blake's own judgment on the founder of the Heresy! The spawn of the Combine, the duplicitous Mori—a traitor not only to Blake's vision but even to that of the fallen brothers!—has died an ignominious death, strangled in her spider's lair by the sanctified hands of one of our own!

The other traitor, the Devil-spawned Focht, slipped away like the snake he is. But he cannot run! He cannot hide! In our effort to

TIMELINE OF THE JIHAD

(28 June) Citing the Capellan Confederation's perceived involvement with the Word of Blake, reports of massive Capellan troop build-ups near the border, and an alleged arms trade with the Blakists, all of which pose a clear and present danger to the Federated Suns, and further claiming Duke Kai Allard-Liao's unexpected (and unexplained) defection to New Syrtis, Duke George Hasek, Lord of the Capellan March, launches Operation Sovereign Justice, an unsanctioned invasion of the Capellan Confederation. The campaign's stated goal is the isolation and liberation of the former St. Ives Compact from Capellan rule, and consists of three assault prongs aimed at encircling the region with a buffer zone of AFFS troops. Skye/Bolan forces claim Shasta, Idyld and Gallatin even as the FWLM launches a successful counterattack on Preston.

(2 July) Led now by Marshall Jeremy Brett, the FWLM takes back Colfax and McAfee. Duke Hasek's Operation Sovereign

Justice continues with the conquest of Minnacora, New Sagan and Capricorn III along one front, Relevow and Overton along the second, and Harloc, Decus, Purvo and Carmen on the third—all undefended worlds that link the attacking fronts together. Capellan counterattacks begin.

(9 July) Skye/Bolan forces take Niihan, Autumn Wind and Gannett.

(10-14 July) Clan Snow Raven's Swift Wing Galaxy Naval Star raids the undefended Draconis Combine worlds of Enif, Galedon and Tabayama in an apparent wave of reprisal strikes for the loss of the *White Cloud*.

(24 July) The FWLM reclaims Cascade, Gallatin and Idyld.

(1 August) By this date, the Word of Blake non-violently secures full control over the governments of Acamar, Arboris, Car Coroli, Caph, Capolla, Epsilon Indi, New Home, Terra Firma and Shiloh. The ComStar WarShip *Bordeaux* executes a daring raid on

TIME OF REVELATIONS



(26 October 3068)

Terra [VOICE OF BLAKE]—People of the Inner Sphere! The time has come to expose a vast conspiracy and unmask its perpetrators!

In spite of the Blessed Blake's efforts, war erupted when Minoru Kurita declared himself First Lord of the first Star League. Discovering that force alone could not achieve dominance over the Inner Sphere, the tyrannical Kurita clan waited for their opportunity and plotted.

Finally their chance came when their agent penetrated ComStar. Rising through the ranks, the infiltrator insidiously twisted and corrupted the Blessed Blake's great vision. Access to the HPG network allowed the Kuritas to spy on the other Great Houses and manipulate them. The Capellan Confederation—not the realm of the Dragon—felt the brunt of the Federated Suns-Lyran Commonwealth fury in the Fourth Succession War. The DCMS received equipment secretly siphoned from ComStar's own warehouses and held off the FedCom alliance in 3039. Theodore Kurita was informed that Luthien was the next target for Clans Smoke Jaguar and Nova Cat, and was ready when those Clans attacked.

The bitter truth is that Sharilar Mori, ComStar's so-called Primus, is that Kurita agent. Using her position in ComStar, she has worked ceaselessly to further her master's plans of conquest and domination!

Of-course, Mori has help—Anastasius Focht, for one. And who is Focht? None other than Frederick Steiner! Reportedly killed during the Fourth Succession War, General Steiner was captured by the Combine, brainwashed and then presented to then-Primus Myndo Waterly as a gift! With Mori's subtle prompting, Waterly accepted him into ComStar, thinking to make use of his experience in the ongoing expansion of the Com Guards.

It was no coincidence that Focht/Steiner chose Victor Steiner-Davion to succeed him as Precentor-Martial. Victor—seduced by Omi Kurita and with blood ties to Frederick—was easily persuaded to aid the Coordinator by using his influence over his siblings. When Katherine Steiner-Davion refused to be swayed, Victor used force to dethrone her and replace her with the easily controlled Yvonne and Peter.

Even the Free Worlds League has not been spared. After the bomb attack that killed Captain-General Janos Marik in 3035, everyone believed his son Thomas Marik had also died. Months later, Thomas Marik miraculously reemerged—scarred, but alive. Who would have suspected the bizarre reality—that this was not Thomas Marik? Seizing this unique opportunity, Sharilar Mori had substituted a double—an easy task when scarring and “reconstructive surgery” could explain away physical inconsistencies.

Where is the proof, you ask?

Precentor Demona Aziz knew the truth, but lacked the evidence. Instead, she fled Terra to keep Jerome Blake's vision alive. Now, after years of painstaking investigation, we have proof—and will share it with you all.

Brothers and sisters! Now you see what heretics have made of Blessed Blake's dream! Abandon those who have played you false and subverted your work for their tyrannical master on Black Luthien. Come to us! Come to Terra! We will welcome you back to the true way of Blake with open arms.

TIMELINE OF THE JIHAD



Tukayyid to extract Primus Mori and several key Com Guard officers stranded there by the Blakist WarShip blockade.

(5 August) Citing the loss of stability on Luthien and the Coordinator's ill health, Pesht Military District Warlord *Tai-shu* Kiyomori Minamoto formally assumes command of the DCMS.

(7-14 August) FedSuns commandos and smaller 'Mech units attached to the Draconis March stage a series of deep objective raids on the undefended Combine worlds of Altais, Chichibu, Junction, Barlow's Folly, Misery and Beta Mensae V, allegedly looking for and liberating some FCCW-era POWs.

(20 August) Capellan March troops secure Aldertaine, Glasgow, Hexare, Imalda, New Westin and Homestead even as Capellan counterattacks bog down two of Sovereign Justice's three fronts.

(22-30 August) Word of Blake troops assault Liberty and Genoa, though resistance on Genoa continues.

(1 September) Jeremy Brett's FWLM counterattack hits Alchiba, Milton, Phecda, Alchiba and Wyatt. The following day, League troops strike at Ford, Gausar and Loric, endangering the Skye/Bolan supply lines. Timbiqui and Poulsbo fall to League troops on the 3rd.

(10 September) The Free Worlds League overruns Dixie and Arcadia.

(11-17 September) DCMS forces raid the FedSuns worlds of Benet III and Cassias, and capture David and Xhosa VII, in reprisal for the recent spate of FedSuns attacks.

(20 September) FWLM troops take Alcor, Denebola, Mizar and Summer. Capellan and Hasek-sympathetic troops clash throughout the St. Ives region.

(28 September) League forces assault Khon Kaen, Penobscot and Cavanaugh II, driving back Lyran forces.

(3 October) The unexpected recall of both Knights of the Inner Sphere regiments to Atrous weakens the central thrust of Marshall



A SPHERE IN FLAMES

destroy the Taint of the Steiner clan, we have destroyed his home on Orestes. We have destroyed his duped protectors of the First Tyr. We have shattered the deceived brothers of two Com Guard divisions. And we have crippled the last vestiges of the "mighty" ComStar navy by gutting the *Bordeaux*, even as the traitor escaped our vengeance! There is precious little shadow to hide in, Demon! We will return and finish our glorious cause as we let you stew in the blood you have spilled to save your own hide!

BLACKOUT ON ATREUS?

(5 November 3068)

Irian [ISAP]—Whoever stops by the stock exchange here on Irian these days gets the chance at a rare view: Where once reigned an air of serene professionalism—seemingly untouched by whatever happens outside—these mighty halls and corridors now brim over with what is best described in a single word: chaos.

The reason: Ten days have passed since the loss of all communication from Atreus, and still nobody knows any details about the cause or how long this blackout will last.

Judging from past figures, one might think that Irian stock traders would be used to such events. Not in this case, though. For the markets still struggling to cope with the surprising flare-up of hostilities all over the Inner Sphere, losing contact with government and the League's second largest stock exchange proved fatal. Like a flock of head-cut roosters, traders and companies all over Irian and adjacent regions literally sped in all directions. Selling and buying seems to be done on sheer impulse, with no recognizable overall trend, turning the quotation-boards into mere jukeboxes. Not even the most daring of consultants try prognosis anymore.

Or, as Mikhail Favre from Seeholzer & Eagle puts it: "For once all bets really are off. Best buy yourselves a big mattress."

And the sky's not just going to clear up. IMI reports increasing signal degradation on *all* incoming HPG transmissions, announcing massive delays on message delivery due to the necessary clean-up process.

FOCHT'S POWER PLAY

She's dead! I can't believe this, but that bitch is dead! Mori is no more!

God, that was lame. It's too bad for me that I don't have an editor for stuff like that. It's a literal brain dump, and you are getting all of it. But hey, it's your drachma. So let's get down to the meat of things.

I just got word from one of the people at ComStar interested in actually transmitting news. He's a staff member for the Inner Circle of Precentors, which puts him in contact with the top dogs all of the time. It also means he's part of the background, which will hopefully keep him as a source for me. In any case, here's what he sent me:

"Jim [no; that's *NOT* my real name!], you can't believe the stories about Mori's death. Our reverent leader died in the same manner as our prior Primus—an externally initiated brain aneurysm. And who was the initiator? None other than that one-eyed warmonger himself, Focht. He didn't retire to write his memoirs. Hell, he didn't even retire. I visited him once, running a batch of research material out to him. When I got there, he was just coming out of the shower after a morning of running around in that *Atlas* of his. Only a soldier still soldiering would spend a morning training in that hulking monstrosity. Well, maybe if he was a Lyran, but we all know that Focht hails from Terra.

"So Focht shows up today, surprising everybody with the unannounced visit, and he has an oversized attaché case with him. After walking into the room, Focht turned around and secured the door behind him. This surprised everybody in the anteroom, but the shouting match that followed put us into shocked silence. Nobody said anything; they just sat there and tried to make out what was going on in there. Things were getting heated, when all of a sudden a gunshot rang out. Everybody froze. Just sat there frozen. We're all soldiers, we all saw combat against the Clans. Some of it was bloody, hand-to-hand. We all thought of ourselves as veterans. Yet that one gunshot froze us all. A moment later, the doors opened up and Focht simply walked out."

There you go, folks. It's true. I verified this with other sources (at least the "she's dead" part). My only wish is that ComStar makes her burial site open to the public. I want to go and piss on her grave.

—Renegade Summer InterWeb posting by "Starling", 1 November 3068

TIMELINE OF

Brett's counter-invasion of the Lyran Alliance. Capellan March troops seize Housekarle, No Return and Randar as Duke Hasek rushes to resupply troops poised near Sian.

(7 October) An apparent orbital strike, allegedly launched by one or more FedSuns WarShips, pummels the capital city on Sian. The attack kills Candace Liao, who is visiting Sian at the time, and Chancellor Sun-Tzu Liao is reported missing, feared dead among the ruins. Rather than shattering Capellan resolve, the attack galvanizes the Confederation, as even elements of Free Capella and pro-St. Ives elements decry the apparent FedSuns attack. *Sang-jiang-jun* Talon Zahn declares himself Military Regent of the Confederation. The Word of Blake captures Muphrid, Thorin and New Earth. The use of tactical nuclear weapons is alleged on all three worlds. Clan Jade Falcon seizes Graus from the Lyran Alliance.

(16 October) Contact with Canopus and its neighboring systems is lost.

CAN WE TRUST COMSTAR?

(30 October 3068)

Robinson [ROBINSON HERALD]—This question is less straightforward than it may seem.

The revelations released last week by the Word of Blake before the whole HPG network became useless provide far too many questions, and far too few answers.

There are people who believe that the allegations are intended to cause additional distrust against two organizations who oppose the Word: the Free Worlds League and ComStar. If the network has been shut down by ComStar as a matter of damage control, this may be true. But just as likely, the Word is interrupting transmissions to disrupt efforts against them, and to prevent people from putting a word in edgewise to their point of view.

Some people forget that the Word used to be ComStar. Some say there's still no difference, that it's all a ruse, an elaborate Operation Scorpion Version Two and that Case White never happened.

If that is true, then the allegation takes on a new meaning for us.

Certainly, having an O5P agent in the First Circuit and then as Primus would explain the favoritism ComStar has shown the Dracs over the years. The Free Rasalhague Republic? The Ghost Regiments? The Explorer Corps? OmniMechs? ComStar as agents of the Dragon.

But if there is no difference between ComStar and the Word, then revealing Sharilar Mori's "true" identity is intended to focus our attention on the Dracs.

Certainly we've got plenty of reason to come knocking. Except now we get to add, depending on one's interpretation, that their buddy, ComStar, no longer possesses the means to give them some more Ghost Regiments. They're on their own.

But if ComStar and WoB are one and the same, then the Dracs are the allies of the Word of Blake. If that is so, we had better take that particular ally out of the equation. It's been long overdue!

THE PLAYERS GATHER

White-out.

Somebody creating a lot of noise, just to cover their own messages. It makes sense; the best place to hide a message is in plain sight. But who's behind the white-out? Only one of three groups could be responsible: ComStar, the Word of Blake or the Clans. Knowing the motives of each will help us figure out whodunit.

The Word of Blake is the most likely group behind it. They've shown no restraint in using unconventional tactics. After all, they decided the best way to get their message across about the Star League was to use a nuke on Tharkad. It's no great stretch of the imagination to see them pulling a stunt like this. But they're not the ones behind things. There's only the one HPG system, so even the Word of Blake is affected by this little mess. They're not the culprits.

ComStar is number two on the list. Borrowing some land from the Rasalhagians, managing to piss off some of the locals in the process, ComStar and the Com Guards have built their own little empire. This is, of course, a far cry from their last empire. But is it enough for them to bite their noses off to spite their face? I don't think so. After all, ComStar earns its operating capital solely from the trade in HPG messages. At least the Word of Blake was smart enough to diversify their income.

The Clans are an oft-forgotten group with HPG capabilities. Their WarShips sport the transmitters, which is flat-out terrifying. But that's not the worst of it. Word has it that the Clans still in Clan space are getting really annoyed with their brethren out here. Word also has it they have their *own* HPG network. What do these two things have in common? Have the Home Clans ironed out their differences, and are they coming back for a second round in the Inner Sphere? And if they are, what side are the local Clans going to fight on?

—Renegade Skye InterWeb posting by "Starling", 7 November 3068

TIMELINE OF THE JIHAD

(17 October) FWLM forces continue to press forward into Lyran space, striking at Syrma and Zebebelgenubi.

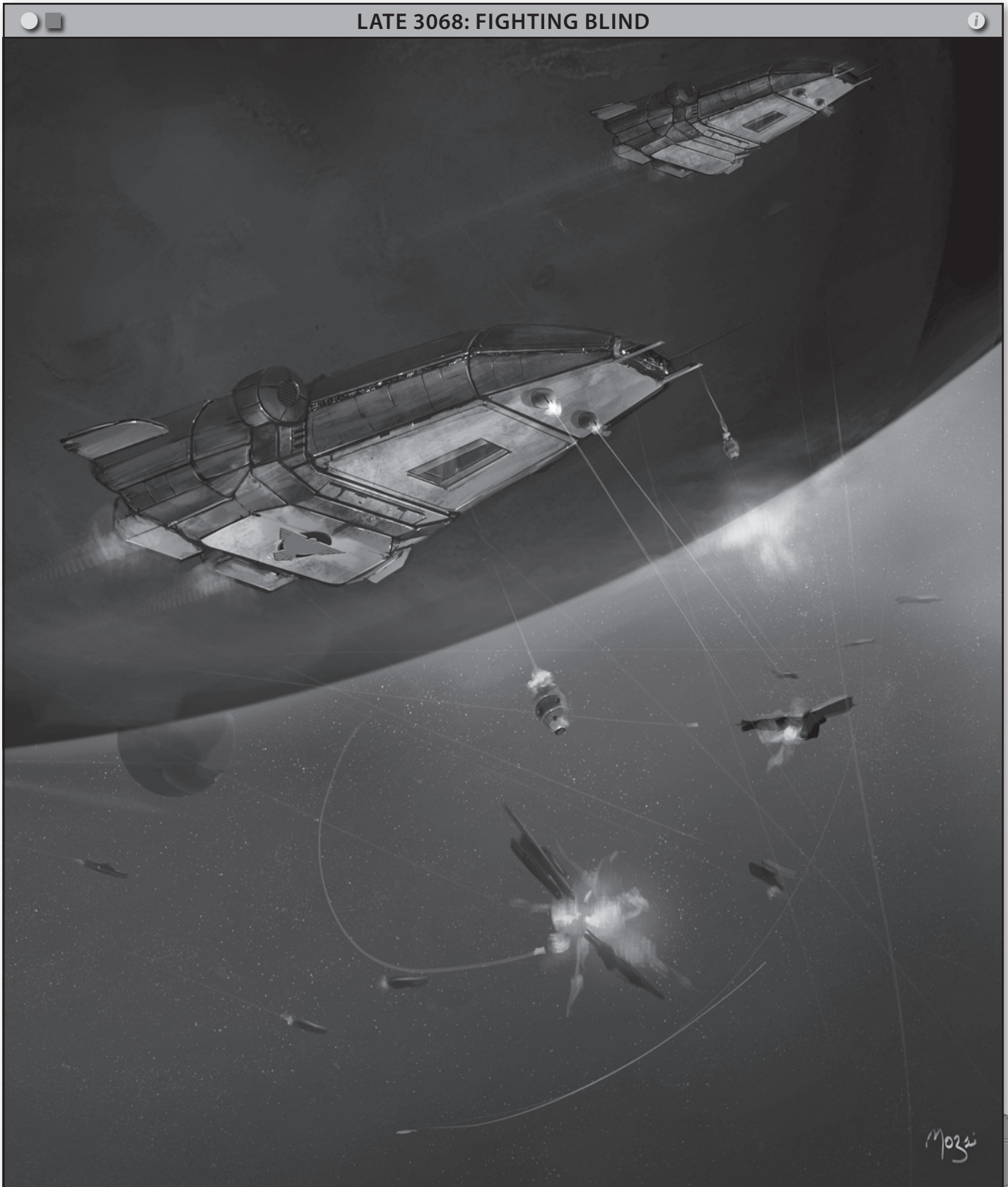
(24 October) The Knights of the Inner Sphere arrive on Atreus.

(25 October) During a hastily arranged parade in honor of the returning Knights, the Word of Blake attacks Atreus. Chemical weapons reportedly kill the bulk of Parliament and the Knights themselves, and a massive naval engagement between pro-Word and pro-League WarShips allegedly erupts in the capital system. Blakist propaganda broadcast just as

the attack commences declares Captain-General Thomas Marik to be a fraud, shortly before widespread disruption of the communications network begins. Across the Inner Sphere, a flood of Blakist propaganda and other interference chokes the hyperpulse generator network with "white noise".



LATE 3068: FIGHTING BLIND



LATE 3068: FIGHTING BLIND

The first months of what is now known as the “White-Out” shut down practically all communications between major worlds. Filling the HPG nets with rants, propaganda, obviously edited news reports and blatantly pro-Blake programming, the Word of Blake rendered most off-world communications virtually useless. Hardest hit were the more industrialized systems across the Inner Sphere; many worlds less important on a strategic scale were correspondingly less affected. With HPG communications corrupted and completely unreliable, the chaos and confusion added to the Word of Blake’s advantage.

As ComStar worked on neutralizing the HPG problem, the Lyran invasion of the Free Worlds League began to bog down, with the League continuing its counterattack and plunging deeper into the heart of Bolan Province. The Jade Falcons went from raids to outright invasions of several Lyran border worlds, apparently taking advantage of the LAAF’s complete military breakdown. The Combine began righting the Dragon’s ship, returning the capital to its ancient roots on New Samarkand as Warlord Minamoto stepped up to take command of the beleaguered nation.

The less-affected Capellan Confederation and Free Worlds League continued to press their advantage by continuing their counterattacks against their neighbors. Kittery fell with Word of Blake assistance, and the Capellans rallied from the FedSuns’ orbital strike on Sian to surge across the border into Duke George Hasek’s Capellan March. The Free Worlds League—despite the loss of Atreus to a massive blackout and the disappearance of an entire naval group—managed to keep its focus on punishing the Bolan/Skye attacks along the League border.

Many continued to view mercenaries with suspicion, especially after mercenary rampages against civilians on Victoria, the desertion of Romanov’s Crusaders and the complete lack of response from the Northwind Highlanders. ComStar suffered from ongoing Word of Blake attacks, the assassination of Primus Mori and the spreading White-Out virus. Only the Periphery nations remained untouched by the chaos enveloping the Inner Sphere, though the Canopus HPG remained unresponsive during this time.

In short, by year’s end, the chaos had only continued to build.

—Michael Bosworth, INN Special Correspondent

WAR IN THE LEAGUE

BETRAYAL ON ATREUS!

(30 October 3068—System Error 0404—Backup Transmitted 3 December 3068)

Atreus [FWNS]—The situation here remains unclear, but there is no doubt that the Word of Blake has finally decided to show their true colors. Smoke palls stain the air in various places around Atreus City, and there have been claims of fighter strikes against the capital. Most of the damage seems to be in the northern districts,

SURPRISE ASSAULT

[Reporter]: “...And here we have another pair of Shivas, passing over the Eighth Legionnaires’ Alpha Infantry Regiment...Second Company, releasing colored smoke, in the colors of the Legionnaires...”

[The colored smoke seems quite heavy, and rapidly descends on the parade route and into the stands. Some of the infantry and their audience succumb to coughing fits as the purple and green smoke lingers.]

“Goodness—” [cough] “—that was a bit thick, wouldn’t you say? Er...Some of the soldiers seem to be having trouble. I see a few clutching their throats and—and collapsing...”

[Many of the parade watchers in the stands and along the sidewalks begin to panic, some rising—and then falling—amid cries, coughing fits and convulsive twitching, still enveloped in the massive clouds of smoke.]

“They’re having the same reaction in the stands... This isn’t right. Oh, my god... It must be some kind of attack. The Scourge? I ca—” [cough] “—can’t believe anyone would stoop to this level of car— Oh, God, are those clouds getting closer?”

[Camera pans wildly, showing bodies in the streets, in the stands and on the sidewalks, many contorted in inhuman poses. A distant BattleMech in Eighth Legionnaires colors stumbles and crashes to the ground amid the panicked, choking masses. Autocannon fire can be heard over the distant roar of engines as the purple-green clouds thicken.]

Reporter comes into focus for a moment, eyes wide as his hands come away from his mouth, drenched in blood. He starts to speak, but suddenly stumbles twitching violently.

Camera wavers as the operator starts to turn, then spins wildly and falls.]

—Live holo-broadcast of the Atrean military parade, 25 October 3068, Atrean Press

around the government complexes. There are rumors of direct orbital strikes against Parliament and the Captain-General’s palace.

It is widely believed that the Blakists employed terror weapons in their assault. It appears we avoided the nuclear strikes aimed at Tharkad and other worlds, but nonetheless numerous streets have become charnel houses, clogged with bodies of civilians and soldiers who appear to have died in agony. The exact number of casualties remains unclear, but it seems likely that tens if not hundreds of thousands perished. In a cynical move, the Blakists targeted crowds gathered to greet the Knights of the Inner Sphere, who had just returned to the capital, as well as the local Eighth Legionnaires garrison. Given the number who gathered to witness the parade, the specter of a seven-figure casualty count looms over the city.



THE END OF THE LEAGUE IS NIGH!

Hooded Stranger: "...couldn't use it on a real ammo bin, could you?"

Female MechWarrior: *[shrugs, her breasts jiggling in her skimpy tank top]* "Not in this 'Mech bay—but if you think the Warrior will give you another go at it, be my guest. I think he's gonna kick your—"

Stranger: *[unfazed]* "Not to worry. The Warrior is no match for this enemy. It's going to take the help of all our people. The real warriors are those men and women fighting for our—"

[Screen blanks, followed by a brief flash of the Tamarind Media/Channel 609 logo before a bedraggled-looking reporter appears.]

Reporter: "Gone! They're all gone! The Captain-General is dead, possibly gassed like a dog on Atreus. The entire *Sardis* Fleet is missing! *Missing!* Not even our new hope, Jeremy Brett!" *[Reporter throws up his hands in disgust.]* "He can't be found, either. There's *no one there*, people! The ship's flying with no crew and no captain. We're alone—sitting ducks for Kelswa-Steiner and his Alliance forces to come charging in and burn us all into the ground. Not even the Word of Blake is defending our borders! Instead they've abandoned the only man with enough courage to stand up for them, give them a home. We—are—alone!"

[The screen blanks again, followed by a black-and-white bulls-eye, which dissolves into snow, then nothing.]

—Tamarind Media (Channel 609) holovid broadcast, 2 November 3068

While the massive loss of civilian life is horrific, the political and economic impact of this unprovoked assault is even more terrifying. Many business leaders attending the gala and parade and are missing in the aftermath, as are most—if not, all—Parliamentary representatives.

Though a number of high-profile government officials survived the assault and have since appeared before the media—the Captain-General and Minister of Defense among them—the federal government has been decimated. Many have rallied round the Captain-General as a focus of the still-functioning national government that remains in the Free Worlds, but the revelations about Thomas Marik's past—which some regard as a greater betrayal than the Blakist sneak attack—have seriously undermined his position.

ENTIRE SARDIS FLEET GOES MISSING

(10 November 3068)

Tamarind [FWNS]—Marshall Brett's hope of retaining the initiative on the Alliance front took a severe blow last week with the apparent defection of the *Sardis* battle group. The *Thera*-class carrier and her escorts, providing security for the Tamarind system since the outbreak of hostilities, carried out a sudden and unscheduled breaking maneuver at around eight PM local time,

FIGHTING BLIND

throwing orbital traffic patterns into chaos. Reports suggest that the vessels ignored hails from Tamarind Space Traffic Control and began boosting for the nadir jump point. An FWLM cutter sent to investigate was fired upon, sustaining moderate damage but remaining functional. This incident prompted Marshall Brett to take more drastic action, dispatching local fighter squadrons to challenge the renegades.

"We show mercy to those we once called friends, but our mercy is not as infinite as the cosmos!"

Though carrying only a fraction of its complement of fighters, the *Sardis* and its consorts nonetheless managed to push their way clear of the engagement zone, scarcely halting their boost out-system and forcing the loyalist fighters and carrier DropShips to withdraw due to lack of fuel. The current whereabouts of all *Sardis* fleet vessels is unknown. They may have jumped out-system via a pirate point or may remain at Tamarind, making a stealthy approach to the jump points or lurking in the system's outer reaches.

"Take heart, fallen brethren; had we chosen to remain at large, you would know it soon enough!"

Why the vessels should flee and fire upon their colleagues remains unclear. Some suggest that the Word of Blake suborned the crew, though on a vessel the size of a *Thera* that seems unlikely.

HOW DID THEY DO IT?

(18 December 3068)

Andurien [ANDURIEN CHRONICLE]—A year ago today, I was a citizen in the realm with the largest navy known to humanity. It contained some of the most advanced vessels ever built. The centerpiece was the *Thera*, a WarShip that had no equal.

Today, no such navy remains to keep the sky above me safe. In fact, I wonder if I ever had one.

The reports are almost as numerous as the pieces into which our League is crumbling. Our fleet and our military are fragmenting into regional components. Some are said to have joined the Word of Blake.

So how did they do it? How did an outside organization compromise us to this extent? It seems particularly inconceivable that our navy has been subjugated as much as it has. Members of the League navy are picked after a careful vetting process, in which not just skill is judged, but loyalty as well—loyalty to the whole Free Worlds League, not just to one or the other portions of it. Yet now, at the first real challenge our nation has faced since the last civil war, everything just falls apart again? And an unknown number of our naval vessels side with a group of religious fanatics rather than with the League government, or even a regional government?

I don't know how they could have done that. I just know that the nation I once called mine doesn't exist any more.

LATE 3068: FIGHTING BLIND

More plausible is that the *Sardis* could no longer tolerate being sidelined as it had been for much of the war to date.

["Still the lack of faith among the unbelievers. By now, it should be clear that none can stand in defiance of Blake's Divine Will."]

CAPTAIN-GENERALCY IN DOUBT

(4 December 3068)

Atreus [ISAP]—Khalil Marcus, Chief Justice of the Free Worlds Supreme Court, today made a scathing attack against the incumbent Captain-General, the man once believed to be Thomas Marik.

"While the Captain-General is right in stating that the Treaty of Marik does not require the Captain-General to be a member of the Marik clan, and two of his forty-nine predecessors were not members of that family, the Succession Act of 2310 gives the Mariks the right of first refusal for the post. It is clear that in masquerading as Thomas Marik, our current 'leader' sought to gain

an improper advantage by sidestepping the legal provisions that would otherwise have seen the Captain-Generalcy offered to Paul or Therese Marik. That both have gone on record as supporting the incumbent is surprising."

The blistering critique by Marcus, the premier legal mind in the Free Worlds and formerly a close confidant of the Captain-General who oversaw his oath of office, further undermined Thomas Marik's position but at the same time offered little hope to the Captain-General's rivals.

"Per the Succession Act, a sitting Captain-General can only be removed from office by the expiration of his term, something held in abeyance since the Addendum of 2671 at the start of the original Star League, or by Parliamentary impeachment, something the present situation makes impossible.

"Legally, however, the enthronement of Thomas Marik—or whatever he calls himself now—should never have taken place and is of highly questionable legal standing. Individuals such as Paul or Therese Marik or their children, Alys Rousset-Marik, and even the real Thomas' illegitimate daughter, Isis, have strong legal grounds for a challenge."

BLACK DAY AT BAD ROCK

(4 December 3068)

Galisteo [SANTA FE CHRONICLE] —Located on the High Sierra, the town of Bad Rock is no stranger to violence. However, what started as a simple demonstration against proposed restructuring of the tax system escalated into a full-scale battle that has leveled half the town.

Local ranchers have been voicing dissatisfaction with the new "Cattle Tax" since it was first proposed last year. "If'n the Cap'n-General's wanting to be fighting them Lurans, he can danged well pay for the war hisself!" said Bart Owens, eloquently voicing the view of many Trinity World ranchers.

On 12 September, when the ranchers paraded through the main street of Bad Rock in their CattleMasters and LineMechs, Sheriff Neils Fernandez called in Swann's Cavaliers to help keep the peace. The precise chain of events remains unclear, but second-hand accounts suggest that the mercenary company immediately opened fire on the protesters. The Cavaliers may have been incorrectly briefed on the situation, or perhaps they mistook the ranchers' IndustrialMechs for bandits. Whatever the cause, by the time order was restored, twenty civilians and two mercenaries were dead, with upwards of one hundred civilians wounded.

Protests over the mercenaries' actions have been lodged with the governor and with Parliament, but no action has been forthcoming. Since the incident, other confrontations have occurred between the mercenaries and the independent-minded citizens of the Trinity Worlds. While none have reached the scale of the so-called Bad Rock Massacre, the situation threatens to spiral out of control.

RETREAT!

Shells whistle over our heads and we can hear the repeated zing-cracks of laser weapons being discharged. The Syrma sky is crisscrossed with tracer fire and the contrails of high-flying fighters. They are not ours.

I'm here with the Twenty-ninth Berenson Infantry, part of the First Guards Battle Group, nicknamed the Amazons, who landed on Syrma last month as part of a coordinated assault with the Sixth Orloff. But the Sixth never arrived. The initial landings and pacification operations on Ezera and Lothair went well, but when Skye counterattacked, the Guards were pressed hard. Several communiqués were sent to Marshall Brett to ascertain the status of the Sixth, but no replies has yet been received from Brett or from Marshal Van Creveld, who commands the spinward section of the border.

The Guards have held out for ten days, but Colonel Briggs—a veteran of Operations Bulldog and Serpent as well as the campaign on Strana Mechty—deems the unit's position untenable. The Amazons are staging a fighting withdrawal to their LZ and the spaceports at Skopje and Strausborg, from which they plan on pulling back to the FWL lines. Force Commander Tito, a Smoke Jaguar bondsman who joined the Guards after Matamoras, commands the rearguard and is clearly disdainful of the situation. "The Great Refusal showed what teamwork can do—the Guards lost their battle, but the Star League won the war, proving the strength of their Touman—but here we have been left to fend for ourselves. We have been thrown to the Steiner wolves."

Colonel Briggs was unavailable for comment.

—Report filed by Liza Jiminez (FWNS) embedded with FWLM forces on Syrma, 23 November 3068



WITNESSES TO SIAN HORROR URGED TO SPEAK!

(8 October 3068)

Sian [CBS]—Loyal citizens of the Confederation! If you were in a position to witness the horrifying attack on our fair capital on the black date of 7 October, please notify your nearest government official. In order to assist relief efforts, and to ensure that as many of our Capellan brethren as possible survive to avenge this horrible crime against our nation, we require as much information as we can obtain to assess the precise nature of the strike on our seat of government. Any fragment of information may provide insight that will allow us to save more lives! If you have anything to offer, do not delay! Contact your nearest governmental office, Maskirovka branch or militia commander at once!

THE CAPELLAN FRONT

CONFEDERATION STRIKES BACK

"This is Kim Soo Li reporting for CBS. We received a special release from the Ministry of Information. During the past few months, Capellan Special Forces units have worked with local indigenous forces on captured worlds, waging a guerrilla war and inciting insurrections against the Davionista invaders in prelude to Operation Thunderstrike, the Confederation's counterattack.

"Our Capellan brethren have us to thank for their ability to coordinate with their forces on these worlds. The victories they enjoy are as much our own. We will seek repayment soon."

"Capellan troops successfully launched Operation Thunderstrike against worlds occupied by Hasek's forces along the entire front. The Fifth McCarron's Armored Cavalry liberated the strategic world of Aldertaine after a brutal battle with the Fifth Crucis Lancers. The Lancers withdrew to St. Ives after suffering egregious losses. On Randar, the Holdfast Guards all but destroyed the Twentieth Avalon Hussars with the aid of the newly upgraded *Ilsa Hyung*, resulting in the death of General Randy Hasek-Bills.

"The planet Ares never capitulated, thanks to the valiant troops of McCarron's Fourth ACR. The Fifth New Syrtis Fusiliers battled for months to a standstill until the Blackwind Lancers broke the stalemate, as *Sang-shao* Doles' command showed no mercy to the Fusiliers. *Sang-shao* Doles, a Free Capellan officer, personally killed Hasek's sister-in-law, General Serena Thomas-Hasek.

"On Hexare, the Remshield's Dragoons and House Imarra—collectively led by *Sang-shao* Choug Vong—shatter the Fourth Illician Lancers.

"With Imarra occupied, Sian is weakened; we must prepare to aid the Capellans in their time of need."

"Stay tuned for more information as we receive it. Reporting for CBS, I'm Kim Soo Li."

—CBS News at Six, Sian, 21 October 3068

UNITED FRONT

(28 November 3068)

Terra [VOICE OF TRUTH]—Today marks the first anniversary of the fall of the second Star League. With that horrible tragedy, the followers of the Word of Blake faced a difficult choice: Watch as criminals and tyrants destroyed humankind's last best hope for peace, or fight for the future that was the Blessed Jerome Blake's vision for humanity.

We chose to fight. To fight knowing that this would be a war the like of which the Inner Sphere had never seen. A war to test our faith. A war of hard decisions. A long war.

But even in the darkest days to come, there were fleeting sparks of hope—glowing embers to lighten the heart. One such spark has been the unswerving support and friendship shown to us by the Capellan Confederation throughout this conflict. And so, when the Federated Suns launched yet another unprovoked attack on House Liao, we had no compunction at racing to the aid of our friends.

The Warriors of Blake are proud to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with our brave Capellan comrades in the face of unbridled Davion aggression. Together we will turn back the tide and the Capellan people will know the Peace of Blake.

ALLIES RALLY ON SIAN!

(3 December 3068)

Sian [CBS]—The ancient proverb that one need only look to one's side to see one's true friends in times of trouble has been proven correct once again! Loyal Capellan citizens greeted Naomi Centrella, the stalwart ally of the Confederation, today at Sian's partially repaired spaceport. At the head of the Third Canopian Fusiliers, the heiress to the Canopian throne brings relief to the capital of the Capellan state in the form of badly needed supplies. Her visit strengthens our resolve! We shall not stand alone against the atrocities inflicted on us by the Davion war criminals!

Lady Centrella was met by *Sang-jiang-jun* Talon Zahn, military regent of the realm. After exchanging warm greetings, they retired to discuss the current Davion incursions.

With the valiant Canopians fighting at our side, victory against the aggressors is assured!

VICTORY AT HAND!

"This is Colleen Thompson with a special report from the front. We have just received information about the launch of the Capellans' Operation Thunderstrike. According to government sources, the CCAF has thrown the last of its reserves into a hopeless attempt to throw back our valiant defenders. Allegedly, Capellan units reclaimed worlds liberated by our troops, but the government assures us this is not the case.

LATE 3068: FIGHTING BLIND

SOVEREIGN JUSTICE OR HASEK'S GREED?

Someone once said, "The political object is the goal, war is the means of reaching it, and the means can never be considered in isolation from their purposes."^{*} One must ask, then, what purpose does Hasek's war serve?

A year ago, our realm fought a bitter conflict and nearly tore itself apart because of a power-mad woman. Now here we are, our troops driving into the heart of the Confederation, killing and dying. Why? To "liberate" the St. Ives Compact from the evil grip of House Liao? No. I submit to you that this illegal war is Hasek's revenge on the Capellans for the attempt on his life. He has abrogated his duties and responsibilities as a March Lord of the Federated Suns. He has refused to answer our Princess Regent. This act alone is grounds for treason.

Hasek's "Sovereign Justice" represents his political goal: to turn the Capellan March into his own Great House. What has his greed gained? Tens of thousands dead, valuable units lost, our realm under attack—and, perhaps worst of all, Hasek's military attacks the Confederation when it should defend us against the Blakists. I call on Duke George Hasek to recall our troops and defend our nation as he has sworn to do.

—Editorial published by veteran columnist Clarence Samwells in *Kathil News Weekly*, Kathil, 14 October 3068

[*Karl von Clausewitz, 19th century Prussian General –Ed]

"Quoting our source, 'Sure, the Capellans have attacked. We've taken some losses. But however tenacious and skilled they are, they're also overextended and don't have the forces to stop our drive to Sian.'

"Further reports indicate the CCAF counterattack was minimal and uncoordinated. Reports from various commands allege Capellan forces put up a brief struggle before retreating. Casualty reports, though not confirmed, are light to moderate. As of this report, only the worlds of Ares and Necromo are still hotbeds of resistance. Our source assured us that these worlds will fall shortly.

"Word of the demise of the Fifth Syrtis Fusiliers at the hands of the Blackwind Lancers and the destruction of the Twentieth Avalon Hussars have been denounced by government sources as well. Though they acknowledge that conditions at the front are fluid, some commands—hampered by current military opera-

KITTERY LIBERATED!

(9 November 3068)

Kittery [VOICE OF TRUTH]—Today the heretics of the Federated Suns are trembling! The Capellan March's invasion of our ally, the Capellan Confederation, has not gone unnoticed. Today the Word of Blake Militia struck their first blows against the aggressors. The supply world of Kittery, under FedSuns occupation since the early 3000s, has been liberated from its tyrannical oppressors.

Taking advantage of the relative security in the region, the AFFS left Kittery woefully under-defended, thus allowing the Word of Blake Militia to launch the first step in helping relieve the Capellan Confederation. Forces led by the Thirteenth Division swiftly assaulted the planetary defenses, and in quick strokes shattered the training battalion and then the First Kittery Borderers. In blow after crushing blow, the Thirteenth Division drove the AFFS units back, every engagement leaving more FedSuns machines broken and destroyed, the survivors rounded up to be given treatment and guarded by militia forces.

Once the remains of the AFFS forces were eradicated, the planetary government surrendered and left office. The planet's historic and legal ruling line has been reinstated, and has confirmed an oath of allegiance to the Capellan Confederation.

The Word of Blake will continue to garrison the world, leaving local administration to the Capellan Confederation. This will allow the CCAF to use its forces where they are needed, to push back and destroy the AFFS units invading Capellan space. Let this be a warning to George Hasek: Those false to the true light of humankind will be made to suffer for their crimes in the end.

tions and Blakist interference—simply have not communicated in the past few days. According to our sources, this is thought to be no cause for alarm, and was in fact expected.

"In conclusion, sources close to the government portray the Capellans' attacks as the last gasp of a beleaguered and besieged military. The final victory for Operation Sovereign Justice is indeed at hand.

"For NSNN, I'm Colleen Thompson reporting."

—*New Syrtis Network News Special Report*, New Syrtis, 7 November 3068

(14 November 3068)

"Canopian Troops Converge on Sian"

[ISAP]

ACCESSING



SAVING THE CORE

For Immediate Release

(10 November 3068)

New Samarkand [VOTD]—Effective immediately, the capital of the Dragon will be relocated to New Samarkand for the duration of the ongoing crisis on Luthien. *Gunji-no-Kanrei* Minamoto issued the following decree [*“of cowardice”*] from his command post aboard the DCS *Dieron Star* [*“A symbol of stained purity begging for destruction!”*]:

“Citizens [*“Prisoners”*] of the Dragon, although our courageous [*“paltry”*] efforts on Luthien continue, we must face the reality that in order for the Dragon to survive, we must relocate our position of honor and purity elsewhere. This must be done for the duration of the crisis [*“obstruction”*] that engulfs our beloved capital. With much agony and heartache [*“manipulation and deceit”*] I have come to this decision, with our Coordinator still ill [*“Dead! He is dead! Can you fools not recognize it?”*] and the Dragon’s heir involved [*“Our guest of honor!”*] in breaking the Word of Blake siege [*“Purification!”*] of Dieron. Therefore, with the power invested in [*“Stolen by!”*] me as the *Kanrei* of our honorable forces, I have issued General Order 9, which repositions our heart and soul [*“Cowardice and false pride!”*] to New Samarkand [*“Another worthy subject for cleansing!”*], the place of our glorious [*“ignoble and bloody”*] birth.

When we have expunged the stain [*“When YOU recognize our right as your Redeemers!”*] that darkens Luthien, we will return our beloved Pearl to a level that rivals the luster she had before the tide of war [*“purification”*] enveloped her. Though the clouds of the *gaijin* weapons [*“Instigated by YOUR own troops, YOUR own command!”*] still mar her honorable skin, they too will blow away when the Dragon’s breath returns to her [*“Or when you recognize the futility of your actions and succumb to the Prophecy’s heir!”*].”

THE DRAGON RALLIES

DIERON FREE FROM TYRANNY

(1 December 3068)

Terra [VOICE OF TRUTH]—Once a jewel in the Star League’s crown, Dieron shared the fate of the other planets in the Terran Hegemony. Only Terra, protected by the Blessed Jerome Blake, was not devoured by the House Lords in their greedy pursuit of power, resources and technology. For centuries, the enslaved peoples of Dieron suffered under the Dragon’s yoke, their world pillaged to support wars of conquest. The Combine’s draconian culture was stamped on every street and every house.

But now, the Word of Blake has set Dieron free!

Once more the House Lords destroyed the Star League—but this time the Word of Blake was here. In answer to the cries of the people long oppressed by tyrannical rule, the Warriors of Blake

BLACK WATCH LOST

(30 October 3068—System Error 0404—Backup Transmitted 4 December 3068)

New Samarkand [VOTD]—It is reported that last week the Black Watch—formally an SLDF regiment—was destroyed while attempting to relieve the beleaguered defenders on Dieron.

Though the Eridani Light Horse Command, Twenty-first Striker Regiment and the Brigade’s dependents at Fort Winston had been annihilated, Colonel Campbell received news that a company or more of the Nineteenth Heavy Cavalry Regiment had survived. With the First Royal BattleMech Regiment destroyed on Tukayyid, and the remaining ELH regiments out of contact, only the Black Watch was in a position to aid their former comrades.

Departing Orestes, the Black Watch (with DCMS aid) traveled to Dieron, entering the system via a pirate point. Tragically, luck was not with them, and at least one Blakist WarShip was in position for an intercept.

The Black Watch, like the other SLDF units, had never possessed WarShips. Outclassed, but apparently too far in-system to return to their JumpShip, the Black Watch made a run for the surface. Their JumpShip remained in position long enough to record the destruction of two DropShips and the uncontrolled reentry of the third before being forced to abandon the system.

The Black Watch Regiment must now be considered a complete loss.

descended on Dieron with cleansing fire. The Dragon did not lightly release its claws from that sad world, and the fight was hard. The Third Dieron Regulars offered fanatical resistance, using civilians as human shields against our righteous wrath. But in the end we prevailed.

In Blake’s name, Dieron is free!

BENJAMIN UNDER ATTACK!

(8 December 3068)

Priority One Feed

Benjamin [VOTD]—Confirmed reports [*“Sanitized lies!”*] from the prefecture capital of Benjamin verify that the planet is under attack [*“Vengeful predation by the murderous Davions!”*] by Federated Suns forces. Casualty counts among the civilian population are high [*“Catastrophically so, in accordance with the will of Sandoval!”*] after Draconis March forces executed a military drop-in-force in the middle of Kyoto City, setting several buildings alight and destroying entire residential blocks with suppressive fire [*“Filling the air with the deaths of the innocent and guilty, brought by the indiscriminate choice of the Combine and Suns commanders, who care not for you, but for the blood-soaked mud they trample beneath them. Embrace the purity offered by Blake. Throw off your shackles of oppression!”*].

A general advisory is being sent out to neighboring worlds to temporarily detour traffic around Benjamin, as there are unconfirmed reports of a Federated Suns blockade in force around the

LATE 3068: FIGHTING BLIND

THE TRUTH OF THE MATTER

To: Ruby**Re:** Alternatives

An interesting tidbit of news crossed my desk about three hours ago. According to two of our agents in the ISF in Benjamin Prefecture, our most hated foe is no longer a problem.

It seems that the surprise assault by some Draconis March units—no doubt sent by that sneaky Sandoval bastard (takes after his father!)—caught our forces unprepared for such a deep strike. That, however, is not the tidbit I promised, as I'm sure you already know about those little "embarrassments," like those on Matsuida and Galedon.

Here's the interesting bit. Apparently, during the Davions' systematic destruction of the Sixth Ghost, a victim of collateral damage happened to be the Gorman Medical Facility, where—get this—Director Ninyu Kerai was being treated. Apparently, he was moved there from Dieron, where a Blakist headhunter unit almost killed the bastard. We didn't even know he had gotten out of the system!

A stroke of luck, this is. I suspect our protégé is effectively countering the Davion foolishness (a wise choice, that one), and these events will go a long way toward purging the stain that Victor placed on us by soiling our former Keeper. Not only does our "beloved" Coordinator now look foolish for stripping our prefecture capitals of their defenses, we seem to have had our one major stumbling block to power removed from our path.

So. The way lies open for us to finally succeed where that damnable Kiguri failed. I suggest we seize the moment.

Jade

—Intercepted message (dated 12 December 3068) leaked to INN by alleged elements of the Luthien resistance (authenticity not yet verified)

planet ["*Truth, lies; does it matter to you? They will tell you nothing of the truth. Your own 'Precentor Dieron' betrayed you, after all.*"]. At least one WarShip is rumored to be present ["*Soon to be destroyed by the Blade of Righteousness.*"], though the Office of the Admiralty has neither confirmed nor denied this report ["*They confirm nothing so they may manipulate you with their false claims and false honor.*"].

Benjamin Prefecture officials have confirmed that additional DCMS forces are en route to guarantee the safety of the population ["*And to reinforce the chains you wear as slaves to the false regime!*"]. Citizens wishing to know the status of families on Benjamin are encouraged to contact their local prefecture office ["*Or you may learn the Truth by contacting the Word of Blake, so we can enlighten you.*"].

LUTHIEN ARMOR WORKS IN PERIL?

At first glance, the Luthien Armor Works' annual report seems full of nothing but the standard corporate blather to their stockholders. However, though no official reports have outright stated it, LAW is in serious trouble.

The continued fighting on Luthien and Dieron—where LAW's two largest industrial complexes happen to be located—has to have taken a toll after all this time. Underground reports, in fact, hint at the massive destruction of LAW's Luthien facilities under tactical nuclear strikes. Scattered reports indicate that Guthry Island, the location of LAW's sixty billion C-bill OmniMech plant, no longer exists as a habitable surface.

Those two complexes alone account for more than sixty-three percent of LAW's BattleMech production assets, and their loss would threaten the company with bankruptcy. If reports that Quentin has also been attacked are true—another thirteen percent of LAW's profitable assets, by the way—then it is easy to foresee LAW dissolving as a corporation by the end of fiscal year 3069.

For the stockholders' sake, LAW had better make some hard decisions soon, or the DCMS will suffer dramatically with the financial destruction of the Dragon's largest weapons supplier.

Tricks with numbers can't hide the truth forever.

—Feature article, *Power Play Magazine*, Athenry Publications, December 3068

DEATH TO MERCENARIES, REVISITED

(20 November 3068—System Error 0404—Backup Transmitted 30 December 3068)

Galatea [MERCNET]—Employment opportunities in the Draconis Combine have declined sharply since Warlord Kiyomori Minamoto issued a declaration adding Greenburg's Godzillas and Camacho's Caballeros to the list of rogue commands. Regular DCMS units have been ordered to show both commands no mercy on the battlefield—an order chillingly reminiscent of the infamous "Death to Mercenaries" order issued by Coordinator Takashi Kurita during the Fourth Succession War. ["*Witness how the Dragon reverts to type.*"]

In the face of claims of desertion, the Godzillas—currently bound for Arc-Royal—maintain that the DCMS tried to ensnare them in an infamous "company store" trap, and refused to sign a new contract. The Caballeros, last reported en route for the Free Worlds League, have yet to offer their side of events.

In light of these occurrences, the MRBC has downgraded the Draconis Combine's Employer Rating to D, pending a review of their claims.

["*Work not for these capricious House Lords! The Word of Blake offers you more lucrative contracts.*"]

A CALL TO ARMS

(5 December 3068—System Error 0404—Backup Transmitted 12 January 3069)

Skye [SBS]—Duke Robert Kelswa-Steiner today issued the following appeal to the people of Skye:

"Sons and daughters of Skye! Hear the call to duty! Skye is beset by her enemies! Even now, our ancient foe—the Free Worlds League—presses at our border defenses, supporting their terrorist allies in the Word of Blake!

"In order to meet this threat to our way of life, I hereby announce the formation of two new regiments. Recruitment for the Second and Third Skye Guard will begin immediately, and I appeal to all who love the Isle of Skye as I do to come forth and help defend your families, your friends and your homes. Once more I must call on the veterans who have already given so much. And now I appeal also to those who previously have been exempt from military service. I need you all. Skye needs you all. Together we will defend what is most dear to us.

"As God is my witness, Skye will never fall!"

ALLIANCE IN TURMOIL

THE SHOW MUST GO ON!

"This is Kiva Cooper with another SBC exclusive. Street investigations have looked at the reports of underground fighting on Solaris. Only this reporter has delved deep into this 'rebellion'. One must wonder why there would be rebellion; perhaps the government is killing innocent civilians? No. Are they removing our civil liberties? Liberties that we need for our jobs? Liberties that we need for our lives? Again, no. Really, we suffer no more than a few minor inconveniences. Inconveniences that preserve our liberties by keeping us safe while the last of the terrorists are removed.

"Our investigation points at nothing of this sort. *Nothing*. The truth behind these rumors isn't a few terrorists with a homemade bomb, seeking to throw citizens off productive order for chaos so that they may grab power. Not even anything *that* insipid. It's merely a publicity campaign by stables whose bottom line had dropped because of their inability to keep their feuds and battles inside the arena. This reporter asks you to respond to this irresponsible campaign with a boycott.

"This boorish attempt to equate underground cultural rebellion with genuine subversion is appalling. Rather than watch these amateurish fights, watch the Best of Solaris. History always repeats itself in the arena anyway. Or even tune into *The Steinhearts*. I'd prefer you watch a soap opera that's honest about it than these staged fights. Which do you think is more likely? That Steve McCormick is fighting out of the arenas in street battles for 300 C-bills, or that some fill-in is piloting a similar 'Mech in a similar manner while Steve enjoys the view from his penthouse?

"Again, this is Kiva Cooper, and thanks for listening to this SBC announcement.

—*Solaris City News at Six*, SBC, Solaris VII, 27 October 3068

FIGHTING BLIND

LAAF RALLIES AFTER STUNNING CLAN ASSAULT ON GRAUS

Rhoda Maines, DBC: "General, did this attack come as a surprise?"

General Steiner: "Not really. If the Falcons were going to attack anywhere, it would be Graus."

Maines: "But if you anticipated this new Falcon Incursion, why did you relocate so many units away from the border?"

Steiner: "Who said this strike is a part of another Falcon Incursion? I certainly didn't say that. While it would be in character for the Falcons to prey on us while we're distracted with other affairs, we have reliable intelligence that they are currently most concerned with Clan Wolf.

"Between the defenses we still have in place and the redeployments of Clan Wolf, I remain confident that we can hold the border. We've certainly demonstrated this on Graus. The First Wolf Strike Grenadiers and Sixth Wolf Guards are frustrating—quite successfully—the efforts of the First Falcon Striker Cluster and the Eighth Talon Cluster. As soon as Khan Kell's Golden Keshik makes landfall, I am certain control of Graus will be re-established."

Floyd Stanleigh, ARNN: "Are you confident in your assessment that the Falcons are focusing on Vlad's Wolves?"

Steiner: "Information is ammunition. Next."

Gabriel Jardinais, ISAP: "Sir! Rumor has it that 'Information is ammunition' is actually one of Blake's sayings? Any response to those who feel that this phrase links you to the Blakist pogrom?"

Steiner: (*Baffled*) "What? Who the hell are you, and who let you in here? I'm not going to respond to hysterical allegations like that! Next!"

Ori Castakus, INN: "Will units be diverted back to the Falcon border in response to this latest attack?"

Steiner: "That would be premature, and a waste of resources. The forces currently present in the Arc-Royal Theater have the situation well in hand. Our primary areas of focus continue to be repelling the Word of Blake attacks and regaining peace along our Free Worlds border.

"That's all for today, ladies and gentlemen."

—Excerpted from a press conference on Atocongo, General of the Armies Adam Steiner in attendance, 28 October 3068

TERRAN CORRIDOR IN CRISIS

(25 December 3068)

Terra [VOICE OF TRUTH]—In their folly, the rulers of the Inner Sphere have torn apart the great Star League and once more set upon one another, threatening to throw the Inner Sphere back into the Dark Age of the Succession Wars. Caught in the middle of all this is the region of space known as the Terran Corridor.

With the Lyran Alliance focused on the conflict with the Free Worlds League, the Jade Falcons are swooping in like vultures. Interstellar shipping routes are disrupted. Economies, already damaged by the ravages of the FedCom Civil War, now teeter on

LATE 3068: FIGHTING BLIND



the brink of collapse. Bandits have again begun to raid with impunity. The very structure of society is threatening to unravel, and through it all the Lyran Alliance has ignored the calls for aid from the Corridor worlds.

With their pleas for help falling on deaf ears, the beleaguered planets of Thorin, Muphrid and New Earth wisely turned to us. Guided by Blake's wisdom, we have answered. As we have already done in the so-called Chaos March, we true followers of the Blessed Blake dispatched our militia to deliver much-needed aid to these embattled worlds of such historic significance. Regrettably, by the time our convoys arrived, the situation had worsened in many cases. On Thorin and Muphrid, all social order had collapsed from Alliance negligence, while New Earth threatened to go the same way.

Fortunately, the valiant warriors of our Sixth Division's Dawn of Truth III-Delta restored order on Thorin, where the grateful local government petitioned for entry into our Protectorate. Muphrid and New Earth, recognizing Thorin's wisdom, quickly followed suit.

Still other worlds remain outside, desperate for guidance and support. For these planets, in Blake's name, the Word stands ready to deliver the light of peace and harmony.

commented on the triumph, "It was easier than we thought it could be—even with the Wobbie support those backstabbers had, they were no match for our people. Hundreds laid down their lives for their desire to take back what was theirs. The Lyran people and her culture will not be destroyed."

Little is known yet of the casualties as those held hostage in the city by the Free Worlds League since October celebrate in the streets at the return of their beloved Alliance forces. Tired, war-ravaged natives of Syrma stood in a small gathering outside a burning administration building where the occupying FWLM had set up an operations network. Earlier reports suggested a suicide bomber had disrupted the communications network, setting off a chain of events that aided in our retaking the city.

"There's not much left," said Lilith Shanks, a former employee of the city's courthouse as she stood amid the crowd of survivors. "But we have our city thanks to the Lyran Alliance Armed Forces."

SKYE FORCES CLAIM NARROW VICTORY ON ZEBEBELGENUBI

(30 November 3068)

Zebebelgenubi [DBC]—Off in the distance you can see shooting stars in reverse as the First Atrean Dragoons retreat off-planet. This is Vincent Wharton for DBC on Zebebelgenubi. The Skye Guard has managed to fend off an attack outside the gates of Redstorm Computers, but as the charred husks of war machines surrounding me show, it was not an easy victory. A last-ditch assault by General Maria Esteban's command lance stopped the Dragoons' charge cold. It was her death, however, that turned the tide. As two Marik lances concentrated fire on the General, the rest of their force crumbled. Less than two Dragoons companies made it off the planet, equaling the functioning units of the Skye Guards.

The true loser, however, is Zebebelgenubi. While it remains a bastion of freedom in the Isle of Skye, this world has suffered greatly for its survival. The Cor D'Azure reservoir is hopelessly contaminated with all the toxic materials leaking from the Skye 'Mechs that tried to spring a trap from it. Ninety percent of the capital city is without power at this time as well. Free Worlds troops attempted to launch a night attack by destroying the three major power plants, while the Guards retaliated by igniting the LP refinery. With funds hard to come by, the people of this region will have to soldier on, with no power, no clean water, no fuel and next to no defense. As for the Lyran Guards, even with a fleet of techs this unit is little more than a reinforced battalion with little leadership left. While spirits are high now, tomorrow may bring a bitter reality here on Zebebelgenubi.

COMPLIANCE IS LIFE!



(13 November 3068)

New Home [NEW HOME HERALD-GUARDIAN]—I ask you, then, fellow citizen: is life really so terrible under the measured hand of the Word of Blake, as it was under the archaic and mistrustful Lyran political circus that the Blakists have so competently replaced? Is it not possible—nay, even likely!—that the classic curse of misleading Lyran propaganda, coupled with the least competent military leadership the Inner Sphere has ever seen, could have brought about the rise of a renegade faction of "True Believers" dead set on returning our beloved Home to the chaos rampant before the arrival of our liberators?

I say to you: Rise up! Rise up and embrace the safety of competent rule and administration! Rise up and show the strength of a newfound unity to the hardliners of olden days

Lest we suffer again a civil war, still so fresh in our memories of the loved ones lost at the hands of the power-hungry Steiner-Davionists, we must indeed band together for safety... and such safety as provided by the Blakists cannot be matched by a renegade Star Lordling, without the ability to enforce rule over his or her own domain.

LEAGUE FORCES SHATTERED ON SYRMA

(28 November 3068)

Syrma [FREE SKYE PRESS]—The FWLM was no match for the might of our LAAF forces today when they overwhelmed the Eastern Front and retook Zebebelgenubi from enemy hands. Lieutenant-General Andrew Baines of the Fourteenth Lyran Guards



YOUR BEST DEFENSE

(8 December 3068—System Error 0404—Backup Transmitted 24 December 3068)

Richvale [QUIKSCCELL ADVERTISING]—Feeling out-gunned? Can't depend on the regular army? Mercenaries too expensive? Troubled by a noisy neighboring interstellar power? Pestered by pirates? Quikscell is proud to present the answer to all your military needs—offensive and defensive! Announcing the all-new and improved Condor Hover Tank!

Upgraded with the latest word in weaponry, this new model is faster*, hits harder, and is better protected than ever! Introducing the new Mydron Excel 5SG LB-X Autocannon—this weapon delivers unparalleled reliability, plus the flexibility to deal with hard and soft targets**. For that long-range punch, the Condor now includes the Valiant Arbalest LRM-15 system in a turret mount for full 360-degree fire! Troubled by infantry? No longer! This new upgrade boasts TWICE the anti-personnel capability of its predecessor!

The new Condor Hover Tank from Quikscell provides you with the edge you need to ensure planetary security and peace of mind—all for only 7.36 million C-bills per unit.

Be the envy of other planetary militias!

Don't delay! Order today!***

*Performance assumes standard atmospheric pressure and gravity.

**With Mydron-branded ammunition only.

***Allow up to 120 days for delivery, depending upon locale.

AND IN OTHER NEWS...

DAMOCLES' REPORT TO THE PRECENTOR MARTIAL

>>>loh1416G/ntrcpt//rr:/IS/LIC/MIIO/ISF/0017K/brnch-INN/ISP-segA7.dcrpt<<<

ROM Security Protocol: Omega Prime

DATE/TIME: 10153068—1547 Zulu Local—Caph

To: Precentor Martial Victor Steiner-Davion

From: Damocles

Victor,

I decided to bypass standard communication protocols and make direct contact with you. I suspect most of ComStar's ROM, including Precentor ROM herself, are Blakist operatives or at least sympathetic to their cause.

["Many hold our cause dear and will stand up to the heretics who have twisted the teachings of Blake's blessed wisdom."]

I have come across credible information I extracted from a high-level Blakist Light of Mankind operative. Precentor ["@#\$R...la13...2439...a-34"] caved after an exhausting interrogation session.

["You blasphemous bastard, you tortured her. We found what was left of her body. You shall suffer a fate tenfold of what you did to our sister!"]

FIGHTING BLIND

DOW: NORMAL SERVICES TO RESUME SHORTLY

(27 October 3068—System Error 0404—Backup Transmitted 23 November 3068)

Orestes [INN]—Acting in the role of interim Primus until the election of Sharilar Mori's successor, First Precentor Gavin Dow today issued a brief announcement on behalf of the First Circuit.

["The truth behind the 'Puppet Primus' has been revealed! Brothers and sisters, hear us! The time of reckoning has come for those who slew Primus Myndo Waterly and perverted Blake's vision and ComStar into the mockery it is today!"]

"As everyone is doubtless now aware, the HPG network has fallen victim to a coordinated attack intended to deny the people of the Inner Sphere access to interstellar communications. The source of communication disruptions has been identified as a virus introduced into the system by Blakist sympathizers. As of today we have several suspects in custody.

["See how easily the true followers of Blessed Blake's teachings defeat the heretics in their citadels of information. Does this not prove that what we do is Blake's will?"]

"Rest assured that even as I speak, our technicians are bringing the full weight of their skill and knowledge to bear on the task of restoring services as quickly as possible.

["Fools! It is we—not you—who control the HPG network now. Your best efforts will avail you nothing! Listen not to your faithless leaders! See the truth and embrace Blake's word!"]

"We apologize for any inconvenience our customers may be experiencing."

["'Customers'? Misguided brethren, here we see ComStar for the hollow corporation it has made itself into, a mockery of our Divine Mission!"]

Her information, though not confirmed yet, alleges there are ["te..Ne,i239d-7///"] divisions of fresh troops in the ["C.ai5o..^^^&{[" staging from the planets ["/////...*^*^/////>.<."] Currently there are ["Kt10100101"] fleets of WarShips operating in the ["C.ai5o"]. They are planning a three-prong thrust against ["D..11a00...v/////772lon, BuNder...EiNeeRan"] and ["Yak11//url^^^tan"] worlds. Their line of advance will move along the ["%*&/////...CibD...55669...01010/////"] axis.

["Our time and place is for us to reveal, not you, Damocles. Prepare to reap what you sow, blasphemers!"]

Just before she expired, she rambled about secret worlds, saying "Gabriel" is one such "world," but that was her last statement.

One other note, Victor. I've heard unconfirmed reports of at least ["thure....n.../////1177/^^^*"] based in the Periphery. If proven true, the Word of Blake's military is nearly the size of the pre-Tukayyid Com Guards.

Choke on that for a while, sire.

—Damocles

LATE 3068: FIGHTING BLIND

LET THE SPHEROIDS BURN!

To hell with the Sphere!

What have they done for us lately, other than sap resources and manpower from our continuing exploration of the space beyond our own borders? How many other realms can legitimately claim to have established new worlds in the past hundred years but us? The [House Lords and functionaries] sit on their posh thrones at their overflowing banquet tables, gorging themselves on the cornucopia of fruits from the labor of their subjects, yet how much better a life have those subjects now, than at the turn of this century?

Oh, to be sure, there have been “advancements” in the technology of warmaking and manufacture... but what of the common family? What benefit do the men and women of that Great Black Hole we call the Inner Sphere see from the labors of their last two generations of scientists? As has been the case for centuries now, the center of that black hole is none other than Terra, the very cradle of such divisive and pointless destruction as humanity has known for thousands of years.

We needn't concern ourselves with the predictable continuation of warfare in that black hole, though we might hope that a new era of peace and prosperity can be brought about by the doctrinal changes the Blakists might offer the lost children of two dead Star Leagues and countless more dynasties built on a foundation of shifting sand—including ComStar.

No, we survivalists on the Periphery have naught to do with, or to fear from, the emergence of this new dynasty; for despite anything they might offer over the course of their lives, the Blakists too, shall fall.

—From “The BullHorn”, a Concordat-wide syndicated column by Mikhail Neils, 11 November 3068

ALL POINTS BULLETIN

To all private citizens, commercial, industrial, government and military agencies of the Free Worlds League. The following is an all-points-bulletin for your safety.

Be it known that: On 27 October 3068, the mercenary command known as Romanov's Crusaders abandoned its garrison assignments on Connaught. The Crusaders left the Connaught system on 4 November after ignoring repeated hails from the Eighteenth Marik Militia commander, Colonel Julie Kiel, to return to their post.

Be it also known that: As of 4 November 3068, the mercenary command known as Romanov's Crusaders is considered in breach of contract for abandoning its post without proper federal deployment orders. Arrest warrants for all known members of the mercenary command have been filed. To date, two members returning from special assignment have been apprehended by the Eighteenth Militia. Investigations into the whereabouts of the rest of the command continue.

Private citizens are urged to exercise extreme caution when interacting with members of Romanov's Crusaders, and to forward

AMC STATUS ADVISORY

>>>ComStar-ROM Communications intercept, reroute by need<<<

Flash traffic: Alert One...Alert One

From: Precentor Martial Cameron St. Jamais

SOJ/ROM Security Protocol: Gamma—Zebra 6699

DATE/TIME: 10263068 – 2206 Zulu Prime

////Phoenix proceeds as planned. Advancing on all fronts; enemies fleeing in total disarray, confusion.////

////This advisory concerns remaining AMC forces missed during Operation Scourge on Outreach. Four commands remain viable. If linked, will pose a clear and present danger to ongoing operations.////

////Commands listed below must be dealt with in most expedient and deadliest manner. Do not, under any circumstances, underestimate them. Each capable of causing great harm to our mission.////

Wolf's Dragoons (Delta Brigade) – Location: Kiesen, Draconis Combine

Dioscuri – Location: Morges, Lyran Alliance

The Wild Geese – Location: Unknown, last seen on Alta Vista, FedSuns

Thirteenth Stalking Horse – Location: Unknown, last seen on Alta Vista, FedSuns

Third Dismal Disinherited/Burton's Brigade – Location: Unknown, last seen on Hall, FWL

////Dragoon and Dioscuri units out of position; probability of interference: low. Disinherited/Burton units badly damaged in Hall incident (estimated at 50% overall effectiveness); probability of interference: low. Wild Geese and Stalking Horse have disappeared following Dragoon/CWiE raid on Outreach (shortly after Geese CO Alisande Faulkner was named AMC head). Our forces fought both units before. Though ultimately defeated, both caused serious damage to units and timetable. Any units encountering these forces are fully authorized to any means necessary. Do not attempt to engage in ground operations without clear tactical advantage.////

////Also note: AMC still actively recruiting via Galatea offices. Action pending.////

////Message ends.////

>>>End ComStar-ROM Communications intercept<<<

any information or sightings of this renegade unit to your local Free Worlds League Military office.

—FWLM Office of Mercenary Affairs advisory, dated 6 November 3068

NORTHWIND SILENCED

(9 November 3068)

Galatea [MERCNET]—ComStar officials confirmed today that the HPG system serving Northwind has gone offline. ComStar tech-



LATE 3068: FIGHTING BLIND

nicians tried unsuccessfully to remotely engage the HPG station from various nearby worlds. Other news from Northwind comes from the captain of the *Derry*, a *Mule*-class tramp freighter that recently passed through the system. The *Derry*'s sensors picked up an unidentified WarShip in planetary orbit. The freighter's sensors also picked up a series of explosions on the planet near the orbiting WarShip. While the ship's sensor logs are examined by local ComStar personnel for verification, the report has nonetheless fueled rampant speculation that the system is indeed undergoing an "Outreach Syndrome" attack. Any merchantmen passing through Northwind are urged to take as much sensor data as possible without exposing themselves to Blakist reprisals.

["Again, the propagandist arm of the mercenary spews forth more lies and half-truths to justify their existence and further the heretical cause of our fallen brothers. Do they tell the whole story? Do they reveal that the Derry had its entire cargo confiscated for smuggling activity? Do they tell you that the "explosions" witnessed were nothing more than smoke from a raging forest fire on the planet surface—one that we helped local authorities contain? We have shut down the system's HPG for upgrade purposes, much as we have done with many of our other allies in the area.

"Seek the Truth, dear people. Do not be deceived by the flopping remains of a corrupt Dagoon-spawned system. For the way of deception contains only pain and despair. Blake's Truth heals all."]

MERCENARY COWARDICE IMPERILS OPERATION RECLAMATION

(10 December 3068)

Taurus [TNS]—In October, what should have been the opening move in the drive to return the wayward worlds of the so-called Calderon Protectorate to the Concordat fold ended in disaster on Marknik.

The landing was spearheaded by the Third Taurian Lancers' Third Battalion, with support from the Black Angus Boys—a recently hired mercenary command. Initially, the Lancers faced only light opposition, and the LZ was secured as planned. However, before TDF armor and infantry forces could land, a counterattack by elements of the First Taurian Pride hammered into the Lancers' perimeter. Brigadier Aaron Wells called for aid from the Black Angus Boys, only to be informed by Major Angus Black that his troops had been hired to support *offensive* operations—not to conduct the defense of the LZ. Further, his "Boys" were returning to the DropShips. Without support, Brigadier Wells had no choice but to withdraw.

Protector Shraplen has lodged a formal protest over the Black Angus Boys' actions with the MRBC. In response, Major Angus Black has cited a contractual clause under which the Concordat provides for rear area security, Black alleges the Concordat breached the contract when it failed to protect the LZ.

THE VIEW FROM GALATEA

MercNet.

Whatever else you want to call it, the system that has come into mainstream use in the hiring, firing, transfer, disposition and overall guidelines for appropriate protocol and deployment of mercenaries Sphere-wide has proven the duality of its twin edges... and we mercs have only our own to blame.

With the coming of the Clans in the late 3040s it seemed the 'Net was a blessing, but as conflicts with the organization intensified, it grew clear that MercNet had become yet another focal point for clamor and blood money. How else can we explain the reality that such organizations as the tyrannical Word of Blake can still legitimately do business within the MercNet hierarchy, which was supposedly formed to prevent the abuse and perversion of our profession? Did not the Dragoons themselves oppose the direction the Blakists have taken, or has the loss of Jaime Wolf shaken them to the core so strongly that they now secretly espouse the tactics of scorched earth and WMDs *even in populated areas*? Or do they even care any more, now that they have been wounded so deeply?

What has become of us? What are we to believe will continue, or change, when the next round of hostilities opens?

Oh, how this correspondent pines for the days of old, when men were men, enemies were enemies, and MechWarriors ruled the field of battle as an elite force unto themselves...

—Roger Coriman, *Warrior Monthly*, MRBC Publications, December 3068

BLAKE'S HAND IS EVERYWHERE

>>>Encrypt/timestamp03:00hrs/09113068OR<<<

To: General Adam Steiner

From: Agent Nigel Hawkins, Outpost Somerset

Date: 9 November 3068

General Steiner—Adam—it's worse than we feared.

I regret to inform you the hand of Blake reaches further than the Inner Sphere. In addition to their strongholds on Terra, the Free Worlds League and our beloved Tharkad, intelligence received just before the bombings of our capital city and New Avalon, as well as subsequently following the White-Out, suggests sightings of Word of Blake ships between the local and the Deep Periphery. Unfortunately, those reports have been few, and several of the smaller ships sent out for deep explorations have disappeared off the radar.

I believe more Word of Blake strongholds exist within Lyran space as well—bases hidden deep on border worlds, close to Tharkad as well as the borders between the Combine and the Free Worlds League and the Periphery. It's the only explanation I can accept for their ability to have moved so quickly between planets so soon after their unprecedented attacks. We've tried tracking these ghost ships, but as I stated before, those operatives reporting such sightings vanish, leaving only their last coordinates.

LATE 3068: FIGHTING BLIND



I realize your forces are spread thin, Adam. But we need your help in weeding out these possible bases and destroying them. If not, our own safety and well-being as a people are at risk. How can we battle an enemy that lives within our own body if we allow it to fester?

I hope this message gets to you in time, and that you'll take my warnings under consideration.

Forever loyal to you and the Alliance,

Agent Nigel Hawkins, Outpost Somerset

—LIC Intelligence Brief (intercepted by unknown sources and leaked to ISAP), transmission time-delayed by communications interference until 3 January 3069

MERCENARY TRAITORS RAMPAGE ON VICTORIA!

(30 December 3068—System Error 0404—Backup Transmitted 2 March 3069)

Victoria [CBS]—Mere days after the departure of the Prefectorate Guard from Victoria to engage the Davion enemy, the loyal Capellan citizens of Victoria are suffering at Davion hands! Even though the spinward scum are unable to strike directly at proud Victoria, they have managed to worm their way into the treacherous hearts of Olson's Rangers. This mercenary command, disgraced on Acamar only three years ago, received the mercy and trust of the Celestial Wisdom when he allowed them to guard the Shengli Arms plants. How this trust was betrayed! Killing Major Timothy Rain and all other mercenaries among them with any loyalty in their hearts as they slept, the treasonous dogs proceeded

to inflict terrible damage on the factories they were paid to protect! Countless loyal factory workers lost their lives at the hands of these war criminals, and the factory's defenses were used relentlessly against the efforts of Sung's Victoria Commonality Rangers to dislodge the bandits. Fleeing before *Zhong-shao* Reginald Berkley succeeded in breaching the defenses arrayed against him, Olson's Rangers made for their waiting DropShips, stealing a merchant vessel to allow them to make off with their spoils. Despite the efforts of the Victoria Home Guard aerospace assets and Sung's Air Raiders, the Olson Ranger pirates managed to commandeer a JumpShip and escape from the Victoria system before efforts could be completed to apprehend the pirates. Now en route to New Syrtis, to their new paymaster Hasek and their former commander Nicholas Olson, the butcher of Acamar, they can certainly expect a hero's welcome in the realm so eager to hire and pardon war criminals.

As proud Victorians gather to save as many from the rubble as they can, it remains unknown when Shengli may be able to resume production.

While Olson's Rangers can be certain that they will receive justice for their atrocities on Victoria, their actions cast a shadow of concern on some of the other mercenaries charged with protecting Capellan lives. Clearly, not every mercenary is a McCarron, or a Black Ace, or a Lockhardt. After the sudden departure of Wolf's Dragoons, and now this latest defection, all eyes are on Rivaldi's Hussars. How will they guard Bora?

NEWS DOWNLOADER v3.7



Date & Title	Service	Status
(20 November 3068) "Officials: Selection of New Primus Delayed Indefinitely"	[INN]	COMPLETED
(11 December 3068) "Benjamin Under Attack!" ("Davion Troops Launch...")	[ISAP]	DOWNLOADING
(20 December 3068) "Rescuers Uncover Chancellor's Bunker"	[CBS]	ACCESSING

A SERVICE OF IRIAN NEWS INTERSTELLAR



CHAOS UNLEASHED: LEADING EDGE

LEADING EDGE

Journal Entry 97-3F

Missions are easy to come by, even if the MRBC is having problems with PR. Fact is, a good merc unit has contacts everywhere, not just relying on the standard avenues to bring in revenue. Yeah, it's harder work, and you need your own lawyer team to make sure you don't get shafted with the contract, but honestly? The pay and the mission options are so much better.

Case in point. We're about to hit Kittery to do a recon-in-force for our Capellan liaison. Not sure what office he's attached to, as he approached us through non-standard channels, but the pay was stellar—enough to get Steve's Arctic Fox back up to trim, and we even had enough left over to spring for some of that new autocannon ammo the Feddies flooded the black market with a few months back.

Too bad this contract's only for this mission. I could get used to the pay they're throwing at us. Stupid Capellans. Heh. We'll end up robbing them blind.

SITUATION

Nadir Point CC-332, Kittery

Capellan March, Federated Suns

22 October 3068

Fighting all along the Suns/Confederation border has increased in the past year, with firefights erupting pretty much on every world. The Confederation seems to be gearing up for a major push now; they've hired several mercenary bands to begin raid and recon missions along the Periphery end of the border.

CHAOS UNLEASHED: LEADING EDGE

GAME SET-UP

CBT: Use Forest Terrain maps.

AT2: Use the standard Space maps. All forces begin the track at any Velocity below 6.

RPG: Prepare for a space or ground battle, depending on group composition. The gamemaster should have a defined battleground.

Attacker

The player group is the Attacker. They may designate up to 25 percent of their total force and may set up on one half of the playing area, with one map edge designated as their home edge—and the Defender's objective edge.

Defender

The Defender is a Federated Suns unit with Regular experience. The Defender's deployed force should be 125 percent of the Attacker's total deployed force.

Half of the Defender's force (round down) enters from the edge opposite the Attacker's home edge on Turn One. The second half enters from the same edge on Turn Six.

WARCHEST

Track Cost: 300 WP

Optional Bonuses (all bonuses cumulative):

+100 Heavy Rain: Per the rules on p. 153, *CBTComp* (or p. 12, *MT*). For AT2 games, the same to-hit and piloting penalties apply, as a result of the track taking place in a dust ring around a gas giant in

the Kittery system used to mask the players' approach (the debris is not large enough to follow the *Asteroid* rules).

+150 Enemy Minefields: The Defender places 1D6 + 1 minefields (gamemaster's choice) anywhere on the playing area before the Attacker deploys his units. Attacking units that begin the game in a minefield only set the field off when exiting the hex. (For AT2 players, see the rules for space mines on pp. 22-23, *CE*.)

+150 Spirited Defenders: Increase the Defending force's experience level to Veteran.

Victory Bonuses (not cumulative):

+200 Marginal Victory: Completing one objective.

+400 Partial Victory: Completing two objectives.

+550 Total Victory: Completing all objectives.

OBJECTIVES

1. Distract and delay: No Defending unit may exit its home edge for a minimum of ten turns. For AT2 games, exiting units may not exceed 3 Velocity, reflecting the heavier debris field of the rings.

2. Hammer down: Destroy or cripple at least 75 percent of the Defender's force.

3. Fast recon: Exit one Attacker unit off the Defender's home edge. For AT2 games, exiting units may not exceed 3 Velocity, reflecting the heavier debris field of the rings.

SPECIAL RULES

The following rules are in effect for this track:

CHAOS UNLEASHED: LEADING EDGE

Salvage

Because this mission involves fast recon, salvage is unavailable.

AFTERMATH

In and out, they said, and that's what you did. The balance of payment landed in your Galatean account before you'd even reached Kittery's nadir jump point. Seems your Capellan liaison left the ship shortly after you transmitted the recon data—so that wraps that up. You briefly wonder what operation is coming, before the final repair and refit reports flood your desk. A merc's job is never done, especially when paperwork is involved...

ADDITIONAL HOOKS

Those Capellans seemed odd—the liaison wasn't as nosey as they usually are. Granted, with the state of the Sphere these days,

people everywhere have a lot on their minds... but still. Maybe with enough digging, the players can find out what's really going on in and around Kittery—and what's coming down the barrel.

Expansion Ideas

The player group may have additional riders on their contract, requiring them to blow up key supply dumps, target communication nodes or even headhunt the local defenders' headquarters. As long as their Confederation employer receives the main recon intel, it doesn't much matter. However, they need to be out of the system before November. Something big is coming down, and they really don't want to be here—or so they've been politely warned.

NEXT TRACK

Brew-Ha-Ha; Seed of Discontent

CHAOS UNLEASHED: ONE FOR THE MONEY...

ONE FOR THE MONEY...

Entry 810

We've been at the Gienah nadir jump point for almost a week now, waiting for a bunch of clowns calling themselves Hal's Heinous Halberds. Their Gazelle decided that today was a good day to die—it's power plant just up and quit on them. Our burn in-system is delayed yet again. A full company of assault tanks is nice, but I don't think it's worth this wait. We've wasted a week now. Gienah's GOT to know what's going on by now. I can smell another disaster.

Entry 811

Things got worse. Four JumpShips showed up and are spilling DropShips as we speak. We're being challenged and ordered to surrender. Two outfits just hijacked a Merchant and jumped out. The Halberds idiots wasted no time in surrendering. Our fighters started to skirmish with them, and plugged a Fury. Of course, five of our guys had to die to get that done. For things to suck any harder, I'd need to expose myself to hard vacuum.

Entry 812

Things got better. Turns out the commander of that JumpShip coterie is on the same mission as us, and thought we were intercepting them. The Halberds un-surrendered, and apart from the wimps who split or died, we've got a pretty decent taskforce. Eight more days till we make landfall. Gienah's supposed to be mostly undefended, which is just as well. This whole mess really soured things up; I don't think there'll be much cooperation.

SITUATION

Inbound vector

Gienah, Lyran Alliance

30 September 3068

A Mr. Askai hired numerous mercenary units from nearby Lyran and League space to attack Gienah, specifically the Gienah Automotive and Gienah Combat Vehicles sites. The strikes succeeded, largely because of the mercenaries' overwhelming numbers and the lack of an organized 'Mech force to oppose them. The Gienah militia, however, with support from corporate security forces (and surprisingly well-armed labor union workers), has managed to inflict a serious toll on the mercenaries, exploiting a lack of cooperation among the invaders.

The mercenaries are wrapping up their operations. Some secondary objectives remain, including a vehicle supply dump midway between Gienah Combat Vehicles and the spaceport. It must be destroyed.



CHAOS UNLEASHED: ONE FOR THE MONEY...

GAME SET-UP

CBT: Use at least one Urban Terrain map. Deploy four Heavy two-hex Level 1 buildings. Deploy at least four additional Medium one-hex Level 1 buildings.

AT2: Use a similar setup as for *CBT*, using the *Aerospace on BattleTech Maps* rules (see p. 40, *AT2*).

RPG: Gamemasters may prepare an appropriate environment according to the plans the players decide. The environment should include at least four hardened hangars, surrounded by chain-link fence. The players can elect to destroy the vehicles inside by collapsing the hangars using demolition charges, or by using internal fuel tanks to start a fire, or via another means of destruction.

Attacker

The Attacker consists of up to 25 percent of the player group's total force. All friendly units begin with half their ammunition load as a result of prior engagements. In addition, the gamemaster (or the players, with gamemaster approval) fields two other forces in support of the player group, both equaling 100 percent of the players' deployed force. Both support forces must have lower-quality technology and lesser experience than the players' force.

Each of the three forces enters from a different map side with a starting Velocity of 6 or lower (if applicable).

Defender

The Defender equals 100 percent of the Attacker's total deployed force and must be of lower quality than the players' force in technology and experience. For example, a Regular 'Mech force with B technology would face Green conventional troops with C or lower technology. A Veteran aerospace company would face Regular conventional fighters and anti-aircraft tank. Deploy all forces near the hangars.

WARCHEST

Track Cost: 250 WP

Optional Bonuses (all bonuses cumulative):

+150 High Ambient Temperature: It's a balmy 52 degrees Celsius outside (see p. 83, *BMR*). If using *AT2* rules, consider the same effect a result of some freakish magnetic belt emissions in the area.

+150 Reinforcements: Local personnel manage to reactivate and attack with two Centipede Scout Cars per hangar if the hangars survive up until Turn Five.

+150 Disorganized: Reflecting poor cooperation between the three attacking forces, all friendly forces suffer a -2 penalty to their Initiative rolls.

Victory Bonuses (not cumulative):

+200 Partial Victory: Completing one objective

+400 Total Victory: Completing all objectives

OBJECTIVES

1. Fireworks! At least two hangars are destroyed.

2. Urban renewal: All hangars are destroyed.

3. Wipe them out! All hostile forces are destroyed or forced to withdraw.

SPECIAL RULES

The following rules are in effect for this track:

Forced Withdrawal

All Defending forces must use the *Forced Withdrawal* rules (see pp. 135-136, *DotJ*).



CHAOS UNLEASHED: ONE FOR THE MONEY...

**AFTERMATH**

Despite the mercenaries' disarray and the valiant efforts of the factory workers and security forces, the Gienah Combat Vehicles and most of the Gienah Automotive sites were destroyed or heavily damaged. Combat took a high toll among the mercenaries, which escalated further when various units began blaming each other for various failures, demanding compensation in salvage or funds for the damage they had suffered. The resulting skirmishes caused tremendous damage and loss of life in the town of Molfetta, and tied down several attacking units long enough for reinforcements from nearby worlds to descend upon them. Only a few of the mercenary raiders survived to retreat from Geinah and press charges of contract breach against their apparent employers in the Free Worlds League.

ADDITIONAL HOOKS

Detail-oriented gamemasters can expand this track to cover full insertion, from inbound to outbound vectors. Curious players may want to find out more about their "partners" in the endeavor, especially whether or not the supporting forces have goals compatible with the players' own. And just who is this Mr. Askai?

Furthermore, the competing nature of several of the players' allies may prompt infighting that—left unchecked—could delay or strand the players' force on planet long enough for the nearest defending reinforcements to arrive. (Though delayed themselves by

communication and transport difficulties, the Kirkpatrick's Invaders mercenary command, a battalion-sized veteran 'Mech force stationed on nearby Arcadia, will arrive to hunt down any stragglers still on Geinah within three weeks of the initial attack; the Invaders' 'Mech and aerospace forces—one air lance per 'Mech company—use the B column of the Mercenary Random Assignment Table (see p. 122, *Field Manual: Mercenaries, Revised*); additional rules and information on this force may be found in *MS2*, pp. 44 and 75.)

Expansion Ideas

The Gienah plants in Molfetta are gigantic; significantly damaging them required several days. Gamemasters may set up various other objective raids as a part of this brief campaign, or the players may get an offer to hire on with the local defenders—either to defend the facilities from the other attacking forces, or to help contain the infighting that ravaged Molfetta.

NEXT TRACK

My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean; Brew-Ha-Ha; Seed of Discontent

CHAOS UNLEASHED: GRAVEYARD SHIFT

**GRAVEYARD SHIFT**

[Sigma Six]: "Once more into the breach, eh captain?"

[Sigma One]: "Seems that way, Six. Tighten up formation."

[Sigma Two]: "I'm reading several bogies on long-range radar. We're being tagged, One."

[Sigma One]: "All right, boys, let's get ready. Dracs're here, just like the paymaster said. My mark, execute Alpha-Five maneuver."

[Sigma Six]: "Three, with me. Prep LRMs for maximum spread, then drop to the deck."

[Sigma Three]: "Roger that, Six. Getting visual confirmation now...holy crap! Are those Onis?"

[Sigma Four]: "Seems the Ghost is better armed than our AFFS buddies let on."

[Sigma One]: "Can it, boys. Let's make those Dracs wish they never got out of bed...Mark!"

SITUATION

Inbound vector, Benjamin

Benjamin Military District, Draconis Combine

2 December 3068

After several weeks of rest and refit, your mercenary command went back to work. Finding someone to pay you to blow stuff up was easy. The Feddies were hiring for a secret operation that didn't involve the Confederation, and you couldn't pass up the salvage rights.

With war engulfing the entire Inner Sphere, it was a mercenary's dream—there were contracts aplenty and the pay was good, even if many higher-profile commands ended up on the nightly news getting the short end. Fact was, a merc commander had his choice of contracts, and the Freddie operation looked like a nice plum—even if it did pit you against the Sixth Ghost regiment on a Drac prefecture capital.



CHAOS UNLEASHED: GRAVEYARD SHIFT

GAME SET-UP

CBT: Use any Terrain Maps.

AT2: Use any Terrain Maps except Urban (Light Urban, Heavy Urban if using *Combat Operations*); unless the gamemaster chooses otherwise. This track uses the *Low Altitude Operations* rules (see p. 33, *AT2*).

RPG: The gamemaster may determine the terrain for the track.

Attacker

The player group is the Attacker and may deploy up to 50 percent of their total force. In addition, the Attacker receives support from a Federated Suns force equal to 100 percent of the players' total deployed force. The FedSuns force is Veteran; for its composition, roll on the Federated Suns Random Assignment Table (see p. 139, *Field Manual: Federated Suns*, or p. 225, *Field Manual: Updates*).

The Attacker chooses a starting side before the Defender deploys and may begin with any starting Velocity (if applicable).

Defender

The Defender is elements of the Sixth Ghost Regiment. The Defender's force is 125 percent of the Attacker's total deployed force and is considered Veteran.

The entire defending force deploys within five hexes of the map edge opposite the Attacker's declared starting side. For *AT2* games, the Defender starts at any Velocity below 4 (if applicable).

WARCHEST

Track Cost: 300 WP

Optional Bonuses (all bonuses cumulative):

+200 Night Combat: See p. 87, *BMR*

+200 Elite Defenders: Increase the Defender's experience level to Elite.

Victory Bonuses (not cumulative):

+350 Partial Victory: Completing one objective.

+600 Total Victory: Completing both objectives.

OBJECTIVES

1. Soften them up: Destroy at least 50 percent of the Defender's total deployed force.

2. Paste them: Destroy or cripple the Defender's total deployed force.

SPECIAL RULES

The following rules are in effect for this track:

Salvage

The players' force only obtains salvage rights for enemy units they destroy. Any enemy unit destroyed by the Federated Suns support force becomes AFFS salvage. The gamemaster determines who claims what kill.

Forced Withdrawal

The Defender is operating under *Forced Withdrawal* rules (see pp. 135-136, *DotJ*).

AFTERMATH

The fighting on Benjamin was brutal, with several mercenary commands going in to "soften up" the Combine defenders. The Sixth Ghost used every scrap of their speed and maneuverability, but in the end they succumbed to the pressing Suns attack.

While it disheartened you to see such a storied force go down like a mandre-stag to a pack of wolfin, what really stung was watching the Suns forces throw down with all the gloves off. Urban fighting cost just as much blood as combat outside civilian population centers. Seems the Suns learned some nasty lessons in their recent civil war—targets like hospitals and high-rise complexes came under fire from the Davion guns, as if they were ammo dumps and headquarters. Your force watched one quartet of Suns 'Mechs decimate a hospital complex near the south end of Deber City—a rumor made the rounds that the Dracs had stashed a large ammunition depot in the underground parking complex. Depressing to watch—but at least you didn't pull the trigger. No bad dreams for your boys tonight.

ADDITIONAL HOOKS

Rescue operations aren't a military force's standard operating mode, but sometimes you have to step in and assist, even if you made the mess. While you're still technically fighting the Dracs, doing some good deeds would go a long way to help repair the damaged reputation mercenaries seem to be garnering these days.

Expansion Ideas

Gamemasters may create more complicated missions using the standard Linked Scenario rules (see p. 78, *CO*). Depending on the player group's success against the Sixth Ghost, the FedSuns commanders may use the mercenary command in other missions to help gain a solid foothold on the planet before Combine reinforcements arrive.

NEXT TRACK

Brew-Ha-Ha; Living Dead Men; Brute Force

connection/JIHAD HOT SPOTS:3070/section05: EARLY 3069: THE FOG OF WAR

EARLY 3069: THE FOG OF WAR





EARLY 3069: THE FOG OF WAR

As 3069 opened, war had finally claimed every Inner Sphere nation. Even the Clans experienced some of the chaos, as an enraged Clan Snow Raven fully invaded several worlds in the Draconis Combine. The Draconis March fell prey to the bloodlust as well, executing deep strikes on Benjamin and Galedon V.

Even as the Human Sphere devolved into savage warfare, bright spots began to emerge. The beginning of the new year saw Hohiro Kurita rescued from a Blakist internment camp. The first of many HPG stations was finally cleansed of Blakist interference, with the Orestes HPG transmitting "clean" data once more. The heroic actions of the crew of the LAS *Fylgia* during the disaster at Alarion gave those determined to fight the jihadists a potentially powerful weapon. Governments began reassembling some

structure and focus, with the Lyran Alliance putting out the call to begin new exploration missions along the Periphery borders.

Yet these oases of normality failed to erase the other horrors being broadcast across known space. Several industries, after surviving the first eighteen months of brutal war, saw whole factories and complexes destroyed. Some of the better-known companies began putting out soft warnings of layoffs, financial hardship and longer transport times. These came along with darker, more worrisome reports of some worlds being quarantined or even full loss of communications beyond the White-Out, suggesting that somewhere, whole planets were dying.

Through it all, the Blakist agenda continued. More worlds fell to the Jihadists, especially in the Combine's Dieron Military District. To some, it seemed the End had truly come upon Humankind.

—Michael Bosworth, INN Special Correspondent

THE CHANCELLOR LIVES!

For Immediate Release, Top Priority

(1 January 3069)

Sian [CBS]—*We interrupt your program to bring you this special report*

CBS has just received confirmation from the Ministry of Information that our blessed leader, Sun-Tzu Liao, lives! Less than two weeks ago, our Divine Chancellor rose from his command bunker deep beneath the ruins of the Imperial Palace, rescued by the surviving members of his Blood Guard.

The Celestial Wisdom was trapped without power, and with very little food or water, yet emerged in astonishingly good health, and has—according to the report—made a complete recovery since his ordeal. The Celestial One officially resumed his divine duties today, and is working feverishly with *Sang-ji-an-jun* Talon Zahn to rid our beloved nation of the Davionista barbarians.

CBS has also been informed of a new military campaign, dubbed "Operation Celestial Vengeance," named by our returning leader. Evidently devised personally by Chancellor Liao while trapped beneath the ruined palace, the counteroffensive, in Zahn's words, "shall purge our nation from Hasek's desire to destroy our people and their heritage."

The Chancellor released the following statement soon after his rescue:

"The path of fire down which I journeyed cleansed my soul. Out of the darkness I emerged...I experienced my own *Xin Sheng*. My life belongs to the Confederation and the Confederation is my life. We, the people of the Confederation, are one. Together, will shall rise up with steel resolve, and resist those who would enslave our beloved nation. Capellans, throw off your yoke of occupation. Make the enemy pay the ultimate price."

For this CBS special report, I am Kim Soon Li reporting. *Yǒng yuǎn Liào Sūn Zǐ!*"

SWORDPLAY

FAITH AND HOPE

(Opening passage)

Oh Holy Father, let this journal be used in spreading the reaction of the good people of the Capellan capital to those who wish to know history.

(p. 25—22-12-3068)

Sian is abuzz today with news that we are starting to turn back Hasek's invasion. I have seen the population go from a collective state of depression to near euphoria. The will of the Capellan people is strong, there is no doubting that. And though the Word of Blake's attacks against the other Great Houses have so far left the Capellans alone, Hasek's recent invasion has brought the mood down. Strangely enough, people here are not asking why Hasek is invading. Rather, they ask why he is not fighting the Word of Blake on New Avalon.

(p. 49—26-12-3068)

Rumors of Sun-Tzu Liao surviving the bombardment of the Imperial Palace abounded almost immediately following the bombardment by Hasek's ship. As is the natural flow of such things, the rumors peaked and have dropped off. Surprisingly, though, a resurgence has occurred in the past day or two, with the source of the news being even more interesting: the clean-up crews. It seems the damage to the Palace was less extensive than people were led to believe.

(p. 93—1-1-3069)

Were I a gambling man, I would have placed money down that Sun-Tzu had survived the attack. After he appeared on Capellan Broadcasting today, I would have donated my winnings to the orphans' fund. The timing of the news was...well-planned. Morale

EARLY 3069: THE FOG OF WAR



was in freefall, and the propaganda machine needed something big to stop that. Hasek's invasion was troubling, true, but the loss of Sun-Tzu affected people all over the Confederation. His return will reinvigorate the entire population. Whether that new energy will be well-directed or wasted has yet to be seen.

—Excerpted diary entries of Father Antonio Leary, Sian Jesuit Ministry, Sian

HASEK'S INVASION UNRAVELS

(26 January 3068)

Denbar [CBS]—This is Robert Li reporting for KDBR, an affiliate of Capellan Broadcasting Services, with the latest military brief from Sian by *Sang-jiang-jun* Talon Zahn.

[Cut to: Recorded press conference, Sian pressroom, dateline: 24 January. Zahn stands behind a green marble podium, flanked by Death Commandos.]

"I have no time for questions; therefore, I will give you situation report and status on certain units and worlds.

"CCAF forces have stopped Hasek's invasion cold."

[Applause erupts. Zahn smiles and waves for quiet.]

"Hasek's Capellan March forces advanced as far as Hexare and Imalda with their central thrust, while their northern and southern advances faltered. They captured worlds from Ares to No Return, Aldertaine, Overton and Glasgow. The worlds of Carmen, Housekarle, Sendalor and Homestead were also lost.

"But on 8 October, we launched Operation Thunderstrike after months of preparations, while the First Death Commandos battalion was deployed to aid local forces on occupied worlds. Within weeks, the Remshield's Dragoons and House Imarra, together with additional Death Commando forces and select Home Guard

units, liberated Hexare and Imalda, our first priority targets. CCAF units are working to liberate other worlds.

"In the St. Ives Commonality, both Janissaries commands, with divided loyalties, battled for their worlds. Elements of the Second Janissaries currently control Warlock. As a side note, the Blackwind Lancers returned home to defend the world of Ares.

"Sadly, I must report the destruction of House Ijori and the Fifteenth Dracon on Overton during the fighting there against the First Federated Suns Lancers RCT. Their heroic sacrifice was not in vain, however, as the Lancers withdrew after suffering tremendous casualties, while a few survivors from House Ijori managed to hold the field.

"As of this moment, the Davion advance in our realm has been halted. The people of the Confederation may rest assured that more victories such as we've seen on Hexare and Imalda will come soon.

"Thank you for coming; that's all I have."

CHANCELLOR TO WED!

(22 February 3069)

St. Ives [ISAP]—Mere weeks after his recovery from a devastating attack against the Celestial Throne, celebrations began today on many Capellan worlds in response to the announcement by Chancellor Sun-Tzu Liao of his intent to marry Naomi Centrella. Many have anticipated the engagement for a number of years now, and it will likely further strengthen the alliance between the Capellan Confederation and the Magistracy of Canopus.

This event, so shortly after the Chancellor's reappearance, and the announcement of the existence of his unknown heiress, Ilsa Centrella-Liao, has done much to further improve Capellan morale. Davion forces continue to suffer reversals in Capellan space, and previously pacified worlds have once again become enflamed against the invaders.

Most surprising is the impact of this news in the St. Ives region. Naomi Centrella has made herself quite popular among the people of St. Ives during the past couple of years, and many respect her for her troops' defense of Denbar. Approval of the engagement is very high.

CCAF DESTROYS DAVION INVADERS!

(28 January 3069)

Sian [XSFP]—Honored Citizens of the Capellan Confederation! Our valiant Janshi have regained control over the worlds of Homestead and Housekarle. On Homestead, Warrior House Lu Sann succeeded in destroying the hated Ninth Rangers of the Illician Lancers with assistance from the Third Confederation Reserve Cavalry. Meanwhile, the terrorists of the Jie Fang Legion finally met their end on New Westin at the hands of the Fifth Confederation Reserve Cavalry, supported by the valiant Death Commandos.

It is indeed a great day as our hated enemy continues to receive his just deserts for the atrocities committed against the Capellan people. These war criminals will soon be pushed out of Capellan space, and our St. Ives brothers can soon sleep free of danger. May our brave Capellan troops pursue the Davion pirates all the way back to their den on New Surtis!

XIN SHENG! XIN SHENG! XIN SHENG!

LINE OF SUCCESSION SECURED!

(20 February 3069)

Sian [CNA]—Capellans everywhere rejoiced after our Celestial Wisdom announced today that the line of succession has been secured with the formal adoption of Ilsa Centrella-Liao! Coming so quickly after the glorious return of our beloved Chancellor, this news further buoys our spirit, and strengthens our resolve against our Davion enemy!



EARLY 3069: THE FOG OF WAR

STRIKING BACK!

(26 February 3069)

Frazer [CBS]—A mere two days after the Protectorate Guards landed, all resistance from the local militia ended. As the planetary leaders surrendered their world, Frazer reentered the Confederation to which it has always belonged. Two firefights saw most of the militia armor destroyed, and the planetary spaceport has been secured along with the local HPG.

The Strategios and the CCAF have drawn the attacking Feddie troops deep into the Sian Commonality, hopelessly extending their supply lines, all while gathering our own forces for an attack at the exposed belly of the Capellan March. These are only the first attacks of Operation Celestial Vengeance, a campaign to reclaim our rightful lands from the Davion aggressors.

Almost before the fighting ended here on Frazer, the Protectorate Guards prepared for departure, already planning their next attack while leaving a detachment of troops here to safeguard the planet until further garrison forces arrive. Engineering elements of the infantry troops are already at work repairing the light damage caused by the fighting and the wrecks of the burned-out vehicles. Even the dead soldiers are given proper treatment, to show that the Confederation respects the local population, working smoothly to ease the transition into the Capellan Confederation with the least amount of change and hostility.

For CBS, this is Frank Otto with the Protectorate Guards on Frazer.

GALAX ASSAULTED

(20 April 3069)

Galax [GALAX WORLDWIDE NEWS]—This is Malcolm Justman reporting for GWN aboard the Rescue DropShip *Marcus Garvey* at Lagrange Point Delta. Over the last four days the *Marcus* has recovered only a handful of survivors from the thousands employed at the Federated-Boeing facility. From their accounts has emerged a picture of a brutal assault that ripped through the Port Simon Shipyards.

Supported by at least two WarShips, a flotilla of Blakist assault DropShips spearheaded the attack. The hastily launched FSS *Intrepid*, Federated-Boeing security forces and squadrons from the Sixth Crucis Lancers Aerospace Brigade met the attack, but were overwhelmed by a numerically superior foe. Survivors report that the Blakists stripped the yards of any hull capable of moving under its own power, including the FSS *Melissa Davion*. Once the prizes were clear, the remaining structures were demolished by capital weapons fire. Federated-Boeing's corporate HQ—the famous Floating Tower—was destroyed along with the construction slips and manufacturing plants.

Meanwhile, a smaller Blakist force executed a high-speed attack on Galax itself. The Crucis Lancer aerospace forces intercepted the attackers as far out as possible, with recent reports of

Blakist chemical weapons attacks still fresh in everyone's minds. The Lancers' defense was successful; only two crippled enemy fighters even reached the planet, burning up over the Megaplex ground installations.

But the victory is hollow. Though Galax lives, with the loss of the Port Simon yards, the Federated Suns has sustained a crippling blow to its ability to build and repair DropShips. Experts fear this will precipitate an economic crisis similar to—

"It is our charge to protect the flickering flame of the candle of knowledge. Like moths, the unbelievers who are drawn to the light shall be burned in its cleansing fire."

KATHIL ATTACKED!

[Camera shakes with the sudden bright flash of heavy energy weapons discharging in its direction. Black 'Mechs move into view amid a smoky urban battle zone. Camera zooms in to spot the Death Commandos' skull insignia on the approaching 'Mechs.]

[Hayes, off-camera]: "This is Inman Hayes, just outside the Yare Ground Station..." [Weapons discharge] "You're witnessing the destruction—" [Massive explosion] "—of the Kathil shipyards' microwave power station. Death Commando 'Mechs have systematically destroyed the site and its defenders..."

[Camera rises momentarily to glimpse an aerospace fighter streaking past.]

"...The militia tells us that the attacking force is comprised of the Second McCarron's, House Dai Da Chi and..." [An intense blinding flash washes out the picture.] "...Holy shi—! Control room, what the fuck was that?"

[Technician, audio-only]: "We're working on it..."

[Producer, audio-only]: "Inman, we had a live feed from the K-F Yare Shipyard. Listen..."

[Female reporter, audio-only]: "We are now under attack by Dai Da Chi ships. Their main target appears to be the Simon Davion..." [klaxons blare] "Hey, chief! What's going on?"

[Chief, audio-only]: "Capellan bastards just lunched a nuke at us."

[Reporter, audio-only]: "A n-uke? What do we do?"

[Chief, audio-only, faint]: "Make peace with your maker, lady."

[Reporter, sobbing]: "...Sam, tell my wife and kids I lo—" [Screeching sound. Static.]

[Filtered voice]: "Our Capellan allies have destroyed the heretics' WarShip. Give praise to Blake!"

[Hayes]: "Shit, is this confirmed?"

[Chief]: "Too much interference, Inman, but we have confirmation that the Caps destroyed the militia."

[Hayes]: "God damn Hasek! Chuck, let's move! We've been seen!"

[Chief, nervous]: "Get out of there, son!"

[Hayes]: "We are, Sam! We—" [Flash. Explosion. Screams. The image blanks.]

—Live special news broadcast aired by KNN, Kathil, 15 May 3069

TRAVEL ADVISORY: GALAX

For Immediate Release

(9 June 3069)

Numenor [FSBS]—Beginning this week, the AFFS has placed a travel advisory in effect for the Galax system. No JumpShip is to enter or depart the system without clearance from the AFFS. So far no explanation has been given, simply a statement that travel restrictions will remain in place “for the duration of the local emergency”.

Even Federated-Boeing vessels are being denied access to the Galax system, where HPG communications—intermittent since the Word of Blake attack in April—have now ceased.

FISTS AND FEATHERS

RESTORATION!

(16 January 3069)

Skye [FREE SKYE PRESS]—Despite weeks of speculation by critics [*Truth seekers*] that the ongoing Lyran defense [*Skye aggression*] has bogged down, reports are now coming in of successful counterattacks that have liberated several Lyran worlds. Contrary to League claims, LAAF forces have freed Alcor and Mizar. Officials from the Duke’s Department of War have also confirmed that Mizar contained League slave camps and execution pits. Summer’s brief capture by League forces ended earlier this week, where similar atrocities have also been found [*manufactured*].

ARCHON’S PLEA: NEVER YIELD!

“Fellow Lyrans,

“I come to you a bruised and battered leader, hiding among the ruins of our once proud capital. Mere hours ago many of my bodyguards sacrificed their lives to keep me safe from capture, while under the guns of our once great icon, the LCS *Invincible*.

“But no matter how desperate it seems here, we fight on. This is my example, my lesson to the rest of the Alliance. The lesson of perseverance.

“During the torturous Succession Wars, we persevered. When the Clans invaded and claimed world after world, we persevered. When brother turned against brother mere years ago in the civil war, we persevered. And with the help of our Lyran heroes such as Adam Steiner, Morgan Kell and Duke Kelswa-Steiner, we will persevere once again.

“Resist with all your might, as we do. Fight the Word of Blake with no reserve, no surrender and no remorse, as we have. They will not stop short of our destruction, so neither should we with theirs.

“My people, through these dark days, the Alliance *will* persevere!”

—Message from Archon Peter Steiner to the Lyran Alliance, sent during the attempted breakthrough of the Blakist blockade of Tharkad, 18 March 3069

THE FOG OF WAR

Evidence was also released [*“manufactured”*] today by the War Department that revealed similar atrocities [*“Mannequins and tattered remains of League defenders!”*] on Syrma and Zebebelgenubi. One “execution pit” [*“bloated propagandist hype”*] on Syrma, outside the logging town of New Delphus, contained more than 350 [*“so-called”*] victims—many of whom showed signs of torture [*“combat”*] prior to death. As more worlds are reclaimed from the League, more of these “death camps” are being discovered [*“Manufactured and sold to the cattle citizenry!”*].

Duke Steiner commented briefly on the discoveries before [*“Acting!”*] breaking down. “This only shows that our decision to go to war to protect our borders was the right one to take [*“For his own power-mad ambitions.”*]. Those warmongers in the so-called ‘Free Worlds’ League attempted to scour Skye, much the same way their Blakist allies scoured [*“attempted to free”*] Tharkad.

“We didn’t start this war, but by God, we’ll finish it. I promise you this: Skye will do what is necessary to safeguard her citizenry from such horrors [*“Including lies, deceit, and treachery. In other words, continue to be Lyran!”*]. Vengeance will be ours [*“As it suits his purposes.”*].”

FALLEN IDOLS

“This is Bob Deal, and welcome to another edition of *Battlefield Justice*, where warriors convicted of treason are given a second chance for a pardon by defeating their foes. Only the Word of Blake would be so forgiving and you are the ultimate winner as we see some great fights. We’re high on the Raven’s Nest in the Cathay Arena to give you an unfettered view of the action. Today Steve McCormick of the so-called Solaris Defense League will pilot a donated *Valkyrie* against an *Axman*, a *Crusader* and a *Wasp*.

“McCormick jumps and fires at the *Wasp*, trying to take down the weakest opponent first, but the *Wasp* also jumps and sends out a volley of missiles that hit the *Valk*, as the *Crusader*’s missiles on either side prevent him from altering his trajectory. One change you may have noticed to the arena is that the trees have been trimmed to only a few meters in height, allowing for unprecedented coverage of battles here—as well as more action!

“Shrugging off the missile attack, McCormick is pummeled by SRMs from the closing *Crusader*, but he returns fire with his lasers and pivots closer to the larger machine to keep it between him and the *Axman*’s big cannon.

“Oh my! The *Crusader* drops to the ground as the *Wasp* fires from behind and the *Axman* lets go with the cannon. Just as he fires, the *Valkyrie*’s leg disintegrates and the ‘Mech twists toward us as the *Wasp* shreds it from behind—

“Christ! Missiles incoming! Get back! Mommy—”

—Unaired audio telecast of a Blakist-sponsored arena duel, dated 11 February 3069 (smuggled off-world by Solaris resistance)



EARLY 3069: THE FOG OF WAR

OUR ACHILLES HEEL?

Efforts last week by General of the Armies Adam Steiner to rescue Archon Peter Steiner-Davion are commendable, and the sacrifices of the men and women who executed his orders must never be forgotten. One can call the assault many things: Daring, for its intent to break the blockade without WarShip support. Inspiring, for its ability to penetrate the Word of Blake's blockade. Useful, for its ability to extract a morale-boosting message from the Archon before being turned back by the *Invincible*. But one word cannot be used: Successful. The Archon remains beyond the reach of his people.

The power to deny is the power to control, and it follows that with Word of Blake's continued ability to deny our leader any access to his nation basically places Archon Peter Steiner-Davion under their de facto control.

We cannot let this continue. If we cannot break the blockade of Tharkad—and, indeed, without either the *Yggdrasil* or the *Fylgia*, we cannot—we must rescue our head of state through other means. We must install a new one. We cannot let the Blakists continue to have this level of control over our nation!

—Syndicated commentary by “Big Brother,” Brotherhood Publications, 24 March 3069

AVENGERS FALL BACK

(2 April 3069)

Arc-Royal [DBC]—As before, the Jade Falcons waited like vultures, until they perceived that the fighting on other fronts had weakened us enough. Then they attacked.

Facing a repeat of the Clans' predatory tactics, the LAAF responded in kind, recalling the Thorin FTM from Gibbs—where its aborted September 3067 demobilization began—and dispatching them along with the Knights of St. Cameron to punch through the Falcon Occupation Zone at Baker 3. With their lines of communication threatened, the Falcons would be forced to shift troops from other fronts.

However, Khan Pryde apparently learned her lessons well. Expecting to face the Tenth Provisional Garrison Cluster, the Avengers instead ran into the Seventh and Eighth Talons—both front-line units with experience battling Inner Sphere forces. The Thorin FTM (also known as Archer's Avengers) bore the brunt of the Clan attack on the LZ, squeezing in between the two Clusters like a vise.

When it appeared the Avengers would be overwhelmed, the Knights of St. Cameron struck at the Seventh Talon's rear, hardly slowing as they annihilated the Clansmen who had so cavalierly dismissed them as a threat. When the Knights then hit the Eighth Talon's flank, the assault distracted the Falcons enough for the

remnants of the Thorin Militia to make a run for their DropShips, their retreat covered by the mercenaries.

No official casualty figures have yet been released, but rumors suggest that more than fifty percent of the Thorin FTM fell in the battle, and that Avengers commander General Archer Christifori is himself among the missing.

DESPERATE GETAWAY

(13 April 3069)

Alarion [ANN]—With the destruction of the First Alarion Jaegers today outside the nuclear ruins of Craiova, Alarion's last defenses have been destroyed. The Word of Blake still has not sent any ground forces down to the surface, but as a new plague continues to decimate the population centers of New Jordan, it has become clear that they are avoiding their own bioweapon. Little is known of this weapon, save that it is apparently bonding to many of the native and imported lifeforms here, but is only lethal to humans. The planetary government has ordered all civilians who have yet to show signs of the epidemic to seek shelter in designated quarantine areas.

I have little hope to offer. Almost all the news is horrible. The Bowie Industriplex is as much a radioactive memory as Craiova, and orbital bombardment destroyed the Alarion Naval Academy. Port Sydney is no more. Despite the valiant actions of the Sydney Defense Squadrons and the Alarion Jaegers' First Air Wing, Word of Blake WarShips destroyed the yards yesterday—after pillaging as many vessels as they could, including the still-damaged LAS *Robert Kelswa*.

The WarShips, including a *Dante*-class destroyer believed to be the *Montpelier*, are believed to be responsible for deploying the nuclear weapons that have already claimed the lives of many millions, including planetary Duke Anatoly Serfass. But simply laying this world waste was apparently not enough. The Word intends to exterminate our planet, make it perpetually uninhabitable. I do not know why. I relay these facts so that they may be of use to those who will stand against the Word of Blake and make them pay for their crimes.

Only one ray of sunshine exists amid this horror. Under the command of Admiral Helena Danvers, we know that the LAS *Fylgia* managed to escape extermination and capture at Blakist hands. Blasting clear from her moorings hours after the Blakist ships emerged from the Tiber-Alarion LaGrange point, the *Fylgia* slipped away from her pursuers, denying the Blakists the most valuable prize we had. During the fighting, the *Fylgia* did not fire her naval autocannon, or any missiles, suggesting she has not yet been fully equipped. The Word of Blake surely knows this, so I say this for the benefit of any who might hear me: the *Fylgia* will be a powerful weapon against the Blakists. Use her well, for she may truly be Alarion's final legacy to humanity.

EARLY 3069: THE FOG OF WAR

BRETT PULLS BACK

(20 April 3069—System Error 0404—Backup Transmitted 17 May 3069)

Marik [MARIK COMMONWEALTH TODAY]—In a move widely anticipated since the Blakist assault on the Free Worlds, FWLM troops in the Lyrans Alliance have today begun a staged withdrawal from their occupied territories. A number of worlds have been completely abandoned, though in all cases the withdrawal took place in good order. On only one world did the League military see any fighting with Lyrans troops.

"These redeployments aid our strategic goals," said a spokesman for Marshall Brett, "freeing up troops from garrison duty to allow us to meet more pressing threats." The spokesman did not elaborate on the nature of these threats, but they are likely to include the Word of Blake, whose mix of military action and diplomacy has allowed them to carve a swathe through the Free Worlds. The destination of the withdrawn troops is likewise unknown, but some are expected to move to the capital, replacing those slain in the Blake Militia strike last autumn. Domestic conflict within the Free Worlds is also a growing problem, even without Blakist involvement, and some of the troops may be bound for peacekeeping operations.

Fighting continues along the Free Worlds-Alliance front, but these redeployments suggest the FWLM, or at least Brett's battle group, is shifting to a defensive stance. Whether such a move will placate the Steiners or encourage them to further military action remains unclear. Diplomatic relations between the League and the Alliance remain precarious, but Brett's move may provide the groundwork for an armistice along the Steiner-Marik border.

ALARION OFFLINE!

(29 May 3069)

Arc-Royal [ISAP]—LAAF analysts voiced concern today over the status of the Alarion HPG network. Having suffered a crippling attack against the orbital shipyards less than two months ago—where the LAS *Fylgia* made a daring dry-dock escape—the provincial capital has lagged farther and farther behind in standard communication schedules, alarming many officials in the public and private sectors.

Possible causes for this blackout stem from the devastating surface attacks during the Word of Blake strikes that destroyed the Alarion shipyards, including unconfirmed and widespread use of nuclear and biological weapons. Coupled with classified reports from some of the military traffic that recently passed through the system, the situation has many government officials worried.

In related news, the Alarion Provincial Travel Panel—provisionally headquartered on Buena—has issued a general advisory for all free merchants to steer clear of the Alarion system while the appropriate government agencies investigate further. Any unauthorized vessels entering the Alarion system will be subject to

EXPLORERS WANTED

"Lyrans Alliance Seeks Explorers to Investigate Void Between Known and Inhabited Worlds."

Now isn't that a bit out of character, folks? It strikes this reporter as odd that during the present hostility toward mercenaries in the ongoing battles with Blakist forces, General Adam Steiner is calling for explorers willing to investigate dangerous voids—and he's opened this call to mercenary units.

You have to wonder about the significance of this call, so close on the heels of Steiner's failed attempt against the Tharkad blockade. In the past year, many of our brothers and sisters have been retreating to the unexplored voids, such as the Deep Periphery, just to escape persecution. And many have not come back.

My advice: Answer this call at your own risk, but ask for high compensation if you do.

There can only be two reasons for the Lyrans leaders to risk lives and the swiftly diminishing contents of their wallets on "explorers" in the deep. Either they suspect some WoB bases are floating around out there and they'd rather risk merc necks to root them out, or—and this seems the most improbable—General Steiner is desperate enough about the state of his defense to look for missing ships like the *Fylgia*. I mean, hey, the Blakies found the *Invincible*, right? How hard can it be?

You make the call, ladies and gents. Is it worth it? This reporter thinks not.

—Libardo Bertolino, *MercWarrior VidZine*, MercNet Broadcasting, 5 May 3069

the appropriate fines and penalties as detailed under the Alliance Transportation Code of Conduct Act.

CRUMBLING LINES

To: Kmd-Gen. Tabitha Bjorn (Cmdr. LIC Propaganda Branch)

From: Kommandant Scott Parker (Norns Data Analyst)

Re: Troop Performance Review (July 3068 to June 3069)

General,

Per your request, I have appended the completed troop performance review. However, I can also give you a summary here. While our forces have achieved a few victories on the FWL front, the picture elsewhere is less encouraging.

With the Great Refusal and the success of operations during the FedCom Civil War against the Jade Falcons, the general impression was that we had taken our measure of the Clans and could now face them on something approaching an even footing. However, combat reports following the Falcons' renewed aggression show that our troops are not performing as they have in the past.

Unfortunately, the LAAF is facing a crisis in morale that is having a detrimental impact on efficiency. The troops on the front



EARLY 3069: THE FOG OF WAR

lines are receiving daily news of Blakist predations. We are asking them to defend the Alliance, yet the Alliance appears powerless to defend their homes. Worse, the infrastructure upon which the LAAF depends is teetering on the brink. Even commands in critical positions are starting to suffer supply problems.

I am at a loss as to how we can put a positive spin on our current situation. Frankly, we need a miracle.

Scott

—LIC Military Analysis Report, dated 30 June 3069 (leaked to INN via undisclosed sources, 16 August 3070)

DRAGON RECLAIMED!

For Immediate Release to All Outlets

(20 January 3069)

[VotD]—Rejoice, people of the Combine, for our victory ["downfall"] begins this day! The Dragon's son, the ["broken"] Pillar of the Dragon, Hohiro Kurita, has escaped the clutches ["embrace"] of the ["Blessed"] Blakists! As he did on Teniente, as he has done on Edo, the Dragon's heir once again defies the Yellow Bird and takes his place ["as a broken figurehead"] at the forefront of our liberation ["Backward slide into chaos."]

Early on the morning of January 4, an elite ["lucky"] DEST squad penetrated the Word of Blake compound ["rejuvenation center"] that held ["as an honored guest"] the honorable Hohiro. Utilizing the ["traitorous"] help of a few surviving members of the Black Watch that had been captured ["sequestered"] there, Lord Kurita defied ["foolishly rejected"] his Blakist overseers ["guardians"] and escaped their prison ["shelter"]. Though wounded ["By your own troops as he left them behind!"], he is on his way to New Samarkand to rejoin the Coordinator and the Kanrei to formulate the Blakists' demise ["Vacuous statements from a vegetable and a traitor."].

To honor Hohiro's return, the Coordinator has declared that the first of February shall be known as the Day of Dawning ["For our Knowledge is your Salvation!"]. All businesses may take the holiday off, and all cities are encouraged to celebrate the return of the Dragon's heir. The Dragon has shown itself to be immortal and nothing can stand against its might, not even the Word of Blake. ["If you buy into this vapid, self-serving neo-ancestry hoopla, you need our assistance in elevating you to a higher standard of thinking. Your day of decision is coming, Dragon. Choose wisely or choose death. Either way, we will accommodate you!"]

THE DRAGON BESIEGED

GHOSTS OF THE BLACK WATCH

(3 January 3069)

Dieron [DIERON UNDERGROUND PRESS]—People of Dieron, take heart! The despised invaders claimed they were dead, but the warriors of the Black Watch have survived! Even now they are fighting beside the brave citizens who have taken up arms against our enemy.

Even with their ranks sorely depleted and their comrades in the Eridani Light Horse annihilated, these "Ghosts of the Black Watch" have vowed to continue the fight alongside the heroic DCMS warriors who battle the invaders. Time and again the Word of Blake and their money-warriors have felt the lash of their fury. With the aid of volunteers and the heroic DCMS, the Ghosts have struck at Blakist patrols, supply depots and detention camps.

In the most daring operation yet, the Ghosts overran the Yomichi Valley "re-education center". Overwhelming the Blakist "warders," the Black Watch helped free hundreds of prisoners—including many Third Dieron Regulars captured when their regiment was destroyed in the first lightning attack last year.

The Ghosts' activities have become too much for the invaders to ignore—substantial rewards are being offered for information on their location, as well as that of freed prisoners.

ENTER THE WORD

(21 February 3069)

Benjamin [ISAP]—For the past three months, troops hailing from the Federated Suns have attempted to gain total control over Benjamin. Despite the efforts of the Sixth Ghost Regiment, which landed here only a few weeks ago, the Davion forces were succeeding. All this changed yesterday, when orbital bombardments launched by Word of Blake vessels inflicted massive destruction on all military forces, Davion and Kurita. The bombardments have since ceased, and the WarShips appear to have withdrawn, but their brief visit caused substantial damage to the civilian infrastructure.

Of particular note was the sacrifice of *Sho-sa* McKinnon, who left Abraham City with the remainder of his force, hailing the Blakists and daring them to destroy his unit in the open, away from the city the enemy had begun to systematically annihilate. Such selfless bravery in the face of inhuman atrocity must be commended and remembered.

With the Blakists seemingly gone for now, the remainder of the Davion and Kurita forces have called a truce, apparently dividing the world into zones under their respective control, along with demilitarized areas where both sides have promised not to tread. Peace has finally come to Benjamin, but at a terrible cost.

MORE WORLDS FREE FROM KURITA TYRANNY!

(21 March 3069)

Terra [VOICE OF TRUTH]—As of last week, the freedom-loving peoples of Al Na'ir, Imbros III and Saffel have been liberated. The former Terran Hegemony worlds welcomed the arrival of Word of Blake Militia task forces on Al Na'ir and Saffel. On Imbros III, the mercenary command Mobile Fire was charged with removing Minamoto's dictatorial heel from the necks of those who have suffered under Combine tyranny for so long.

Al Na'ir proved an uncompromising battleground for the brave warriors of our Third Division. Fragmented groups of Combine supporters continued to hold out in scattered habitats and mines. Bloody Skies III-Mu and Force of Thought III-Delta waged a campaign that quickly devolved into a cave-by-cave and room-by-room advance.

In comparison, the drive to liberate Saffel went quickly and bloodlessly. Unlike Al Na'ir, the pro-Combine factions chose not to use the local population as living shields, allowing the valiant warriors of Blake to eliminate them with minimal collateral damage.

Other former Hegemony worlds can expect to be liberated from centuries of Combine tyranny in the coming months.

CRY OF THE RAVEN

[Sho-sa *Ischach Mulvaney*]: "*Tai-sa* Ourho, my battalion is in position."

[*Tai-sa Tomi Ourho*]: "*Domo*. Remember, *Sho-sa*, strike at them once, then withdraw. We are closing on your position, but may not arrive in time to support you. It will be difficult for you to serve the Dragon while dead."

[*Mulvaney*]: "Understood, *Tai-sa*. Forgive me, but I thought the Snow Ravens were a weak Clan, whose prowess paled in comparison to the Smoke Jaguar or Ghost Bear Clans? Why all this caution?"

[*Ourho*]: "Pale though they may be, weak they are not. Even the weakest of their warriors can match skills with our veterans. And these are likely some of the most skilled warriors that Clan fields. But they have not yet learned what it is to fight us. We will teach them at their expense."

[Sho-sa *Connie Chang*]: "*Tai-sa*, they have adapted to our tactics. I anticipate we will lose the air to them soon."

[*Ourho*]: "Understood. Sell yourselves dearly. *Sho-sa* Mulvaney, our scouts indicate their first Star will be upon you soon."

[*Mulvaney*]: "*Hai!* They have just crested the ridge! Two *Koshi*, one *Uller*, one *Puma* and a design I do not recognize. No Elementals. They are closing on our position fast. Second Company has engaged them! The *Puma* has fallen! All troops, withdraw! To your APCs!"

[*Static for a few moments*]

[*Ourho*]: "Status report!"

[*Mulvaney*]: "Commander, they are equipped for anti-infantry duty! They have engaged and destroyed most of the APCs, and are proceeding to destroy the battalion! We need support *now!*"

[*Ourho*]: "Stand your ground. We will be there in five minutes."

COUNCIL OF GEMS

[*Obsidian*]: "What is our status regarding Luthien?"

[*Pearl*]: "Not good. The LAW facilities are total losses."

[*Sapphire*]: "*lie!*"

[*Pearl*]: "*Hai*. Every last megaplex has been destroyed, thanks to the Blakists' indiscriminate use of tac nukes."

[*Ruby*]: "Unfortunate. Solvency?"

[*Sapphire*]: "I have a few ideas. We should talk privately."

[*Pearl*]: "*Hai*."

[*Obsidian*]: "Diamond, you are quiet this day. What is in the box you brought?"

[*Sound of snaps*]

[*Diamond*]: "Gentlemen, Emerald is no longer a problem."

[*Silence*]

[*Jade*]: "As it should be."

[*Diamond*]: "*Hai*. Now. What is the word of our other *ronin*, our mole in lofty places?"

[*Ruby*]: "She has gone to ground. She knows we are not pleased with her and her lover's actions."

[*Pearl*]: "Damnable bitch. If she had just remembered her place...or he his, we would not have this problem."

[*Obsidian*]: "What's done is done. She has done us a service, after all, since the Pillar's attention is directed at them and not at us."

[*Diamond*]: "She *is* us, however."

[*Ruby*]: "*lie*. A shadow, nothing more. Though they may find her—and our recent placement of Jerrar into the position will guarantee that—they will not find us. After all, it is why we selected her."

[*Sapphire*]: "I'm not comfortable with him there. He's too new. He could slip up, make a mistake. And that may well damn us all this time."

[*Ruby*]: "I trust my judgment. And Jade's. His record is spotless, which elevates him in the Coordinator's camp."

[*Jade*]: "His part is more of the knife pointed at our protégé. To remind him of our presence. We still hold the power over him. His daughter, for one."

[*Diamond*]: "As long as the Order does not know, we are safe. If they ever link the bitch and him together..."

[*Ruby*]: "That connection is long dead and buried. And when she is gone, the last link to him and us is done. We have nothing to fear now except—"

[*Obsidian*]: "From what I've seen, *that* isn't something we need to worry about. The Blakists at least did something right there..."

—Recording made on Pesht, attributed to unknown parties (date unknown, circa March-April 3069), supplied to INN via ISAP sources

[*Mulvaney*]: "We will *not!* They have already decimated Second Company, and First and Third have taken heavy casualties! *lie!* Air strike! Take cover! Take cov—" [Transmission lost at source]

[*Ourho*]: "*Sho-sa*, report! *Mulvaney!*" [Pause] "*Ourho* to Eleventh Ghost, the militia are no more. Form up to engage their screening force. *Chu-i* Rucker, bring your *Jenners* to the front. The Omnis are in anti-in-



EARLY 3069: THE FOG OF WAR

fantry configurations, so they should be light on anti-Mech weaponry. Second Company will support, but you will pin them down."

[Chu-i Rucker]: "Hai, Tai-sa..."

—Intercepted communications from Valentina, 11 March 3069, relayed to ISAP via undisclosed sources

VICTORY, AT COST

To: *Gunji-no-Kanrei* Minamoto

CC: Hohiro Kurita

>>File 280469ISFI-*TS*decrypt complete<<

>>file attached: //TSAAISF#SXRT3-Cabra Dulce//<<

Honored *Kanrei*:

We have received an update from our agents on Galedon V via JumpShip courier, which explains why it has taken so long to hear of the status of our counterattack in the system. Apparently, during one of the final stands made by the AFFS troops, the Suns forces blew up the HPG station in an attempt to distract us from their withdrawal. Fortunately, *Chu-sa* Huchinag saw fit to prepare a detailed report for us and sent it through standard ISF channels, as is his duty.

In short, we have successfully thrown the invading March forces off Galedon V. No damage has been done to the shipyards, though the fighting ravaged several cities. The Suns troops have made several defensive stands in the cities ringing the DropPort, using our citizenry as shields.

However, what I'm most interested in bringing to your attention isn't the status of the counterattack. That you can receive via standard DCMS communications. What caught my attention isn't something an ordinary officer or even a Warlord would pick up. It appears in the last portion of *Chu-sa* Huchinag's report—I have highlighted it for your attention. It seems a particularly fierce battle occurred in the Outermark Hills. That reference is important because, as you are now aware, an extensive old graveyard site is located there. Specifically, the *Cabra Dulce Memorial Site*.

The location of Bunker SX-RT3.

Chu-sa Huchinag reported that he was "concerned about the momentum of the offensive, because the DCMS is down two whole companies of troops from a mysterious, fast-spreading flu outbreak."

Kanrei, Lord Kurita. I fear that the fighting with the Davions has unleashed a far deadlier curse than what the Blakists are doing elsewhere.

Permission to formulate options is hereby requested.

Your servant,

Director Shakir Jerrar

—Intercepted ISF communiqué (authenticity unconfirmed) dated 28 April 3069, as reported on Oshika pirate interwebsite "DragonWatch"

BLAKE'S HAND AT GALEDON?

Hey, anybody going to Galedon V, I hope you got your shots first. It was already a nasty place to visit, but it sounds like the whole planet went from bad to worse. Seems the place got hit by a virus, and not the electronic kind, either. Reports of the locals' condition have not been forthcoming. But what would you expect from the DCMS and the Dragon? These guys are tighter with their information than a Capellan moneylender with his purse. But I've managed to piece together some info.

First off, we can rule out the esoteric bugs. It's not Ebola or *yersinia pestis*. Those are just too nasty for their own good. Nice for local dispersal, but for widespread use, they're too efficient. No chemical attack, either. UrbStryc-A, sarin gas and all their cousins require too much for a planet-wide attack. And it's definitely not something like Chungalomeningitis. *That* little bug just causes weight gain, loss of hair and a severe bend toward Libertarianism.

No, I'll put money down that somebody tailored this bug from something already in Galedon's biosphere. And judging from the amount of electrolytic base being imported, I'd have to say it's an influenza strain.

The real question is, why would the Word of Blake do this? Call me goofy, but I believe the Word was sincere when they said they were just trying to return order to Luthien. But that's one for another day. In this case, I have to wonder about their motives. Has the Word given up on positive relations with the Combine? Have they decided to wipe that branch of humanity off the map as well?

Can they handle another front in their war?

—Renegade Freedom InterWeb posting by "Starling", 1 June 3069

BARGAINED AND DONE

FALLING STARS

(19 January 3069)

Black Earth [INN]—Everyone has seen the trids of the big space battles; massive ships passing by one another, close enough to make out gun ports and portholes. But in reality, space is big, ships are pinpoints of light, and the flash of explosions makes fireflies look like blimps. Most space combat is seen and recorded by radar and tactical computers. But for every maxim there is an exception. For this reporter, the death of the *Kerensky's Blues* was one such exception.

On the edge of oblivion, I was among hundreds to witness the fury of the Jade Falcons as they descended on Black Earth. The Blue Star Irregulars fought well, but could not halt the onslaught. They sounded a retreat, surrendering the world to the Falcons, hoping to

SAVAGES!



[Blizzard]: "Roger that, Control. *Sir Guthrie* is now locked and we are preparing for supply transfer."
 [Ramora Control]: "Terror, your supply ship has arrived and is on station. Prepare for docking maneuvers."
 [White Terror]: "Acknowledged, Control. We are ready and waiting."
 [Control]: "*Spur*, your supply ship has been delayed. New transport inbound three point five hours."
 [Spur]: "Understood. We shall watch herd over these other merchant vessels then, *quiaff?*"
 [Control]: "Aff. Though I doubt we will see anything unusual this far inside the Alliance."
 [James McKenna]: "*Oswald*, we are having trouble opening your cargo doors. Can you confirm if there is a system problem on your end?"
 [Oswald]: "Roger, *James*. We're manually overriding the doors now..."
 [Control]: "*Madagascar*, why are you killing velocity? Continue on vector to the *Terror*. We have a tight schedule to keep; this Star is to be back on duty in less than twenty-three hours."
 [Madagascar]: "*Dragon's ire kindled. Raven's time of reckoning. Fire and flame to hell.*"
 [Terror]: "What the—? That *Mule* is opening her cargo bay doors..."
 [Control]: "*Madagascar*! What is the meaning of this?"
 [Spur]: "...Multiple target locks! We are being actively targeted by multiple missile launchers! From that *Mule*!..."
 [Control]: "...Raven's Wing Star launching...ETA two point four minutes. Missile launch! Missile launch!..."
 [James]: "...Kerensky's blood! We have massive explosion from the *Oswald*, it just vented into ou—" [Staggered static. Squeal. White noise.]
 [Terror]: "...reading heavy radiation and EMP waves from the *James*...massive heat spike—"
 [Blizzard]: "...*Sir Guthrie*, detach imm—" [High-pitched squeal. Popping static. Whine. Silence.]
 [Spur]: "...multiple hits, decks three and five are venting to space..."
 [Terror]: "...all bays, target that *Mule*! Blow it to atoms!..."
 [Control]: "...*Blizzard*, please respond! By McKenna's mane! She just blew in half from a massive internal firestorm! It is the supply ships! They are sabotaged! Attention Raven vessels! Destroy all merchant ships, they are all sabotaged!..."
 [Dakota Railroad]: "...Now wait a damn minute, Control...Evasive action! Damn you to hell, Snot Birds!..."
 [Terror]: "...the hell?! No! Security to Collar Two! Subdue the *Bucolic*! They are going t—" [Explosion. Shattering sound.]
 [Napoleon]: "...no, I swear! We're not traitors! Spare us pl—" [Explosion. Static.]
 [Spur]: "...forward laser batteries, hit that *Mule* again! It cannot be that armored! Broadside batteries, clear the area of all merchant vessels, I will NOT have another *stravag* sneak attack..."
 [Control]: "...*Spur*! *Madagascar* is accelerating on a collision vector! Move, dammit, move!..."
 [Spur]: "...heading five-five-nine! Full thrust! Break that damn yoke if you have to, I will *not* have this ship destroyed by a damn Miraborging Spheroid!..."
 [Control]: "...Raven's Wing, fire everything you have now! Divert that *Mule*!..."
 [Wing One]: "...too late, Control! They are not going to....*Spur* has been hit! Repeat, *Spur* has been hit! That *Mule* just accelerated and rammed..."
 [Control]: "...Wing One, what the hell is going on...?"
 [Wing One]: [Silent pause] "*James McKenna* destroyed. Her spine is broken. *Blizzard's* IFF is dark, I am reading heavy radiation in an expanding cloud—by the Founder, most of that *Cameron* is just gone. *Spur* is on vector three-two-six; her bridge and front is a giant charred hole. *White Terror* is just—there is nothing but heavy radiation and a gaping hole right through her primary drive, I am scanning no power... I am reading several lifeboats near the *Spur*, only a few by the *James*. How the—what the—who would dare do this?"
 [Control]: [Pause] "The Combine. They did it with the *White Cloud*. They do it again because we have raided their worlds. Eye for an eye..."
 By Kerensky, they will pay."



(10 January 3069)		
"Alliance Reclaims Summer, Mizar!"	[FSP]	COMPLETED
(23 January 3069)		
"Falcons Retake Blackjack, Roadside"	[ARNN]	DOWNLOADING
(8 February 3069)		
"War for Benjamin Heats Up"	[ISAP]	ACCESSING



EARLY 3069: THE FOG OF WAR

give them this victory so the battle-worn mercenaries could fight another day. We rode to the jump point aboard the *Loyal Son*, an *Overlord*-class DropShip, under the escort of the *Kerensky's Blues*, the Stars' own captured Clan *Fredasa*-class corvette.

A small fleet of JumpShips and DropShips—Irrregulars and civilian—was assembled at the nadir jump point, waiting for the final dockings to make their outbound leap.

Then the Falcons struck.

A *Congress* and a *Vincent Mark 42*, the names of which I did not know (though we were probably close enough to see them at one point), made a rare and dangerous in-system jump to cut us off. The *Blues* cut us loose, and valiantly interposed herself between the Falcons and the retreating DropShips.

Missiles and lasers flashed between both sides as the *Blues* burned forward, bearing on the *Vincent*. In a burst of autocannon fire, the *Vincent* faltered even as debris trailed from our champions' *Fredasa* like the guts from some high-tech piñata. The *Congress* ignored these combatants and came through swarms of fighters like a giant among gnats to shatter DropShips and JumpShips alike with her massive guns. Even under fire, we managed to dock with our JumpShip, just in time to see the *Congress* turn our way. She looked as big as my fist in the portholes...

But then the *Blues* came charging forward, maimed, guns blazing, risking her life to force the more massive *Congress* to veer off and deal with a greater danger. As we made the transition to K-F space, it struck us all that only we aboard the *Loyal Son* remained of the Irrregulars' departing task force, aboard the only JumpShip the Falcons had yet to strike. We never saw the *Blues* or any other JumpShip emerge with us over Blue Hole.

But as long as we live, none of use will ever forget the brave souls who traded their lives for our own.

THE CAT STIRS

From: Sub-director Matsuke Dieron

To: *Gunji-no-Kanrei* Minamoto

Re: Clan Nova Cat

My Lord,

I hope New Samarkand treats you well.

Alas, it is my duty to report the following:

The Nova Cat Clan continues to deny your orders to redeploy their forces to meet the insurgents and the Blakists. They will only commit to "defending the integrity of the Combine-Dominion border", as Khan West had indicated to you before.

But the recent debut of the *Ocelot* BattleMech, and rumors of additional new designs in the making, proves that the Nova Cats are far from dormant. It seems they are simply unwilling to pick sides in the disturbance. But it could also be that without the Star League, they no longer feel restricted. It is entirely possible that they are using our current troubles to build up, intending to strike at us when they perceive we are weak enough.

WOLVES ON THE MOVE

General Report #8A-T3

To: General Reinhart Vossler, MID

CC: Kmd-General Johann Strauss, LIC

16 May 3069

Sir:

The following intel report came from the LIC office on 5 Apr 3069. We must have missed it with all the craziness on the border with the Falcons, not to mention all the HPG problems. Not much is in the report, but I thought you should have it anyway for informational purposes.

Hauptmann Newman Kristoff

*****8A-T3 Intel Update-LIC*****

5 Apr 69

According to latest analysis and on-site field agents, Clan Wolf has begun moving forces into Falcon-held space, with lightning strikes on Cusset and Biota. Both worlds fell with minimal losses to the Wolves, with Falcon resources taking severe damage. Recommend continued surveillance at this time, as Wolf intentions are unknown regarding occupation. Please advise.

Agent 93

—Excerpt from LAAF military intel briefings (declassified 11 December 3070)

If this is true, it may be critical that we strike the first blow. While a war with Clan Nova Cat would likely unite our people, and while the Nova Cats have suffered in recent conflicts, they can do substantial damage to our military and infrastructure if we allow them to strike us at a time and place of their choosing.

Naturally, efforts are underway to ascertain the Cats' true intentions and the reason for their military buildup. They *could* be benign, but until we know for certain, would it be wise to err on the side of caution, and begin to mobilize for operations against the Nova Cats?

—Intercepted ISF intel briefing (veracity unconfirmed), dated 3 April 3069, posted to Xinyang Interweb forum by "TheKatsKatana"

THE RAVEN'S FLIGHT

[*Khan McKenna*]: "Our current status here prevents a full presence to carry out vengeance."

[*Galaxy Commander Arianne D'Amone*]: "Beta Galaxy still stands ready to deliver our judgment ["*Holy cleansing*"]."

[*saKhan Broderick Sukhanov*]: "Eager for the bloodletting, are we, Arianne?"

EARLY 3069: THE FOG OF WAR



[D'Amone]: "With all respect, saKhan, you did not see the inside of the *James McKenna*. You did not float among the bodies of our brothers and sisters, poisoned by massive radiation. You did not watch as four—four—of our ["inferior"] WarShips were gathered together like so much junk in an Ironhold training pit!

"If you *had* been there, jettisoning our Clansmen into the sun because we could not keep such radioactive material near our salvage teams, you would understand the depths to which I am willing to go to assuage our stained honor."

[Star Admiral Lydia Sukhanov]: "Agreed. Only with the blood of the Combine can we even begin to repay such treachery. The last enemy who dared attack us with nuclear weapons was eliminated from existence."

[McKenna]: "It is decided, then. By the will of our own ["heretic"] Founders, we must act. Now. Decisively. To prove to these Spheroid barbarians that the ["corrupted"] Raven will brook no cowardice, no treachery. The previous Invading Clans may have waved their hands at such temerity. We will not. Our vengeance shall be swift and permanent this time. We shall tear the flesh off the Dragon's hide, and dig our talons into its weakened innards. Fighting with the Davions on Galedon recently ended; that shall be our final prize."

[D'Amone]: "Galedon? A worthy price for our blood-soaked honor. Taking ["burning"] a district capital will make a statement to these *surats* they will not soon forget."

[McKenna]: "First, we shall claim *isorla* along the way, for ourselves and for our Alliance 'friends'. Then, on Galedon, we shall make our rage truly felt. We will make them understand that we are not weakling Nova Cats or paralytic Falcons. Scorch our feathers and we will burn entire worlds."

[saKhan Sukhanov]: "So it is said, so it will be done ["By Blake's will."]. Carry forward, Storm Crows, and gorge on the flesh of the feeble serpent. *Seyla*."

—Intercepted (alleged) Snow Raven transmissions dated 5 April 3069, transmitted to ISAP by Voice of Blake

PASIG FALLS!

(15 June 3069)

Pasig [ARNN]—The scene is utter chaos. Not only is the Exiled Wolf Clan's Second Wolf Legion retreating off-planet, civilians by the drove are trying to do so as well. Even though citizens of border worlds have throughout history often faced enemy occupation with stern resistance or stoic apathy, rarely do any of the non-nobility flee, as life rarely changes that much from one Successor State to another. But here on Pasig, faced with the prospect of Clan rule, fears of the Jade Falcons' infamous harshness have local residents in a mad rush to get away.

Behind me, a collision of military and civilian bodies clogs the Jonathan Steiner Spaceport, the only major hub of interstellar travel on-planet since the Falcon WarShip *Jade Talon* obliterated the primary spaceport, along with the entire capital city of Meriden. We have 'Mechs and cargo trucks trying to board the *Karakorum*, the giant *Mammoth*-class DropShip to the east, while people with only a handful of belongings try to embark on the *Monarch*-class *Franciska Donnahue*.

Just last week, a second-class ticket to Deia might've run a mere 2,199 kroner, but today those tickets sell for 20,000 and up. Most ships won't even take electronic credit, insisting on hard currency, precious metals or gems. There are even rumors of children traded for passage, by families desperate to escape the Falcons. And life isn't any better in the cities, where utilities have failed as those entrusted with their maintenance join the exodus.

The pandemonium may only increase as the hours count down until the inevitable Falcon occupation. With no guarantee that outbound traffic will even be allowed safe passage beyond the system, a sense of overwhelming desperation hangs heavily on everyone here.

For the Arc-Royal News Network on Pasig, I'm Thomas Beggs.

AND IN OTHER NEWS...

BUZZ-KILL

To: David Hyde, Public Relations Dept

Fr: Thomas Yedde, VP/Corp Dvlpmt

Subject: Press Release

David—

Here's how I need you to handle our little "crisis" right now. We can't let the truth out, it'll just cause a mass panic and our stock will take a nosedive. Rework this with your usual magic and disseminate it internally and externally:

"*Magliss Spirits*—Detroit is experiencing a temporary interruption of export services for the time being, especially on orders placed within the last sixty days. While we anticipate a resumption of service in short order, we want to make sure our customers know that we have their business at heart when we experience such occasional service

IMMINENT FIRE



(1 June 3069)

"Lower castes of Galedon. I am Star Admiral Lydia Sukhanov, commander of the Storm Crow Naval Pursuit Star. Five months ago, vile assassins struck a dishonorable blow at our Clan. We have traced the path of one of the ships involved in these atrocities to this world. It is here that we will exact our vengeance in blood. You have one week to evacuate this planet. On June seventh, the day that your *dezgra* nation struck with such cowardice at us, we shall raze this world and any who remain on it. Thus is the nature of the insatiable wrath your vaunted Dragon has called upon itself!"

—Intercepted communications from Galedon V, relayed to INN via ISAP from undisclosed source



EARLY 3069: THE FOG OF WAR

THOMAS SPEAKS!

"These are difficult times. Enemies within and without struggle to crush the Free Worlds. In some areas they fight with 'Mechs and bombs, in others with diplomacy and blackmail, and elsewhere with whispers and lies. Fear and mistrust are key weapons of the enemy, adding shadow legions to his force and allowing a battalion of troops to appear as a regiment. The enemy turns us against each other, using secrets and suspicions to undermine our relationships. I am aware that many such rumors, started by the Blakists, concern me and my position. In the interests of truth and justice, let me be brutally frank:

"I am not Thomas Marik, and yes, I was trained by ComStar. I am not, however, an operative of the Word of Blake, nor am I privy to their battle plans. I do, however, have some insight into the mind of the Blakist leader and in conjunction with the LCCC will use that to counter their attempts to subvert the League.

"I do not seek to elevate myself to become dictator of the Free Worlds, an oxymoron if ever there was one, nor did I—unlike some heads of state—engineer a crisis on my own capital for political gain. What I have done and what I am doing has only ever been for the good of the Free Worlds.

"The Chief Justice has expressed doubts over my legal position, but the fact remains that I have been sworn in as the Captain-General of the Free Worlds and have the support of the Marik family in my current retention of the office. I will not, as some have suggested, resign and throw the League into chaos. That said, I have no desire to retain the post if the people do not wish me to lead, and with that objective in mind I propose the restoration of Parliament as soon as is practical. I call on all Free Worlds to choose new representatives to send them to Atreus where they and they alone, the voice of the people, will decide my fate and that of the League.

"Until that time I shall remain at the head of the FWLM and the federal government, defending the integrity and rights of the population to the best of my abilities."

"Listen not to the forked tongue of a man who knows no true identity of his own! The real Thomas Marik was a true believer, a saint worthy of the Blessed Blake, whose spirit is more a part of the League than this pretender could ever claim! Children of the Free Worlds, the truth cannot be found with one who knows not his own face in the mirror!"

—League-wide public address by "Thomas Marik", Captain-General of the Free Worlds League, 17 April 3069

interruptions. We ask that our clients be patient in the interim and as such, we will be extending the standard 180-day billing cycle to 300 days to compensate for the delays."

Add the usual crap about our goals being honesty, integrity and corporate awareness. Make sure it's clouded—as usual—in "company speak," so we can avoid any possible legal problems that may stem from this.

Thanks!

TY

—Magliss Spirits inter-office memo erroneously sent to Pan-Periphery Press, 23 January 3069

ONE QUESTION TOO FAR...

[Wilson]: "Marcy Wilson here, for INN. I've caught up with Marion Leaford and her Merry Maids in Blaster's Booze Palace. Marion, how do you justify your...occupation?"

[Leaford]: "It keeps me in ammo, men and shots. How the [deleted] do you justify yours?"

[Wilson]: "I get news the people want."

[Leaford]: "And I get the [deleted] people want. Nobody turns down our discount trids. People haven't decided to tithe to end piracy, they must not mind much."

[Wilson]: "Aha, and what of rumors that you often freelance?"

[Leaford]: "We just look for the biggest score and move on. Short memories are good in our biz."

[Wilson]: "And what of the rumors you work for the Word of Blake?"

[Leaford]: [Pause] "I try to stay away from big guns like that."

[Wilson]: "Are you sure? We have pictures procured from reliable sources showing you meeting with a top Blakist operative."

[Leaford]: "Ah, son of a [deleted]! Blaster, open the pit."

[A heavy, metallic grinding sound is heard.]

[Wilson]: "What? Wait! Stop! You can't do this! People have a right to know the truth!"

[Leaford]: "Welcome to Astrokaszy, you stupid [deleted]! This is the *really* real world, not your [deleted] perfect collegiate world. Stew on that for your last few [deleted] hours of [deleted] life!"

—This final broadcast from INN's Marcy Wilson was transmitted to her DropShip in orbit over Astrokaszy on 12 February 3069 (Edited for content)

CAESAR'S CHALLENGE

(17 February 3069)

Illyria [ABBAY WEEKLY REPORT]—"The League claims weakness while secretly pursuing their ill-hidden agenda of territorial expansion." Attributing the strife currently wracking his Marian Hegemony to its larger neighbor, the Free Worlds League, Caesar O'Reilly stopped just short of blaming Thomas Marik or Jeremy Brett personally, but his implication was clear. Brett, whose Tamarind Theater abuts the Marian state, is known to keep a wary eye on the Hegemony, particularly after its recent military con-

EARLY 3069: THE FOG OF WAR

quests. Brett's penchant for military intervention is well known, particularly his unsanctioned action against Arcadia during the FedCom Civil War and his transformation of "defensive operations" in the wake of the Skye-Sirius clashes into a full-blown invasion of the Lyrans Alliance.

The exact status of FWLM operations remains unclear, particularly in the wake of the ongoing communications difficulties, but while Marshal Brett has focused his attentions on the Lyrans, it is clear he has maintained a watchful vigil over the League's Abbey District and the plethora of independent worlds that surrounds it. But Hegemony officials see a more sinister intent.

"He is a wolf, seeking new prey," said Emperor Gladding, taking a more direct approach than his master. "[Brett] seeks to carve out his own petty state, and those worlds along with ours fall into the territories ceded to him by the Captain-General as the price for his continued support. Thomas' position is so weak now that he sells his own people as well as outsiders to buy off his power-hungry warlord."

Neither Thomas Marik nor Jeremy Brett has had an opportunity to comment on the Marian accusations.

NIMAKACHI PLANT DESTROYED!

(4 March 3069)

Tematagi [CNI]—After months of raiding the other Commonality worlds, the pirate band known as the Order of the Faithful has finally struck at Tematagi two weeks ago. Using a pirate point, the Order set down after a two-day burn. Fielding approximately a full BattleMech regiment, they advanced on the Nimakachi plant, overwhelming the Orloff Grenadiers detachment and Nimakachi security forces in a matter of hours. The next two weeks saw the destruction of the entire Nimakachi plant, leaving behind nothing but rubble. While it is clear that the Order made off with salvage and whatever they might have pried from the factories before obliterating them, no additional attacks were mounted against the people of Tematagi.

However, with the destruction of the Third Battalion, the Eighth Orloff is now stretched too thin to cover the worlds of the Commonality against an opponent as large and well equipped as the Order. Only the Coterie has been successful to date in keeping nearby Campoleone safe, but—say some—even they appear ill suited to resist a force as large as what just hit Tematagi.

It is disturbing to note that many of the designs fielded by the Order appear to be brand-new Word of Blake constructions. Far more disturbing is the latest expression of Marik neglect of the Commonality. Said one Tematagi native, "We've been ignored... left to fend for ourselves against pirates and Hegemony ambitions. Even when we finally *do* get help, they send us the Eighth... worse than bandits because they don't leave after they're done. Now we face a threat [the Eighth] clearly can't handle, and it looks like we're on our own again."

ORESTES HPG HUB RESTORED

(15 March 3069)

Orestes [INN]—Normal operations were restored to the Orestes HPG system today with the broadcast of this address from Primus Gavin Dow:

"It is with the greatest pleasure that I announce the restoration of the Orestes HPG system.

"ComStar's dedicated technicians have labored ceaselessly to counter the senseless act of vandalism that denied all humanity access to interstellar communications. Rest assured that we shall take steps to prevent any recurrence of such an event. I have already directed Precentor-Martial Steiner-Davion to work with Sasha Richardson—the interim Precentor ROM—to devise more stringent security measures, and I implore the leaders of the Inner Sphere to support us. Without ComStar's skilled technicians, the HPG network can never be restored.

"Now that Orestes can be heard clearly again, our technicians on other worlds with which we have intermittent contact will use the instructions I am sending along with this message to restore more worlds—and to pass the word onward.

"Meanwhile, I am dispatching JumpShips to contact those worlds with which we have lost all contact. I am confident that the Herculean task of restoring communications between the stars will be completed within eighteen months."

COM GUARDS IN DISARRAY

(2 April 3069)

Arc-Royal [DBC]—Once seen as the proud defenders of the Inner Sphere—men and women who fought and died, proving their mettle on the bloody fields of Tukayyid—the Com Guards today face grave threats to their existence. The greatest threat, however, comes not from the Clans, or even the Word of Blake, but from within.

Morale—already battered by the savage casualties suffered by the divisions stationed in the Chaos March—sustained yet another blow from the Case White debacle. The subsequent revelation that their Primus was in fact a Kurita agent (not the usual wild accusations thrown about as propaganda, but a disclosure accompanied by irrefutable evidence), and the subsequent disruption of the HPG network, all combined to precipitate an almost universal collapse of faith.

During this "White-Out", ComStar desertions climbed to an alarming level, with the Guards experiencing a virtual epidemic. Many disillusioned warriors simply quit. Some went home; others refused to abandon their vocation and instead chose the mercenary life, and some have enlisted with the Inner Sphere's other armed forces. Of greater concern, an indeterminate number appear to have concluded that their former comrades in the Word of Blake were right all along.



EARLY 3069: THE FOG OF WAR

The simple fact is that the formations Precentor Martial Steiner-Davion can call upon today are perhaps one-third the strength of the forces he commanded in 3067, if not lower. Rebuilding units left under-strength by casualties or desertion will be no easy task, and ComStar has reported that recruitment is at a virtual standstill.

STRANGE ALLIANCES

ARM: Is this thing secure?

CM: As secure as dad's people can make it

ARM: Why does the "truth about Uncle Tommy" not surprise me? He always was a cold fish, always ready with a smile and a platitude while coldly plotting. One part of me wants to hang him out to dry, but despite so many years of trying to do just that, I'm not sure.

TBM: You're too close to the situation. He can be a complete bastard, but Tom's always worked for the good of the Free Worlds. One of us could step forward and lodge our claim, but how many people would follow us on a League-wide basis? Okay, some of us have regional authority, but none of us have the experience or influence at the same level or scale as Tom. We need him, even if only for the moment.

CM: There's a vocal group here calling for his removal, but dad and I agree that's a bad idea at this juncture. He might not be a Marik, but he is competent and respected, even by his political enemies. If we collapse the house of cards, we'll be playing into the Blakists' hands, fragmenting the League even more than it is at the moment. We need to leave him be.

JB: We need to do more than that. We need to make it clear to him, and to the people, that we are behind the Captain-General. We need to express our "utmost confidence" in his leadership and ability to get us through this. I can fight wars with guns and 'Mechs. We need Tom to fight with words and ideals, no matter how much that may offend familial sensibilities.

CM: I can speak to him privately and assure him of our stand, but I'm not in a position to do the media thing.

TBM: I'll do it, or Jerry can.

JB: I'm the warlord, dear. You're the diplomat.

TBM: But people know and trust you.

—Communications log attributed to Marik family officials, dated Mar-Apr 3069, found in the ruins of the Hall HPG station, leaked to ISAP by unknown sources

(1 March 3069)

"Necromo Bombarded, Cossacks Destroyed"

(16 March 3069)

"Al Na'ir Assaulted, Millions Killed"

RALLYING CRY

"People of the Free Worlds, we live in dark times. Many claims and accusations have been made, leveled at individuals and organizations throughout the League and abroad. Some are the whispers that always accompany the chaos of war. Others are designed to feed distrust and division, making it easier for the culprits to advance their own schemes.

"But whether these claims are true or not, we cannot allow them divide us. The chain of command must be respected, and we must unite against the chaos. Yes, the Word of Blake claims the Captain-General is not who he says he is, and he has acknowledged this claim. But after spending half my life working with him to defend the borders of the Free Worlds League, I can attest to his commitment to the people and the state. Do we trust Thomas Marik, or an organization that has made indiscriminate use of chemical, nuclear, and—for all we know—biological weapons?

"I call upon all citizens of the Free Worlds, all troops of the FWLM, to work together in this time of strife and conflict. There is no better reason to come together for the greater good of the people, no matter the forces that strive to divide us. Our strength lies with our diversity as a people and a nation.

"Do not let small-minded and self-centered individuals drive a wedge between us. Do not give them what they want by turning your backs on the League and the government. To quote an old saying, 'we must hang together or we will hang separately'.

"To that end, my wife and I attest to our unequivocal support for the Captain-General and the Federal authorities in this time of crisis. Tamarind stands with Atreus and shall do so until the League falls."

—Marshall Jeremy Brett's courier dispatch to all FWLM units and media outlets, 28 June 3069

READER v3.7

Service	Status
[ISAP]	COMPLETED
[FSNS]	DOWNLOADING
[VotD]	ACCESSING



CHAOS UNLEASHED: MY BONNIE LIES OVER THE OCEAN



MY BONNIE LIES OVER THE OCEAN

[Brynhild]: "Bogies inbound, vector nine-nine-two."

[Kander Command]: "Roger that, Brynhild. Comms, contact the mercs, let them know the Falcons have taken the bait."

[Brynhild]: "Still not sure this is wise. If those Falcons blow that bunker, there's a good chance the fault line underneath will rupture; we'll be sinking the Cokery Isles."

[Kander]: "A risk worth taking, Bryn. We can't afford any more combat on the mainland—the ecosystem's all screwy already with that reactor meltdown last year."

[Brynhild]: "What the hell difference does a few more rads make?"

[Kander]: "Apparently you fail to recognize that we're a water world? Any more rads may accelerate the pollution rate—and send Blue Hole Bottled into bankruptcy."

[Brynhild]: "Ah, the meat of the matter. Once again, a corporation dictates our battles. Only in the Alliance."

[Kander]: "Can it, Freddie. Falcons incoming."

SITUATION

Kander Sea, Southern Hemisphere

Blue Hole, Lyran Alliance

9 January 3069

Blue Hole's in trouble. Ever since the Falcons' serious raids last year, the entire Alliance border with the Falcon OZ has held its breath, waiting for the inevitable assault. With General Steiner's reshuffling of the LAAF, local commands have taken it upon themselves to prepare for the inevitable.

The government bureaucrats hit on a plan that only corporate stiff could love—place a large bunker of military supplies deep on the coastal shelf near the Cokery Isle chain—a large series of flat rocks that served as landing ports for Ryan Cartel water ships centuries ago. By luring the Falcons there with the offer of a *batchall*, the corporate "strategists" hoped they could blow the bunker at the right time, taking out several Falcons and setting off an earthquake that would sink the Clan DropShips. Hired mercenaries would keep the Clanners busy until the appropriate moment.

All seemed to be going well—until someone discovered that delivery problems would delay the arrival of the necessary explosives for another month.

CHAOS UNLEASHED: MY BONNIE LIES OVER THE OCEAN



GAME SET-UP

CBT: Use Wetlands Terrain maps (Coastal if using *Combat Operations*). Place one Hardened Level 2 building in any water hex of Depth 2 or greater (building will be underwater).

AT2: Use Wetlands Terrain maps (Coastal if using *Combat Operations*). Place one Hardened Level 2 building in any water hex of Depth 2 or greater (building will be underwater). This track uses the *Aerospace on BattleTech Maps* rules (see p. 18, AT2)

RPG: The base to defend is underwater. Gamemasters should have a blueprint handy for reference as well as an idea of topography for the surrounding area. Base security is protected by an advanced sensor suite (add +5 to all TNs).

Attacker

The Attacker consists of elements of the Jade Falcons' Alpha Galaxy. The Attacker's force should equal 100 percent of the

Defender's total deployed force and is a mix of Veteran and Elite warriors. For every complete Star, one unit has Elite experience and four are Veterans.

Defender

The Defender consists of up to 75 percent of the players' total force. In addition, the players' force may add five sea mines of any type (for ground games; see p. 22, CE) or three AA gun emplacements (for AT2 games) for every ten units fielded.

WARCHEST

Track Cost: 500 WP

Optional Bonuses (all bonuses cumulative):

+300 Contemptible Birds: Add 25 percent to the Attacker's deployed force.

+300 High Winds: See p. 152, CBTComp.



CHAOS UNLEASHED: MY BONNIE LIES OVER THE OCEAN

-500 Fist Full of Dollars: Add one *Jormungand*-class blue-water cruiser (the BHS *Brynhild*) to the defending force (see p. 171, *Handbook: House Steiner*; for Support Vehicle rules, see pp. 86-138, *CE*).

Victory Bonuses (not cumulative):

+550 Partial Victory: Complete two objectives.

+900 Total Victory: Complete all objectives.

OBJECTIVES

1. Denial: Keep the underwater base from being captured or destroyed.

2. Bird-hunting: Destroy or cripple at least 75 percent of the Attacker's force.

3. Prove yourselves: Destroy or cripple at least 25 percent of the Attacker's force underwater.

4. Don't sink the *Brynhild*: If the *Jormungand* is in play, it must survive the track.

SPECIAL RULES

The following rules are in effect for this track:

Aerospace Bomb Racks

Aerospace forces on both sides have access to time-delayed bombs, which function as bombs for purposes of rules and damages, with the option of how deep the bomb may go underwater before exploding. Depth times may be changed during the End Phase. If carrying split loads of ordinance, players should note which racks carry which bombs on their record sheets.

Torpedo Launchers

Non-aerospace units that have access to torpedo racks may mount them in place of the appropriate LRM/SRM launchers as normal. The Jade Falcons do not have access to such weapons. These racks can be fired only against targets at or below the water's surface.

AFTERMATH

It was a bad plan from the start—but what do you expect from desk generals? The mercenaries' zeal might have hurt the Falcons, but only a week after the "Battle of the Tides" (as a local media wonk reported it), the government of Blue Hole surrendered to the Clan.

ADDITIONAL HOOKS

Delivery problems... or something more sinister? And just how flimsy is the excuse of "protecting the environment," anyway? Sounds like someone in the business district has something shadier in the works....

Expansion Ideas

A running naval battle along the coastal plains and wetlands can be linked together for a final stand in or around the underwater bunker. Perhaps the explosives were indeed delivered and it's only a matter of time....

NEXT TRACK

Brute Force; Living Dead Men; Stirring the Anthill



CHAOS UNLEASHED: SEED OF DISCONTENT



SEED OF DISCONTENT

"It's extremely important you shield the objective craft from the system defenders. One of our agents will attempt an insertion from the craft, but we need to make sure we have a clear orbital path for a HALO drop."

"What about the militia? What kind of force are we looking at?"

"Honestly? We don't know. We lost all contact with Thraxa several months ago. We don't know if it's a Hegemony force sitting there or worse, a Word of Blake militia. Best be prepared for anything."

"Not a lot of detail here. Not sure I like it all that much. That and the active scanning will pretty much announce our presence to everyone on the planet."

"Understandable, major. We do appreciate the risk you're about to take, and if the insertion goes well, we'll be able to garner a better picture of the whole situation."

"As long as we're not decoys like your other two crews. Can't say being a duck in a shooting gallery is my kind of life."

"Maybe not, but it's the life we have chosen. MIM is good for a reason. And while your loyalty lies with your bank account, some of us have deeper morals."

"Whatever floats your boat, missy. As long as we get paid on time."

SITUATION

*JumpShip Bella Cortez, Nadir Point
Gambilon, Magistracy of Canopus
28 February 3069*

Contract details: Escort several civilian landing craft into hostile airspace around Thraxa. Hold off local defense forces until orbital insertion is secured and retreat. Supplied forces will provide transportation to and from system*. Early termination of convoy will invoke "failure to complete" clauses and forfeiture of payment balance.

Current intelligence: Unknown. System is currently under blackout.

*This clause is non-negotiable.

CHAOS UNLEASHED: SEED OF DISCONTENT



GAME SET-UP

AT2: Use at least two Space maps for this track. Designate one short edge the objective.

RPG: Though this is primarily an AT2 track, gamemasters can modify it for use with CBT: RPG games.

Attacker

The Attacker is the player group; they may use up to 50 percent of their total force. In addition, three Mark VII landing craft with Elite crews (run by the Magistracy Intelligence Ministry) are attached to the Attacker's deployed force. Before play, the Attacker designates one of these units as the objective (for resolving Objective Two, below).

The Attacker enters from the edge opposite the objective edge at a Velocity of 5 or lower. The MIM shuttles enter at the beginning of Turn Two at a Velocity of 4 or lower.

Defender

The Defender is made up of elements of the Thraxan militia and mercenary commands. The Thraxan militia should equal 25 percent of the Attacker's total deployed force and are Green. The mercenary commands equal 75 percent of the Attacker's total deployed force and are Veteran. The Defender's units may be

determined from Word of Blake, Magistracy, Hegemony and/or Mercenary Random Assignment Table (respectively, see 131, *Field Manual: ComStar* (or p. 219, *Field Manual: Updates*); p. 146, *Field Manual: Periphery* (or p. 229, *Field Manual: Updates*); p. 146, *Field Manual: Periphery* (or p. 229, *Field Manual: Updates*); p. 122, *Field Manual: Mercenaries, Revised*) with a Tech rating of B or lower.

The Defender begins the track within 4 hexes of the objective edge at any velocity.

WARCHEST

Track Cost: 500 WP

Optional Bonuses (all bonuses cumulative):

+200 Asteroids: Place 2D6 asteroids on the map and use the *Asteroid* rules (see p. 47, AT2).

+300 System Defense: Add an *Alliance*-class space station (Green experience) to the Defender's force.

+300 More Mercs!: Add another mercenary force equal to 50 percent of the Attacker's total deployed force, with Regular experience.

Victory Bonuses (not cumulative):

+500 Partial Victory: Complete Objective Two.

+750 Total Victory: Complete both objectives.



CHAOS UNLEASHED : SEED OF DISCONTENT

OBJECTIVES

- 1. Get in, get out, no sacrifices:** Avoid more than 50 percent casualties (destroyed or crippled units) by the end of the track.
- 2. Successful insertion:** MIM Mark VII landing craft must survive and exit the designated edge.

SPECIAL RULES

The following rules are in effect for this track:

MIM Mark VII Landing Craft

In order to execute a successful insertion, the MIM unit must perform a combined total of five successful sensor sweeps to determine the best insertion path. To execute a successful sweep, a MIM craft must declare at the Initiative Phase whether it is performing a sweep or not. If a sweep is declared, during the End Phase, roll 2D6. A successful sweep is achieved on a roll result of 10 or better. If the craft does not fire any weapons during the turn, add a +2 bonus to the roll. Once five successes are logged, the designated objective craft may exit the playing area through any hex along the designated map edge.

AFTERMATH

Good thing you've got an ace hacker in your circle of friends. Otherwise you'd never have known how the MIM screwed you

and your unit over. The entire operation was a fake from the start. MIM knew what was at Thraxa all along and staged the whole thing to keep the militia's attention away from the real mission. While your boy can't scoop up those particular details, you do know that some type of op went down during your playtime with those militia punks.

Guess the merc cliché is right: "Great House, great pay. Periphery will ruin your day."

ADDITIONAL HOOKS

So what operation went down while you were dancing with the militia? And what is the MIM up to, especially running operations against their own people? Could this be tied in with the silence from Canopus?

Expansion Ideas

A series of feints and raids can help identify the opposing forces or stretch them out. Conversely, the battle could spiral down into the atmosphere and become a dogfight as the MIM agent executes his mission.

NEXT TRACK

Living Dead Men; Brute Force; Stirring the Anthill

CHAOS UNLEASHED: BREW-HA-HA

BREW-HA-HA

[Monteray One]: "HQ, I'm getting an odd signal over the horizon. Really bizarre."

[HQ]: "Patch it through."

[Monteray Three]: "Sure bet someone's coming and wants us to know it. Looks like those kooks in the Coterie were right after all."

[HQ]: "Boys, that's the worst rendition of 'Baby Mack Attack' I've ever heard. Didn't know it even still existed."

[Monteray Four]: "Nuevodiscola should've died with the damn dingo."

[HQ]: "Well, e-com analysis shows it's a modified ECM wave. Whoever it is, they're coming in to play."

[Monteray One]: "Roger that, HQ. Mongoose Lance, prep for high-angle scanning run on vector two-four-oh. Pass and scan, people. No heroics."

SITUATION

Mather Swamp, Lowellstowne

Tohelet, Free Worlds League

6 May 3069

Subcontracting work out is tough, but pays off in spades if the timing is right. As your command passes through the Free Worlds League, a member of the mysterious Coterie contacts your CO to assist with defenses in the apparently defenseless Rim Commonality. Seems the Eighth Orloff is the only unit in the area, and several pirates and hard-luck mercs have taken advantage of that fact by executing heavy raids. The bandits have absconded with enormous amounts of foodstuffs and basic supplies, more than those groups would normally require. This means someone's coordinating the raids, and piling up a large amount of the fundamentals for an army or a world in crisis. You haven't heard of any planets in crisis around here, so most likely someone is building an army.

The Coterie seem to think that the large peat farms outside Lowellstowne make a viable target, so here you sit, babysitting some hardened muck. Ah, the mercenary life!

CHAOS UNLEASHED: BREW-HA-HA

**GAME SET-UP**

CBT: Use Hill/Mountain Terrain maps. The gamemaster may place at least one building (gamemaster's preference) anywhere on the map that the players' force must defend.

AT2: Use Space maps. The gamemaster may place at least one small space station (gamemaster's preference) anywhere on the map that the players' force must defend.

RPG: The gamemaster should prepare his choice of environment for the player group, with an object or person that the players' force must defend.

Attacker

The Attacker consists of elements of Reed's Brew, and fields a force equal to 75 percent of the Defender's total deployed force. Reed's Brew is a Veteran mercenary command and rolls on the D column of the Mercenary Random Assignment Table (see 122, *Field Manual: Mercenaries, Revised*).

The mercenaries start on the map edge farthest from the gamemaster-designated target.

Defender

The Defender consists of the player group and the small planetary militia. The players may use up to 50 percent of their total force; the militia equals 25 percent of the players' deployed force and is Green.

Set up the Defender within eight hexes (or 250 meters for *CBT: RPG*) of the gamemaster-designated objective.

WARCHEST

Track Cost: 600 WP

Optional Bonuses (all bonuses cumulative):

+150 Brute Force: Add a number of mercenaries equal to 50 percent of the Defender's total deployed force. These units enter later in the track (as determined by the gamemaster).

+250 Sharpshooter: The gamemaster designates at least 25% of the units in the Attacker's force as Elite.

Victory Bonuses (not cumulative):

+450 Partial Victory: Complete one objective.

+800 Total Victory: Complete all objectives.

OBJECTIVES

1. Defend target: The gamemaster-designated target must survive the track.

2. Information: Capture or cripple one mercenary unit.

3. Eliminate the threat: Destroy or cripple the Attacker's force.

SPECIAL RULES

The following rules are in effect for this track.

Reed's Brew

Reed's Brew isn't suicidal but they are out to prove that they're more than just a "party patrol". They will begin to withdraw only after they take over 50% losses.

AFTERMATH

The battlefield hadn't even cooled before several small cargo craft bearing members of the Coterie arrived on-station to assess the damage. While you were tangling with the "Beer Can Brigade," another merc force hammered Lowellstowne and "liberated" several containers of seed and cattle from one of the giant land train terminals. The fighting started several fires that took most of the next day to corral.

As for you and your team, the Coterie representative just smiled, handed you the confirmed transfer order and politely asked you to leave. While you had no problem complying, you couldn't help but wonder what was going on....

ADDITIONAL HOOKS

What exactly are these raids about? Does some secret army out there need such a massive amount of supplies—or is someone attempting a covert colonization effort? How does the Coterie fit into all this?

Expansion Ideas

In addition to the obvious stretching of the encounter with Reed's Brew into multiple scenarios, players may also wish to look more in-depth into how the Coterie knows where these attacks will occur.

NEXT TRACK

Brute Force; Living Dead Men

LATE 3069: DEATH FROM ABOVE



LATE 3069: DEATH FROM ABOVE



The latter half of 3069 fared no better than the prior six months. In most places, things got worse. Humanity's slide into the abyss seemed to accelerate, thanks to the Blakists. Kathil, Galedon and Alarion fell silent, prompting many to believe that the Blakists had found the will and the means to annihilate entire thriving worlds. Along the Confederation-Suns border in the Chaos March, more worlds fell off the HPG net amid reports of heavy fighting between mercenary, Capellan and Davion troops.

The Word of Blake began broadcasting supposedly "secret" Clan transmissions, adding to the public belief in Blakist invincibility. Rumors of reeducation centers and internment camps came to light—not all of which were apparently run by the Word of Blake. The Blakist juggernaut in the Chaos March continued, though a

tremendous victory for the Lyrans at Skye showed that the jihad-ists could be beaten.

Chaos continued to grow, as more and more units broke their chains of command to ineffective or shattered leadership in order to pursue their own agendas. The Free Worlds League became a prime example, as provincial boundaries widened and commanders received often-conflicting orders. Old allegiances and hatreds once more reared their buried heads, further fragmenting the ailing League. Though some stepped forward to take charge, the recent unmasking of deception by a man for decades believed to be Thomas Marik left many unwilling to keep their trust in the Marik line.

Yet hope remained, if only as a weak flicker. During these months, elements in the Free Worlds first proposed a cease-fire with the Lyran Alliance. Meanwhile, the return of an imprisoned Duke Kai Allard-Liao gave hope to a Capellan citizenry besieged on both sides by renegade forces of the Free Worlds League and the Federated Suns.

In the larger view, however, it became clear that the Inner Sphere could not soon extricate itself from the multiple conflagrations in which its nations had gotten embroiled, while in the center of it all the Word of Blake continued its brutal campaign to remake humankind in its own image.

—Michael Bosworth, INN Special Correspondent

RAIN OF FIRE

(20 June 3069)

Galedon V [THE DRAKE]—First the Clanners came. Then the Fedrats captured us, before we were "liberated" by the DCMS. Toward the end of the fighting, people in areas surrounding the Ru-Sangaku fell ill, affected by a disease nobody could identify. The DCMS took steps to quarantine the affected areas, and it looked like things were under control.

Then the Snow Ravens returned.

Brutally, and for no apparent reason, they decided to level this planet. For the first week after their arrival, they allowed civilian transports to depart, but with few DropShips and even fewer JumpShips here, who could leave? Then, four days ago, they started the rain of fire. First hit were military installations and the capital. Only ruins remain of that ancient city, founded at the birth of human existence on this planet.

The swift breakdown of central authority and order (most government types left as soon as they could) has made this place a living hell. The so-called Curse of Galedon has broken out in new places, spread from the dead at the hospitals and by people escaping the quarantine zones. We have no way to check who has the disease, and as city after city dies under Raven guns, people have taken to the woods and hills to survive. Armed and paranoid, they take no chances. They drive off or kill anyone approaching their small encampments. Some are picking over the urban ruins for food and supplies. Steady streams of vehicles run from the few towns that have so far been spared, but it's only a matter of time before the Clanners turn those guns their way.

Galedon was a thriving place; now it's a hellhole from which there is no escape. The DCMS can't break the naval blockade, and the Ravens are bent on exacting their vengeance upon us. The Yellow Bird has come to roost here.

May the powers above help us.

WRATH AND FIRE

WAYWARD BROTHERS AND SISTERS SEE THE LIGHT!

(15 July 3069)

Terra [VOICE OF BLAKE]—In the words of the Blessed Blake, "the truth shall set you free." Certainly since the revelation of the Heretics' treachery, the thousands who have chosen to once more embrace the true Word of Blake have proven this wisdom. Finally they understand the mockery made of the once-noble Order of ComStar by the perfidious Frederick Steiner—under the assumed identity of Anastasius Focht—along with his impudent nephew and their replacement "puppet" Primus, Gavin Dow. Finally they see how they were led from the true way.

Repentant of their error, they returned to the fold. We welcomed them with open arms and joyful hearts. Our brothers and sisters, you have come home at last!

The Word of Blake calls to all those still enslaved by the evil and self-serving villains who twist Blake's name to hide their ambitions. They desire only to dominate all of humankind. Throw off the cloak of lies they have woven around you! Come back to us! Come home to sacred Terra and join us in the great mission of fulfilling the true words of the Blessed Blake.

LATE 3069: DEATH FROM ABOVE

WMDS AND THE CLANS WHO USE THEM

...Guys, I told you this would happen, and it's gone down just like I said. The Snow Ravens—just more damned Clanner bastards!—planted chem and bio weapons underground on **Galedon**, in biodegradable containers. Just as sure as the **Ghost Bears nuked Edo** a few short years ago. Now we see that such actions are not “accidents” attributable to just one Clan in the bunch. Hell, they didn't even need nukes, and probably have a vaccine to neutralize the damage they did. Not like the dead will have anything to gain, as the Clan comes back and occupies their world without a fight. They planned it all out in advance—all you have to do is be willing to see it.

If the Clanners were as “honorable” as they pretend, the rest of them would gang up and jihad against the dishonorable ones and restore their own standards. We CAN'T just sit back and do nothing, cuz the **Blakists** and their anti-prophetic babbling are no better. They won't fight the Clans unless it suits their own purposes! Just look at the “rumors” of fighting on **Kessel**; the Blakists no doubt had something to do with the “supposed” **nuke use there**, and they've been sapping Combine and Federated troops there for months now!

It's crazy, and I DO mean crazy... Hell, I'll come right out and say it. I think the Wobblies are just pawns for the Clans, doing their dirty work Sphere-wide and covering for **other atrocities** that those bastards (and I HOPE some of you *bastard* Clanners read this!) would have had to do themselves anyway!

I tell ya, when I'm 18, I'm gonna enlist, and help make this {CENSORED} right.

Peace/out

{Consumer Advisory: Censoring provided by MechaSoft Parental Programming (all rights reserved); The content of User: consPlracy666buff's personal journal does not reflect the views of Delacruz Web Services or any of its worldwide subsidiaries.}

—Excerpted from a private blog by consPlracy666buff on the Delacruz InterWeb, 23 July 3069

domed cities initially used during colonization of the planet. This move coincided with an outbreak of the Alarion Flu. Crowded conditions helped the flu spread rapidly throughout the cities; this strain resisted the usual antivirals, and so was much deadlier than ever before.

Meanwhile, the Interstellar Red Cross JumpShip *Sister of Mercy* met a DropShip from Alarion and found the entire crew dead. Once apprised of the situation, the LAAF medical unit quarantined both vessels. Luckily, only the boarding team of the *Sister of Mercy* died. The remainder of the crew was unaffected. Medical personnel discovered an unknown virus in the victims and in the DropShip. Alarion was placed under immediate quarantine and we confirmed with the planet that the contagion raging on the surface was not the Alarion Flu, but some kind of bioagent released during the nuclear assault.

Further analysis shows that this virus is a descendant of the Terran hanta virus, which is normally transmitted from rodents to humans. Analyzing its RNA proved that it was engineered on a world containing life forms unknown to the Inner Sphere scientific community. The virus transfers not only from rodents to humans, but also from human to human, with many other local animals suitable as carriers. Initial symptoms are fever and muscle aches, followed by coughing and shortness of breath. Death occurs within two to three weeks of infection. We have sent information to Alarion, but with the recent collapse of local infrastructure there, it is unlikely anyone will survive the quarantine. The planet should be off limits for at least a year until further studies can be done to ensure its safety, but I fear the planet may be unsafe for far longer.

—Lyrn Emergency Management Corps (LEMC) report to General of the Armies Adam Steiner, 19 August 3069 (Declassified 1 April 3070)

OFFICIALS: GALAX IS DYING

(29 August 3069)

New Syrtis [FSNS]—Several highly placed sources in the Federated Suns government revealed today the true nature of the calamity at Galax, and the need for the recent negative travel advisory. A lethal disease has been sweeping across population centers on Galax, and efforts to enact local quarantines have so far consistently failed. Even the old biospheres used when the atmosphere was toxic have proven ineffective shelter from the disease.

Initial research suggests, but cannot prove, that the illness is transmitted to humans who come in contact with local fauna, where it remains dormant for extended stretches of time. It is contagious during this dormant period. Scientists do not yet know the length of this time frame, but it may explain why even the ancient biospheres cannot quarantine the sickness: at least some inhabitants are already infected before entering. After the first several hours of infection, the pathogen begins to produce an enzyme that destroys hemoglobin, until an insufficient amount is left to absorb oxygen into the bloodstream. Patients initially suffer

FIELD STUDY REPORT (CONFIDENTIAL): ALARION

To: General Adam Steiner

From: General Ytzak Arran, M.D.

Re: Alarion Biowarfare

A formal report is due out next week, but this abstract puts much of the information in a military/lay format and removes most of the scientific writing for simplicity. It begins with a synopsis of events as we know them, then offers information on the bioagent and conclusions.

During the assault on Alarion, the planet was bombarded by nuclear weapons. Nuclear fallout forced the population into the

LATE 3069: DEATH FROM ABOVE



from shortness of breath, followed by the effects of suffocation, and finally unconsciousness brought on by lack of oxygen to the brain. The brain deteriorates further from oxygen starvation until the patient dies.

While not identical to the plague affecting Alarion, it seems clear that this disease, too, was delivered by the Blakists during their recent attack on Galax. The odds of an illness seemingly tailored to destroy all human life on a planet spontaneously coming into existence mere weeks after the Blakists struck are beyond abysmal. It is clear that the Word of Blake intends to depopulate critical worlds such as Galax, apparently unwilling to render the planet useless through conventional means, but more than willing to commit genocide. If they only require an opportunity to release a tailored bioweapon to kill a world, the defense of every planet has become nearly impossible.

QUARANTINE ALERT: GALEDON V

For Immediate Release

(15 September 3069)

New Samarkand [VOTD]—Until further notice, the entire system of Galedon V is under Level Five Quarantine protocol. No civilian traffic may enter the system under any circumstances. Vessels doing so will be subject to immediate seizure by on-site DCMS forces. All communications with the planet are suspended unless authorized. Persons with business and/or family on Galedon V are to work with their local System Environmental Services office for the time being.

Quarantine protocols are in effect due to unusual ecosystem patterns on the planet. In order to prevent possible infection of other systems, these protocols will remain in effect until the danger has been safely contained and no possible contamination risk remains.

SUMMER'S NIGHTFALL

[Roberts]: "...and we're here on Promontory Hill overlooking Curitiba, where behind me you can see the muster area of the local Com Guard garrison. Precentor Narami Nichigama notified the local militia force late yesterday that he would be adding elements of the Ninth Division to the planet's defense. As our viewers may recall, the inbound aggressors were positively identified as Word of Blake DropShips only yesterday morning."

[Excited shouting off camera. One figure runs into the background, pointing to the east.]

[Roberts]: [Turns and looks, briefly touching his earpiece] "Craig, can you get that?"

[View shifts and zooms in on several contrails burning their way through the atmosphere.]

[Roberts]: "Commander Griswalt informed us this morning that the incoming ships are standard troop carriers, so the population is to expect some heavy fighting in and around several key areas near the capital's industrial sector. Most of the DropPort and the Boolan Complex have been evacuated and citizens in Curitiba are urged to remain indoors for the time being. Shelters have been—wait, what's that?"

[View pulls back slightly as smaller smoke trails are seen radiating from several of the inbound ships.]

[Roberts]: "There seems to be some confusion on the military band...apparently, what we're seeing are not 'Mech drop pods but possibly fighters, though they seem to be too—"

[Camera follows a pair of contrails moving fast toward the ground, enlarging as they approach the lens on an oblique angle.]

[Roberts]: "Wait—are those missiles?"

[View pulls back as the missile contrails intersect with the city skyline and explode.]

[Roberts]: "Oh, sweet Mary...."

[Camera locks onto forming mushroom cloud as more missiles hit the capital. View shakes and pitches over as ground rumbles from shockwave. Multiple screams are heard in background.]

[Roberts]: "Craig! Are you okay? Get out of here, man! There are more missiles headed this way, toward the Com Guard camp.... Oh. My. Go—"

[View goes white with intense glare, then static.]

—Recording salvaged from SkyeStar Six communications satellite, Skye Broadcasting, 27 September 3069

THE SACKING OF GLENGARRY

(18 December 3069)

Glengarry [INN]—Last night, the Chancy Plateau was the scene of desperate fighting as Blakist troops advanced on the Grey Death Technologies manufacturing plant. Defending the factory was Brewer's Legion—a security force deployed by Defiance Industries to protect their investment in GDT.

["The Blessed Blake charged us with the preservation of knowledge until such time as humankind was ready. In their folly, the Gray Death Legion let loose a genie of destruction that has ravaged the Inner Sphere for the last four decades."]

Consisting of an under-strength combined-arms battalion, the Legion began the battle in well-established defensive positions. But even though they count former members of the destroyed Gray Death Legion among their number, the Gray Death's legendary luck eluded the defenders. Facing superior numbers, the Legion was pinned down by concerted BattleMech assaults, leaving them vulnerable to a flanking strike by fast-moving hover transports carrying battle-armored troops.

Their position compromised, the Legion attempted to fall back to the manufacturing plant, but only a handful of infantry and dismounted MechWarriors made it to the protection of a heavily reinforced security bunker. Despite the hopelessness of their



LATE 3069: DEATH FROM ABOVE

position, they refused to surrender, holding out for several hours before squads of Purifiers stormed their position.

Hans DuVauil, Baron von Glengarry, has been highly critical of the LAAF's failure to defend worlds in the Terran Corridor. The sacking of GDT is the latest in a series of attacks launched by the seemingly unstoppable Word of Blake.

LIBERATION!

"We're here with Roman's Mounted Fusiliers on Warlock, standing just outside the Capitol building, site of the last major battle between the Lancers and rogue elements of the Second St. Ives Janissaries. Around me, the wreckage of battle still burns, as salvage vehicles drag away the shattered hulks of BattleMechs crippled on both sides.

"It was here on Warlock that the Janissaries' Combat Command Gamma turned on the Second Rangers' infantry regiment and destroyed their sister unit. Claiming their support for Hasek's invasion of the Confederation, the renegade forces subsequently offered the planet's military industrial output to aid the Davion invasion.

"Two days ago, the Fusiliers grounded their DropShips around Warlock's capital, where the treasonous Janissaries had erected defenses. After forming up, the Fusiliers drove the Janissary skirmishers back toward the city and eventually overpowered Gamma despite admittedly stiff resistance.

"Under artillery and aerospace barrages, the Fusiliers forced the remaining traitors to the center of the capital; where both sides then fought the bloodiest battle of the campaign. For nearly five hours, the rebels resisted to their bitter end, taking with them a number of valiant loyalists. None of Gamma's members survived, but sadly, nearly thirty percent of Roman's Fusiliers lay with them.

"Calm has descended on the capital as funeral pyres mark where 'Mechs, vehicles and buildings collapsed amid the fighting. In the days to come, it will be the civilians of Warlock who restore true normalcy to this world, once more returned to the haven of Confederation rule.

"For CBS news, this is Tessandra Ling reporting."

—Tessandra Ling, CBS reporter embedded with Roman's Mounted Fusiliers, Warlock, 30 July 3069

SURGING AHEAD

AGAINST THE FLOODGATES

(10 July 3069)

New Syrtis [FSNS]—The sudden and unexpectedly successful Liao invasion of the Capellan March has forced Duke George Hasek to commit his reserves in a bid to stem the green tide.

Two months ago on Jaipur, the Twelfth Vegan Rangers' Gamma Regiment (hastily brought in from Wappingers to relieve the Fifth Syrtis Fusiliers) faced elements of the Second St. Ives Lancers. Not expecting the badly under-strength mercenaries to offer much resistance, the Lancers' command company pressed the attack, only to be annihilated in a deadly crossfire by Gamma's heavy and assault companies. With the Capellans momentarily off-balance, Colonel Desantis pressed his devastating counterattack. Though outnumbered, the Rangers were concentrated into a powerful phalanx that smashed right through the Liao ranks, overrunning their headquarters and killing *Sang-shao* Lucas Tolek. With the death of their commander, the Second lost all cohesion and fled the field.

Despite their victory, the exhausted Rangers could not capitalize on their success and crush the beaten Capellans. With the subsequent arrival of the First St. Ives Lancers, the initiative swung back to the invaders, forcing the seriously outnumbered Rangers to fall back from Jaipur.

With the Rangers' Alpha Regiment tied up on the Draconis border, and their Beta Regiment recalled to New Avalon, Colonel Desantis cannot expect aid as the Capellan forces continue to flood across the borders.

DUKE OF ST. IVES FREED!

(3 August 3069—originally filed 15 June 3069)

Today we can report another glorious victory for the Capellan people! Kai Allard-Liao, Duke of St. Ives, has been rescued from the clutches of the Davions! The valiant Death Commandos once again proved their devotion to the Celestial Wisdom by extracting his cousin safely. Duke Allard-Liao wasted little time condemning Hasek for his criminal abduction intended to help him sow discord in the St. Ives Commonality to further prosecute the Davion war of aggression against the Capellan people. The Duke is expected to join the war effort at the head of our valiant St. Ives brethren as soon as he recuperates from his ordeal.

"Dow: Formation of New First Circuit Underway"

(30 March 3069)

"Report: New Avalon Defenders Push Back Word a Second..." [FSNS]

(1 April 3069)

"LAS Fylgia Sighted at Noisiel"

[BNN]

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LATE 3069: DEATH FROM ABOVE



THE DRIVE TO NEW SYRTIS

"Task Force Light Horse—comprised of both St. Ives Lancers regiments and the Third McCarron's Armored Cavalry—shattered all organized Davion resistance here on Taygeta almost twenty-four hours ago, after some of the fiercest fighting of the campaign left the FedSuns' Third Ceti Hussars and the Vanguard Legion mercenary command in retreat.

"All forces are standing down for resupply and refit, in preparation for the final stage of 'Operation Celestial Vengeance,' the invasion of New Syrtis. Since departing St. Ives, we have witnessed the fall of Haappajarvi and Jaipur to this task force. Unconfirmed reports also have the worlds of Hadnall, Spica, Velhas, Frazer, Ridgebrook, Verlo, Sirdar and Hobson firmly in CCAF hands. The drive to New Syrtis has seen more than thirty Capellan March worlds invaded or raided by our forces.

"CCAF troops surround New Syrtis now with three task forces on Taygeta, Ridgebrook and Hobson. This thrust, so deep into Davion territory, seems to have occurred in part through the lack of any reasonable interior defenses. A sitrep given by task force commander *Jiang-jun* Tristan Bothel indicated that Duke Hasek apparently stripped most of his forces to launch his ill-fated invasion of the Confederation.

"We are now poised to invade New Syrtis and bring the war to Hasek's front door,' Third McCarron's commander Otto Kung stated in a briefing today, adding that, 'We are the Celestial One's sword of vengeance and shall be thrust into the bosom of the Capellan March, to succeed where Hasek failed.'"

"Reporting from Taygeta for CBS, I'm Josef Zane."

—Josef Zane, CBS reporter embedded with the First St. Ives Lances, Taygeta, 28 August 3069

SHATTERED LINES

"Never before in the history of our great nation have we suffered so many defeats so swiftly as we have in the past three decades. To make matters worse, George Hasek's war has proven the greatest disaster since the fall of the first Star League. I stand before you today enraged by Lord Hasek's lunacy. His complete disregard for FedSuns law and abrogation of the responsibilities of his noble position has left every world in the Capellan March defenseless....

"Hasek follows the Heretic Prince's path."

"Almach, Valexa and Ashkum were attacked by an elite Capellan task force consisting of Warrior House Dai Da Chi and the Second McCarron's Armored Cavalry. Each world's defending unit died under the Capellan onslaught. Industrial, agricultural and military industries, along with the infrastructures of each world, have been destroyed. On Valexa, the returning March Militia unit never even made planetfall before Capellan nuclear weapons annihilated them in space.

"Our Capellan brethren acted hastily...we shall investigate this and see what we can salvage."

"On Kathil, Death Commandos supported by Dai Da Chi and the Second McCarron destroyed the shipyards, GM's mega-complex and all local militia forces. This same story is playing out on a number of our worlds. We are *losing* this war. Hasek deployed our military to the Confederation on a worthless cause. He is on his own, and so are we.

"Only we can help; soon the unbelievers will seek us out for redemption!"

"People, how much more do we need to suffer before the removal of that idiot on New Syrtis? Our families and worlds are suffering because of his unsanctioned war. Can anyone help us now?

"For KNZA News 12, I'm Alfred Whittington, Senior Editor, and this was my opinion."

—Alfred Whittington, Senior Editor, *Novaya Zemlya Tonight*, NANS affiliate, 2 September 3069

ANNIHILATION ON TALON

(12 September 3069)

Wernke [NANS]—Wernke planetary officials this evening confirmed reports of a brutal nuclear assault on Talon, perpetrated by the Blackwind Lancers against two of the planet's largest cities. Horrific damage and massive civilian casualties currently beyond estimation have been described to our reporters. In the words of planetary governor Liam Carabas:

"...The Lancers used nuclear weapons to destroy the two largest cities on Talon, including the site of Kallon Industries. The death toll is expected to exceed two million, with twice that number wounded—most of them seriously. From what we know, it seems the defending garrison, the Thirty-ninth Avalon Hussars, died in the first of five nuclear strikes and the Lancers' follow-up ground assault. There are no reports of survivors at this time.

"Kallon Weapons Industries no longer exists. From what we can discern, the factories were the Lancers' primary target. When the Hussars moved to engage the rogue Capellans, the Lancers launched their first nuclear attack. Afterward, they apparently sent in ground personnel to place a large device deep within the complex before detonating it.

"The surviving Hussars fell back to the twin cities of Carver and Shamrock, where the Lancers launched two more massive WMD assaults to level both cities. What remained of the Thirty-ninth's 'Mech forces vainly attempted to stop the Lancers, but were annihilated. The Lancers then withdrew from Talon, leaving behind a burning world with a poisoned atmosphere. We have declared a planetary crisis for Talon and our militia is scrambling now to evacuate any survivors here to Wernke. Please keep these men and women in your prayers. Hasek's war is costing us more than it's worth. Thank you."

LATE 3069: DEATH FROM ABOVE

THE BATTLE FOR NEW SYRTIS

[O'Tanner]: "Things are calm here in Saso City right now, even as the main fighting continues between invading Capellan forces and the FedSuns defenders in the surrounding countryside. But that was not the case only six hours ago, as elements of the Capellan forces landed in the park you see just behind us...."

[Camera pans to show a Thunder Hawk lying on its back across a cobblestone road encircling a wide park. Its armor is shredded and black smoke still pours from its mangled torso. One leg is gone; its left arm is a ruinous stump. Further inside the park stands the burnt-out husk of an Overlord-class DropShip, Capellan Confederation markings still visible.]

[O'Tanner]: [Off-camera] "The Capellan forces, whom sources tell us were part of the Third McCarron's Armored Cavalry, intentionally grounded one of their DropShips in this park, their assault 'Mechs pouring out of the bays with all guns blazing as they fell upon the defending elements of the Third Ceti Hussars and the Fourth Donegal Guards. Struck along their flank and rear, and pinned between the Third MAC and the Confederation's main thrust against the city, the defenders took a heavy toll as they bent under the Capellan attack, pulling back from the outer suburbs to concentrate their fire.

"A suicidal attack run by the Hussars' remaining aerospace lances against the Third MAC's DropShip crippled the vessel, and the arrival of the armored infantry from the Sixth Syrtis Fusiliers—apparently from positions on the city's east side—finally turned the tide. Hasek's forces pushed the MAC back to their burning DropShip, destroying all who refused to surrender.

"Reports from outside the city say that the Capellans are conducting a fighting withdrawal from their week-old offensive. Only time will show if this is just a respite, or a prelude to something more."

—Roger O'Tanner, INN, New Syrtis, 21 September 3069

THE ADVANCING HORDES

WOLF WATCH

Disturbing news, my Khan. Agents within the Dominion have reported that the *Rasalhague* has been declared fully operational and is now underway to Alshain's zenith point. The ship was loaded with a full crew and half her estimated maximum fighter complement under intense security, unusual for a standard deployment. At least a Galaxy has been transferred off-planet as well, presumably traveling with the *Rasalhague*. Several of her attendant vessels are non-combat DropShips. I suspect that if the WarShip is headed to the standard jump point, she is joining up with the small fleet of JumpShips currently on station there.

In addition, the Alshain yards have finished their expansion project. Shortly after the *Rasalhague* left her moorings, the *Great Bear* entered in her place, presumably to undergo continuing re-

pair work. The *Leviathan* arrived in-system only yesterday and has made course for the planet as well. Service laborers and technical crews have been increased at the yards, so the evidence points to the conclusion that the *Leviathan* has arrived to begin her upgrade.

I will forward any news on the *Rasalhague*'s destination when I am able. It is currently the Watch's first priority.

—Wolf Clan Watch report dated 12 October 3069 (relayed to

INN via ISAP, 5 December 3069)

THE CURSE OF GALEDON

From: Sherri Dineson, ISAP (Irurzun Office)

To: Jackson Heckinger, INN-Proserpina

Date: 1 August 3069

Re: Unconfirmed Raven Incident

Jack,

I have been unable to confirm the accuracy of the following transcript. My source in the ISF *claims* it came from a DropShuttle assigned to the *Mountbatten*, one of the Raven WarShips that hit Galedon. The location of the incident is unknown, and the date is simply given as "mid-June." Might be unwise to rely on this report without independent verification. Certainly, the editing is curious. Regardless, it appears that the "Curse of Galedon" has spread beyond that world.

>>>EXCERPT AD7671-881-XHR-001<<<

[MOUNTBATTEN]: "Trothkin of the Storm Crow Naval Pursuit Star! The epidemic continues to proliferate among those vessels that took on Galedonian bondsmen. Medtechs on all our ships confirm that by now the *Ark Royal*, the *Storm Crow* and the *Nestling* are overrun by this plague." [DELETED] "...we cannot risk further contamination. As much as it pains me, I see no alternative but to Reave the contaminated vessels."

[ARK ROYAL]: "Neg! You have lost your mind, Star Admiral! Surely it will be sufficient for us to hold in space until a cure is found?"

[MOUNTBATTEN]: "If a cure is ever found! We *cannot* risk the safety and well-being of our entire Clan, neither with your contamination..." [DELETED] "...For the sake of all, we must purge this disease that has been inflicted on us!"

[ARK ROYAL]: "Lunacy! I reject your faulty reasoning, and refuse to let you destroy me, my crew and the *Ark Royal*!"

[STORM CROW]: "The *Storm Crow* also rejects your conclusion, Star Admiral. Our destruction is not necessary."

[MOUNTBATTEN]: "*Seyla*. Then prepare for combat, trothkin. Your Trial of Annihilation begins now..."

>>>END x/x<<<

LOOMING APOCALYPSE

For Immediate Release

(17 August 3069)

New Earth [VOICE OF BLAKE]—Attention, citizens of the Inner Sphere! We bring you this from the dark chambers of the Clans, where they plot your destruction! Hear this and tremble! And know now that the only saving grace you have in this time of petty war and self-serving nobles is the comfort and protection of the Word of Blake!

>>>Begin Transmission<<<

[Kael Pershaw, Jade Falcon Loremaster]: "And now, my Khans, we will entertain nominations for ilKhan. Yes, saKhan Troy Boques of the Blood Spirits."

[Troy Boques, Clan Blood Spirit]: "Clan Blood Spirit nominates Khan Garret Sainze of Clan Fire Mandrill for the position of ilKhan."

[Marthe Pryde, Clan Jade Falcon]: [Filtered, indistinct]

[Brett Andrews, Steel Viper]: "What was that, Khan Pryde? Surely you would like to share your obvious derision with the rest of us?"

[Pryde]: "Derision? Neg. I am merely commenting that we would be better served with one of the low-life Spheroid warriors the Ghost Bears seem content to absorb into their Touman."

[Aletha Kabrinski, Ghost Bear]: [Filtered, hearty laughter] "On this, I agree. One of our Rasalhagian bondsmen has more blood of warriors in him than most of the Mandrill Kindraa."

[Garret Sainze, Fire Mandrill]: "So rather than second my nomination, you choose to insult a fellow warrior of Kerensky? Have we sunk so far, that you so-called 'Spheroid Clans' deem yourselves superior to us, the true holders of Kerensky's vision?"

[Martialle Radick, Wolf]: [Filtered] "Aff, because it is true. Though we hold more dearly to the spirit of the Great Father. You are more like rotten children, feeding off the spoils of the parents."

[Dante Truscott, Star Adder]: "Is that so? Then we will surely elect one of our own to resume the invasion that you so extravagantly botched for almost twenty years. And *this* time, we will not only defeat the Spheroids but you stagnant Clans as well."

[Radick]: "You will find the way through the Wolves wrought with your own Clan's destruction."

[Kabrinski]: "Try and fail, like the Horses before you."

[Ariel Suvorov, Goliath Scorpion]: [Filtered] "The Horses? The Horses apparently do not think this Council is even worth their time. They have once more failed to attend—in person or virtually. Perhaps one of the Home Clans has indeed lost its way."

[Angus Labov, Diamond Shark]: [Filtered] "Maybe. Maybe not."

[Truscott]: "As you should speak, Shark. Your massive mercantile movements from Kerensky's home have not gone unnoticed, either."

[Pershaw]: "My Khans, enough!" [Coughs] "We have let this again devolve into arguments and petty bickering. There is a nomination on the floor; is there a second?"

[Karianna Schmitt, Blood Spirit]: "I, Khan Karianna Schmitt of Clan Blood Spirit, second the nomination of Khan Garret Sainze of Clan Fire Mandrill."

[Pershaw]: "saKhan Connor Rood of the Ice Hellions."

[Connor Rood, Ice Hellions]: "I nominate Khan Marthe Pryde of the Falcons for the position of ilKhan."

[Pryde]: [Hysterical laughter] "Surely you jest, snow ferret."

[Rood]: "Why not? You tell us we are too weak and stupid to lead such a grand Crusade, so who better to lead us then the Khan who has beaten down the Lyran Alliance twice now? What have the Wolves and Bears done but scuffle with the Horses? By your own words, Marthe, you are the best choice."

[Pryde]: "Neg. I refuse the nomination on the grounds of foolishness. I know the path of my Clan and we will follow it, not lead you stupid children with us to steal our glory. If you persist in your foolish ideas you will face me in a Trial of Grievance."

[Radick]: "In that case, Loremaster, I would like to nominate Khan Stanislov N'Buta."

[Silas Kufahl, Coyote]: "I second the nomination. The Adders have proven the right to lead a new Crusade. After all, aside from the Falcons, they were the only ones to defeat the Spheroids in combat during the Great Refusal."

[Labov]: "Interesting. So that throat wound you received did not take away the Coyote power of braying incessantly, as we originally thought."

[Pershaw]: "Any other nominations?" [Silence] "Then nominations are closed." [Coughs] "We will now allow Khans Sainze and N'Buta five minutes to address the Council on their fitness to be ilKhan..."

>>> End Transmission<<<

They are coming for you all, but the True Believers shall be saved.

Peace of Blake to you.



LATE 3069: DEATH FROM ABOVE

BACK TO BASICS

"Attention, Jade Falcons!

"Today the warriors of Clan Wolf have arrived to take this world from your weakened talons. Your facile attempts at glory end here, for we have come to show you the way back to the path of the warrior.

"Tremble in your nests, Falcons. I, Galaxy Commander Sandra Vickers, along with my entire Kappa Galaxy, will enjoy wresting Rasalgethi from your misguided ways. I have taken Orkney and Jabuka from your sibkin and will enjoy teaching you the true art of war as seen through the eyes of the true children of Kerensky.

"We do not request or require safcon. You may attempt to stop our assault and die with some honor, or you can turn tail and run like your brothers did on Jabuka.

"With what forces do you defend this world? Take as much time as you need—I am in no hurry to leave. The Wolves are on the prowl and we have come to stay."

—Decrypted transmission intercepted from the Rasalgethi system, 6 October 3069

THE TRUTH REVEALED

Josef,

I've intercepted this note. There was no report attached. Considering how old it is, I'm surprised we haven't heard yet that Dante got glassed by the Ravens. Pass the word to the usual suspects. This won't stop at Dante; too much has happened for that.

OvKhan,

It is difficult to contain my rage. The attached report by the OAI confirms without doubt that terrorists on Dante planted nuclear bombs aboard the vessels of the Swift Wing Star. They used our contempt for the Kuritas' dishonor against us. I do not regret our actions in the Combine, but to hide behind others when inflicting such a vicious attack makes it even more cowardly. The extent of these Spheroids' depravity is astonishing. What are we doing here? Certainly we must exact punishment against the scum on Dante, but once that is done, what remains for us here? I doubt our path, and seek your guidance.

Marten

—M12 internal memo, dated 28 August 3069 (declassified for FSNS, 15 December 3070)

DANTE BURNING

To: Marshall Daniel Darwith

Re: Intercept 522-99FHHA-3

Dan, I'm not sure what to make of this. Our boys monitoring the Alliance picked this up from DeepSat G-2. It's partly faded out and our tech boys are trying to boost the signal for more information, especially the tag files so we can see who this was going to. But the content we did pick up is interesting, to say the least. Seems the Alliance has other problems right now besides the Combine. Don't know if you want to inform the Regent or not, but that's not my call to make.

—Marshal Romulus Colcetti

>>>Audio attached<<<

[Static] "...ently the Birds have figured out who pulled off Operation Purification. We made sure our volunteers did not return to this mortal coil, but somehow the Ravens have backtracked the entire cleansing to us. We suspect a Combine agent is somewhere in the network. The Ravens arrived in orbit yesterday afternoon and began firing indiscriminately on known population centers. If they sent a message to the planet, we don't know, other than the massive fire they're pouring into the cities. For the moment, our main base here at the Sixth Ring is safe, but I wouldn't consider it survivable, especially if our network is indeed compromised. We are scattering as we can, but it's impossible to leave Dante at this time; the Ravens are destroying any ship that lifts. We've dampened our reactor in the mountain, but it's only a matter of time before their sensors pick up residual neutrino traces.

We knew this wouldn't last, but I hoped we'd have enough time to move more of our network. I suggest you put Causation on hold until we can assess the damage done by this attack—and I warn you, it will be considerable. I place long odds on us ever being operational again. Personally, I think you should write us off. At least the Ninth Ring survives elsewhere....

At least I can go to my fiery end with the knowledge that a bunch of neo-Luddites managed to take out an entire Clan WarShip Star. Fortunately, the Ramora Virus was inst..." [Static]

>>>Audio Ends<<<

—M12 internal memo, dated 29 September 3069 (Declassified for FSNS 15 December 3070)



LATE 3069: DEATH FROM ABOVE

INCOMING FIRE

[Outcast Five]: "...Copy that, Special, moving to nav one-bravo to reinforce Jazz Command."

[Outcast Special]: "Roger Five. Make it speedy; Jazz says the zone's hot. Special out."

[Pause. Distant rumbles.]

[Five]: "Mon Dieu! Special! We have co—"

[Thunderous explosion. Static. A high-pitched squeal. Silence.]

[Special]: [Muttering] "What the hell—?" [Louder] "Outcast Five, this is Special; say again last transmission, over..."

[Silence. Popping static. Explosion.]

[Special]: [Muttering] "There it is again..." [Louder] "Outcast Five, this is Special; sitrep!"

[More popping static.]

[Special]: "Jericho, this is Outcast Special. Request flyby of nav one-bravo and Jazz Command, sector three-zero. Possible Cappie arty mission in progress. Please advise on situation and render support, over."

[Jericho Leader]: "On it, Outcast. Standby..."

[Silence.]

[Jericho]: [Muttering] "Mother of God..."

[Special]: "Jericho Flight, sitrep!"

[Jericho]: "O-outcast Special, this is Jericho...we can't see nav one-bravo... There's smoke everywhere. This can't be right. Verify position, over."

[Special]: "Sensors read you dead over designated sector, Jericho... sector three-zero, nav one-bravo is right below you, over."

[Popping static. Distant thunder.]

[Jericho Alpha]: "Oh, hell! Orbital fire! That came from above!"

[Special]: "Say agai—"

[Jericho Leader]: "They're shelling everything! Outcast Special... there's *nothing* here! No friendly or hostile IFFs! It's just a wasteland down there... They're dead... *All* of them..."

—Transcript of AFFS comms traffic on Halloran V, 13 October 3069

FOR VENGEANCE OR JUSTICE

TIKONOV UNDER FIRE?

"Good evening, I'm Jason Flynn with breaking news from the front. We just received reports from Capella that Tikonov's HPG transmitter ceased operations some time yesterday. Rumors claim Duke Hasek's army may have assaulted the planet and silenced communications to keep the Strategios unaware of the true extent of Davion aggression along the Chaos March border. But the Tikonov shutdown may also merely be part of the massive HPG outage in and around the coreward border of Word of Blake operations.

["We have claimed these worlds at the behest of their peoples, for their protection and salvation. It is a great day for the Word of Blake

and a testament to Blake's will and prophecy. We shall stand firm in our resolve. We shall stand and face the wrath of the evil Succession Lords to defend the defenseless as the righteous warriors of Blake's will. Blessed be the Word of Blake!"]

"Now I want to bring in retired *Sang-shao* Alexander Knight, our military analyst, about the current success of CCAF operations in the Capellan March. *Sang-shao* Knight, thank you for being here with us tonight. What is your expert opinion of Capellan success in Operations Thunderstrike and Celestial Vengeance?"

[Knight]: "Thank you for having me. Jason, in my opinion, it's simply phenomenal. Hasek and his generals seriously underestimated the resolve of the Capellan people and its military."

[Flynn]: "With the recent revelations from the Chaos March border, can the CCAF's advances against Hasek's troops benefit from these developments?"

[Knight]: "I don't believe so. Hasek sent troops across the border as a diversion to tie down any reinforcements. However, the bulk of his military participated in operations to liberate the St. Ives Commonality."

[Flynn]: "Thank you, *Sang-shao*. At this time, we'll break for our sponsors. Please stay with us..."

—Channel 2 News Special Report, KDBR (a CBS affiliate), Denbar, 15 September 3069

OUTRAGE!

It would appear we're rid of those thrice-damned Snow Ravens for a while. Let them choke on the Blakists. They deserve each other. One of our automated listening posts intercepted the transmission below. It took us this long to decode it. We're lucky the post just happened to be close enough to pick up that HPG communications circuit. It's partial, but we're lucky we got even this much.

>>>Transmission Begins<<<

[Static]

[Lynn McKenna]: "...trying times. This Word of Blake has cost us dearly, and they will pay for it sevenfold. Our fury is as righteous and just as it was when the Not-Named assaulted our holdings, and this time we will enact the punishment directly. But as I near the Inner Sphere, we must not let rage blind us. The campaign before us requires a stable base of operations and a proper infrastructure to support us. It is *imperative* that we accelerate our efforts to coordinate with the Outworlds Alliance. They have proven to us time and again that the essence of the Inner Sphere is not all corruption. In order to execute our planned revenge against those treacherous Spheroids..." [Static] "...we..." [Static]

>>>Transmission Ends<<<

—Communications intercept released by the Drake (veracity unconfirmed), Kaznejoy, 11 October 3069



LATE 3069: DEATH FROM ABOVE

LIAO INVADED BY BLAKIST TROOPS

(5 November 3069)

Capella [CBS]—CBS has just received confirmation of a Word of Blake attack in progress against the Confederation world of Liao. The following is a transcript from CBS field reporter Jason Vedmeyer, currently embedded with the Dynasty Guards on Liao.

[Vedmeyer]: "I'm sending this report to you from the HPG station here on Liao. Just over a year ago—and after six months of hard fighting against the Eighth Syrtis Fusiliers—the Dynasty Guards, supported by Hell's Black Aces, reclaimed another world imperiled by Davion aggression. The CCAF high command left the Guards in place, replenished by captured equipment, to defend against any further attacks by Hasek's forces.

"Invasion eventually came, but it wasn't the Davions who darkened Liao's skies. This time, the invaders were the Word of Blake. Three days ago, a Blakist force calling itself the Twenty-first Division, 'Divine Right and Justice,' landed several kilometers outside the planetary capital. Alerted to their presence, the Dynasty Guards deployed and waited for the Blakists, while the mercenary Aces harried their still-inbound DropShips. The elite mercenary force inflicted several losses before falling back.

"Elements of the Twenty-first subsequently attempted to move on the capital but were immediately engaged by the Guards and defeated. Drawing on lessons learned in battle against the Fusiliers, the Guards unleashed a massive artillery barrage in concert with the Aces' aerial attacks. The entire Dynasty Guards then hit the Blakist division on three different flanks, decimating them and forcing their retreat. With several Blakist units still operating in the system, however, the Guards believe another invasion of this hallowed world is inevitable.

["Victory shall be ours! We will overcome all Heretics!"]

"Reporting for KGSH Eyewitness 12, I'm Jason Vedmeyer."

CLASH OF TITANS

(13 October 3069)

Halloran V [FSNS]—Thousands, if not millions, are dead this hour and damage reports are still coming in as the battle for control over Halloran V escalated dramatically with the entry of Word of Blake naval forces, apparently engaging both of the forces already engaged below.

The attack came just days after elements of the Sixth Confederation Reserve Cavalry landed within 100 kilometers of the planetary capital of Gethin and advanced on an AFFS depot

in that region. After the Capellan forces destroyed militia defenders, ransacked the base and leveled the compound, Major General Perry Nichols called up the rest of the Halloran Militia to intercept the attackers. Though Nichols' troops were outnumbered, they managed to hold back the Sixth until reinforcements arrived from the First FedSuns Armored Cavalry, who landed on the city outskirts under heavy aerospace cover and moved to engage the Capellans.

Over the next two days, both forces sparred on the outskirts of the capital, with the Sixth suffering serious casualties before the Cavalry finally caught the Capellans out of position. But before the Confederation troops could surrender, a Blakist WarShip that had slipped past the planetary sensor grids saturated both sides in a devastating orbital bombardment.

The bombardment continued for several hours as the hovering WarShip turned its guns on nearby cities and towns, ending around midnight local time. Officials estimate that the attacks decimated the Capellan and Allied units, who were last seen helping each other with casualties and salvage, while millions of Halloran civilians have been killed, injured or rendered homeless.

WORD OF BLAKE INVADES CONFEDERATION

During war, confusion is a tool an enemy uses to distract or blind an opponent. Such is the case in this war. Initially, based on electronic intelligence and other information, our military leadership believed that the Davion military was solely responsible for the attack on our coreward front. While we know Hasek's forces did cross the border last year, we now have proof of a new enemy who invaded our sovereign nation in a despicable act of blatant treachery.

The Blake Militia launched a massive invasion of our territory from their worlds in the Chaos March. To date, excluding Liao, the Word of Blake has assaulted Pleione, Ponzan and Gan Singh. We do not yet know exactly what is happening on each world. We have confirmed the attacks via reports from our ISAP writers on each planet, but we lost all contact when the HPGs went down.

Those who escaped tell of unbelievable atrocities. Wanton acts of violence against civilians with conventional arms and weapons of mass destruction have proven that the Word of Blake, not the Federated Suns, is our greatest enemy. We implore the Celestial Wisdom to turn his blessed eyes on the new threat posed by the religious technophiles of Terra. Our people, our nation, stand at the brink of the abyss. The Word of Blake is a clear and present danger to the Capellan Confederation and we should resolve to meet them with everything we have.

—Jamal Washburn, ISAP, Styx Times Journal (Sunday Edition), 21 November 3069



LATE 3069: DEATH FROM ABOVE

DAILY BRIEF

For Immediate Release

(30 November 3069)

This is a routine summary report provided to all Lyran media outlets to give an accurate picture of the war effort against the Free Worlds League and their Word of Blake allies. You may use any part of the following as a confirmed source from the War Department of Skye.

Skye/Bolan Front Update:*Systems captured from FWL:*

Autumn Wind, Gannett, Megrez, Niihan, Pingree, Preston, Thermopolis, Togwotee, Rexburg, Shasta and Sheridan. Allied forces have also reclaimed Alcor, Mizar, Summer, Syrma and Zebebelgenubi—all Alliance worlds temporarily lost to FWLM forces.

Systems lost to the FWL:

Giausar, Preston

Systems still under attack by FWL forces:

Alchiba, Arcadia, Cascade, Cavanaugh II, Colfax, Denebola, Dixie, Ford, Gallatin, Idyld, Khon Kaen, Loric, McAfee, Milton, Penobscot, Phecda, Poulsbo, Solaris VII, Timbiqui and Wyatt.

The Word of Blake recently attempted to invade Menkent, Skye and Summer, though LAAF forces repulsed all three attacks. Unfortunately, the capital of Curitiba on Summer was leveled by nuclear weapons. Relief forces and aid have been dispatched from Skye. The Blakist task force that subsequently threatened Skye was savagely repulsed by the LAS *Fylgia* and her escorts with minor losses to the defending Skye fleet. Menkent suffered minor damage from a few random orbital attacks, but local aerospace defenders managed to throw back the enemy before the Blakists could inflict serious harm.

Fighting along the Bolan front is at a standstill as Duke Umayr of Bolan prepares for another push into the League to exploit FWLM confusion evidenced in many League border provinces. The Skye/Bolan push headed by Duke Kelswa-Steiner is clearly going well. Additional reinforcements and mercenary units are en route to embattled worlds.

For further information, contact the Skye War Department at ComStar account SK-5229-WDS-4.

—Kommandant Lee Parroti, Skye War Department

AND IN OTHER NEWS...

DEFIANCE

"Lies, damn lies and the Captain-General's truths. The Pretender of Atreus wants us to trust him, to believe that he had our best interests at heart while he staged a coup d'état and lied through his teeth for more than thirty years. This wasn't one bad decision, one white lie to cover up an indiscretion, one act of cronyism. It was three decades of habitual deceit and manipulation, of attempts to gather power into his hands. Look at the Addendum to the Incorporation. To the reformation of the FWLM. Tell me then that he hasn't sought to bolster his own position at the expense of others.

"Some people have said his track record gives him the justification to rule and that the Marik clan supports him in this. It is true that some have come out in support of the impostor, but only because they were swayed by his promises and lies. They have forgotten too soon that "Thomas" was more than willing to sell off his daughter—whom we now learn isn't—to safeguard the Capellan border, and had no use for her once Sun-Tzu cast her off. They have forgotten the fate of Kristen Marik, her daughter Ana and her son Janos, all because Thomas put the Free Worlds before "family." To me, that is not forgiveness. It is weak-willed capitulation—and with it, I believe, goes the Mariks' right to govern the Free Worlds. Any who choose to support the fraud over their own family are traitors to the League and their own blood.

"The Act of Succession gives the Marik clan the right of first refusal of the Captain-Generalcy but it does not give them an absolute claim to the post. With their steadfast support of an illegal impostor, they have to all intents abrogated their right to nominate a candidate to the office of Captain-General. Therefore, by default the post should fall to the head of one of the other founding states: Oriente and Regulus.

"Christopher Halas is bound by blood to the fraud, and thus his candidature is suspect. That leaves Regulus as the only true bastion of League freedoms. With that in mind, and following my directive regarding the fraud's efforts to convene a fake Parliament to legitimize his post, I enact the provisions of the Succession Act and merge all federal authority with the post of Prince of Regulus, and assume the post of Captain-General. Henceforth, no federal bodies or troops are to accept the orders of the individual claiming to be Thomas Marik, nor shall they offer him succor. Instead, they shall deliver up said individual to Regulus for trial under Free Worlds law."

—League-wide address by Kirc Cameron-Jones, Prince of Regulus (Captain-General), 7 August 3069

LATE 3069: DEATH FROM ABOVE

NEW MARIK CAPTAIN-GENERAL INSTALLED

(10 August 3069)

Atreus [ATREUS CHRONICLE]—"The traitor who illegally held this office has been removed from power and a true Marik sworn in." This curt announcement by the Minister of Intelligence represented the first official confirmation that the man people had until recently believed to be Thomas Marik has been deposed, though it had been obvious since the small hours that a military operation was underway in the Capital. "Captain-General Corinne Marik has been confirmed by DNA matching as descended from the Marik bloodline, and received the acclamation of senior members of the Marik clan on Atreus."

Though having little reason to doubt the veracity of Paul Marik's assertions, or the ascension of his daughter—a development some factions have touted for more than a decade—sources close to the throne suggest a darker motivation. The curious wording of the pronouncement seems designed to obscure the fact that this was a coup d'état and that Parliament has not ratified Corinne's installment. It also seems likely that despite the phrasing, a small clique of the Marik clan selected her; the present communication difficulties make it a challenge to consult with family members on Marik, Tamarind and elsewhere.

The vastly bolstered troop presence on the streets of the capital has discouraged mass gatherings for or against the events in the Palace. With a de facto state of martial law in effect, travel is only possible for those with official passes. How long these restrictions will last is unclear.

Details of casualties in the operation remain unclear also, but witnesses report hearing gunfire in several parts of the city, as well as seeing numerous ambulances. No one yet knows the fate of "Thomas Marik," though the Minister's pronouncement implies that he is not in custody. Court rumor suggests the former leader has fled but that several members of his family were killed during the night.

Corinne Marik, the fifty-first Captain-General of the Free Worlds League (though that title is contested by Prince Kirc Cameron-Jones of Regulus) was not available for comment.

"DOES PEACE HAVE A CHANCE?"

[Alethea Colby (Foreign Ministry Attaché, ret., Foreign Market Report)]: "The fact that worlds have split away from the League because of the impostor Thomas makes any kind of unified response to this crisis impossible until he steps down. The loss of the Irian industrial base alone is crippling our economy. Like it or not, any response we make will be fueled not by patriotic fervor, but by our ability to financially mount and maintain a military force. And to rebuild."

[Colonel Caleb Montieth (FWLM, ret., Armed Forces News)]: "Fake or not, the Thomas Marik we've got has worked for the best interests of the Free Worlds League for years. True, he admits he was originally placed by ComStar—but they've dropped all support of him. In fact, they're working against him on several fronts because he chose the League over Blake. Right now he's more stabilizing than divisive. Jeremy Brett recognizes this and is working to rally the united military behind him."

[Keith D'Candide (syndicated columnist, Free Worlds Features)]: "Behind Jeremy Brett, you mean! He's feigning loyalty to Tommy the Fake because once the dust settles, the impostor will be the easiest leader to topple. After all, he has no legitimate claim to the Captain-Generalship."

[Montieth]: "Surely you're not suggesting Jeremy Brett intends to assume the C-G?"

[D'Candide]: "No. But he is a father. Once the crisis is over—assuming he's successful and Tommy the Fake remains in office—he'll be in an excellent position to broker a new dynasty."

[Colby]: "Again, the key issue is economics, not politics. Without the fiscal infrastructure to maintain a government—particularly a government rebuilding after a tragedy of this magnitude—a faction based on deceit and military prowess will not succeed. Though much of his support is regional, Kirc Cameron-Jones represents—"

[D'Candide]: "A power-hungry opportunist willing to tear the League apart rather than have it survive without him as Captain-General."

[Colby]: "The incident on your home world was unfortunate—"

[D'Candide]: "Unfortunate?!"

[Montieth]: "What do you recommend, Candy? What sort of leadership to get us out of this mess?"

[D'Candide]: "The Free Worlds League's greatest strength has always been our people. The Captain-Generalship was conceived to meet an emergency; it grew to become a hereditary title, the

PUPPET MASTERS

[Paul Marik, center frame]: "... acclamation of senior members..."

[Reporter, off-camera]: [Whispered] "There, to the right, the trooper..." [Camera shakes and re-orientes]

[Paul Marik, off-camera]: "...of the Marik clan on Atreus. Thank you."

[Reporter, off-camera]: [Whispered] "You recognize the armor? Doesn't look like FWLM standard issue."

[Cameraman, off-camera]: [Muffled] "Some Irian Skunkworks job?"

[Official, off-camera]: "And that concludes the news conference. Additional briefing documents will..."

[Reporter, off-camera]: [Whispered] "It's familiar. I'm sure I've seen something like it before."

[Official, off-camera]: "...be available in the lobby."

[Reporter, off-camera]: [Whispered] "Quick, zoom in on the torso. Further. Tighten on the logo..." [A Marik eagle springs into view.]

[Cameraman, off-camera]: [Muffled] "Hello. Is that what I think it is...?" [The shot pans a little to reveal the broadsword behind the eagle.]

[Reporter, off-camera]: [Whispered] "Uh huh. I think toaster-worship just became the state religion..."

LATE 3069: DEATH FROM ABOVE



time for which has passed. In the present crisis, the people must decide our course. An openly elected leader—regardless of what title we give her or him—is the only way the Free Words League will attain its full potential.”

[Colby]: “God, you’re a dreamer.”

—Partial transcript from *Commentators’ Weekly Roundtable*, first aired 13 September 3069

[Baker]: “Now you’re cooking with fusion! All right, form on me, cupcakes. This’ll get a bit rough and chunky, but we outmass those Lyran butt-drips, so put your backs into it and make the hole for—”

[Charlie]: “Disengage from this frequency! That station is monitoring!”

[Static]

—Intercepted comm transmissions attributed to Blakist forces near north polar monitoring station *Rochelle*, Skye, 4 October 3069

FYLGIA RETURNS FROM THE DEAD!

(29 September 3069)

Skye [FREE SKYE PRESS]—Still bearing battle scars from Alarion, the LAS *Fylgia* appeared at Skye two weeks ago—after avoiding Blakist pursuit for several months and shunning all contact for as long as possible, despite the rumored sightings at Noisiel and Gallery. Admiral Helena Danvers is said to be eager to replenish the *Fylgia*’s stores of ammunition and supplies so that she can quickly pay the Blakists back “with interest.” Already many locals are jumping at the chance to become part of her crew. Numerous requests to do so—both formal and unofficial—have reportedly already been filed with the admiral.

With the *Fylgia* back in the fight, we can expect to see some reversals in the near future.

[Free Skye Press—Be advised of the following:

The above article cannot be transmitted, per Ducal Decree 3069/71, which specifically prohibits the transmission of any facts related to or mention of the Mjolnir-class cruiser Fylgia through any channels.

If you repeat this offense, this crime is punishable by ten (10) years in prison and 100,000 kroner per responsible person, per offense.

—Office of Duke Ryan Kelswa-Steiner]

BLOODY SKYE

(7 October 3069)

Terra [VOICE OF BLAKE]—Today we salute the defenders of Skye who lost much in their haphazard defense of Duke Robert’s home. Though we do not understand why so many military men sell their souls for a deceiving, power-mad noble who claims questionable lineage to the corrupted Steiner bloodline, we admire their perseverance against our smaller fleet.

VOICE OF THE FORGOTTEN

Hi Mom, I’m well. The invasion started out easy but now it’s gotten tougher. All that time in the academy and now I finally get to show off my stuff. Combat is exciting until it’s over and I have to get out of the ‘Mech, to see what it does to people. The Eagles are finally recovering from the initial hit and they aren’t falling as quick. I took down three on Cascade and one here on [censored]. When we hit [censored] I’ll be sure to be an ace. We sure could use some snacks, TP and toothpaste. Luckily we took a deodorant factory, so I’ll send you guys a crate later. I hope things are going well back home and I miss you and Jamie. I really regret missing her graduation.

Love, Jeremy

Hey folks, I’m still hanging in there. Just like I told you, I made ace when I took down a *Hermes II* here on [censored]. Then the Eagles hit back, hard, with a heavy lance. I pulled their lead *Orion* off to the side and managed to take it down. My *Clint* took out an *Orion*! But when I got back, a *Quickdraw* had killed Billy Thompson and tore up Jinny Taylor’s *Uziel* before my reappearance sent their two ‘Mechs back to their lines. We’re going to try to get Billy’s *Blitzkrieg* fixed up so Jinny can pilot it, but it’s weird having her pilot his ‘Mech. And we’re low on ammo, so I don’t know how useful it’s going to be. Well, there went another warning. I’ll write again soon.

Love, Jeremy

—Private letters found among the effects of Leutnant Jeremy Minderhoff (MIA on McAfee 27 November 3069), dated mid-October 3069

UNEXPECTED SURPRISE

[Static]

[Able]: “...confirmed, the jump signature is the *Fylgia*! Say again, we face the *Fylgia*! Command, we must abort, we do not have the resources to engage that *Mjolnir*!”

[Baker]: “I’m with Louis, Command. Lets get the [deleted] out of here! Her fighters will be all over us in ten more minutes!”

[Command]: “Form up to engage those fighters. Make a hole.”

[Baker]: “Which fighters, Command? The wing that came from the station, the wing that the *Mjolnir* is launching, or the wing those Lyran droppers shat out?”

[Able]: “[Deleted]! We’re [deleted] dead!”

[Charlie]: “Cut the chatter! Break through the *Fylgia* fighters. Fifth and Sixth squadrons are about to launch. We’ll deliver Blake’s wrath on that Heretic cruiser. So quit crying and get the job done.”



LATE 3069: DEATH FROM ABOVE

Our naval force did not expect such stiff resistance. The presence of the cowardly *Fylgia*—which obviously took advantage of the chaos in Alarion to slip away from her Tharkan masters—merely confirms that Duke Kelswa has his own interests at heart. Our attempt to put down such a traitorous crew failed only somewhat, however, as we managed to wipe out most of the support vessels and shattered the planetary aerospace defenses. Rest assured that we will return to finish the job, once the *Fylgia* and her crew have had time to repent their cowardly and traitorous ways and return to the Alliance. There, we can give them the honorable death they deserve, so that the men and women of the *Fylgia* might go down in history as misguided heroes rather than as traitors to their country.

So prepare what meager resources you have left, Duke Kelswa. Blake's judgment is calling and finds you wanting. Remember, you are the one who declared war on our allies in the League. We will punish you for your naked ambition and unwarranted aggression.

The Hand is coming. And you will succumb.

IF NOT FOR KING, THEN FOR COUNTRY

(3 November 3069)

[Cue images of the nuclear holocaust at Tharkad City, mushroom cloud rising high into the air.]

"Tharkad. Our capital. Our leadership. Our citizens. In one fell swoop the Blakists tried to decapitate our nation, launching their attacks from the lost pride of the Lyran Navy, the hero of Hesperus II, the LCS *Invincible*! Not content with that, their Marik puppets also launched an unprovoked attack on Skye. Since then, the Blakists have launched assault upon assault against our worlds, doing their best to cripple our military and industrial might. It is only because of men like Marshal Adam Steiner that the Archon is still alive and the LAAF is fighting back.

"Already the Mariks have sued for peace, unable to continue their offensive against us. But still we have enemies out there, foul cowards who take advantage of our plight to stab us in the back. The Clans will pay in the end, but only after the Blakists are dealt with.

"Citizens of the Alliance! These are the times that try our souls, these are the times in which you can do your duty to your nation! The valiant Lyran Alliance Armed Forces needs YOU! Planetary militia academies are quickly being upgraded to turn out not just infantry and armored units, but also MechWarriors and aerospace pilots to replace those who already have given the ultimate sacrifice for the Alliance.

"Will you sit and cower until the Clans or the Blakists come? Adam Steiner, the Alliance and the future of the Inner Sphere depends on YOU!"

"Paid for by Brotherhood Press and Concerned Citizens for a Secure Commonwealth."

FOX'S TEETH STILL SHARP

(11 November 3069)

Mira [FSNS]—The Word of Blake's grip on the Federated Suns world of Demeter remains far from firm, as was demonstrated graphically last month when McKinnon's Company raided the planet.

Also known as McKinnon's Raiders and as the Fox's Teeth, this crack company of the elite Seventh Crucis Lancers has been striking Blakist-held worlds for months. Under the command of Captain Ross McKinnon, they have caused confusion and inflicted damage on our enemy far out of proportion to their small size. While the objectives of the Raiders' campaign remain classified, the AFFS has released details from the first field tests of a new battle armor design attached to the company.

On Demeter, the Blakists' Call to the Faithful III-delta dispatched troops to pursue McKinnon's elusive 'Mech force, only to fall into a carefully coordinated ambush. Thinking they had finally cornered the Raiders' BattleMechs, the Blakist advance was thrown into chaos when a company of the new Hauberk assault battlesuits emerged from concealment behind them. Caught in a hail of missile fire from the battle armor, the Word's lighter equipment was swiftly destroyed. Before the surviving Blakists could turn on the infantry, McKinnon's 'Mechs launched their own attack. Few of the enemy survived to flee the field, and our troops departed Demeter.

The AFFS reportedly is "very happy" with the performance of the new equipment, and believes it will be an invaluable asset in "driving the Blakists from our worlds."

"PAYBACK ON BETELGEUSE"

(12 November 3069)

Betelgeuse [FWLN]—The sky is clear over the Firmir Commercial plant on the banks of the Whiskey River. It's spring here, dawn, and the sky to the east is turning copper, red and gold as the rays of the rising sun pass through the smoke above Ymyr—the city in flames.

It was noon local time when the First Free Worlds Legionnaires descended on Betelgeuse, having jumped in-system via a near-orbit pirate point from Conquista.

The First Aerospace Wing under Commodore Wilerby Rosslyn was the first to engage the enemy when Warrior House Kamata's aerospace rose to meet the attack. Composed almost entirely of *Transgressors*, the Kamata wing attempted to keep the fight above the atmosphere, but the First's *Stingrays* and *Rievers*—led by the command lance of Commodore Rosslyn and Commander Barbara Williamson in their new Lopez-produced *Shivas*—slashed their defensive shield to ribbons.

With clear aerospace superiority, General Tracy Fenton placed her forces on the surface unencumbered. While the First and Second battalions struck various key military and logistical targets, the Third attacked the House Kamata stronghold. Though lighter overall, the Third's mix of *Eagles*, *Wraiths* and *Hammer/Anvil* lances was more than a match for the Kamata *Jinggaus*, *Lao Hus* and *Sha Yus*.

LATE 3069: DEATH FROM ABOVE



With the planet's defenses effectively neutralized, General Fenton set about reducing the Betelgeuse threat with the same efficiency she employed in neutralizing the Magistracy Dragonslayers and Marshigama's Legionnaires during their unprovoked sneak attack on Andurien in 3066.

As our Karnovs flew without need of escort from the landing zone to the Firmir plant—one of several industrial sites being stripped of technology that might be used against the Duchy of Andurien—this reporter finds hope that unmolested flight, like this golden dawn, may prove a precursor of a new day for the duchy and the Free Worlds League.

With the First Free Worlds Legionnaires on Betelgeuse, I'm Liz Althea.

BRETT OFFERS CEASE-FIRE TO ALLIANCE

*** Breaking News***

(2 December 3069)

Bolan [BBC]—Only minutes ago, Duke Alder Umayr of Bolan completed an impromptu press briefing on the steps of Government Hall in Bolan City, in which he announced Bolan's receipt of an armistice proposal—apparently more than a month old—from Marshal Jeremy Brett of the Free Worlds League. This move appears to follow Brett's previously unexplained unilateral moves to halt the fighting by scaling down and even pulling back his troops along the border.

Umayr, while refusing to be drawn on the particulars of the proposal, was quietly optimistic. "[Brett's proposal] provides a real opportunity to end this conflict and restore the Bolan worlds to a sense of normalcy. Too many sons and daughters of our province have given their lives to this Blake-bred conflict. We must do all in our power to end the senseless bloodshed."

The Duke's aides likewise sounded upbeat, calling the development a positive move that benefited both sides, though many obstacles remain to be overcome.

It is not yet clear if similar proposals have been made to Duke Robert Kelswa-Steiner and Duchess Hermione Aten of Skye. Though recent evidence suggests that Brett wishes to restore peace along the whole League-Alliance border, no news has emerged from the beleaguered Isle. However, given that the province is reeling under Free Worlds operations and has also become a prime focus for Blakist invasions, the slow response is unsurprising. Only the coming days will show whether the hopes of Duke Umayr and the people of Bolan can be realized.

NEWS DOWNLOADER v3.7



Date & Title	Service	Status
(20 April 3069) "Moore, Sabik Fall to Blakist Invaders"	[DBC]	COMPLETED
(25 April 3069) "Capellan/Blakist Onslaught Drives Wedge Near Kittery"	[KNN]	DOWNLOADING
(20 May 3069) "Raven Warpath Claims Four Worlds"	[ISAP]	ACCESSING

A SERVICE OF IRIAN NEWS INTERSTELLAR



CHAOS UNLEASHED: BRUTE FORCE

BRUTE FORCE

The Caselton asteroid belt was formed more than three million years ago, when two mid-sized planetoids intersected in their orbits. The resulting collision occurred in slow motion over time, creating gigantic chunks of rock that gradually separated along a wobbly path around the system primary. Influenced by gravitational effects from the two nearby gas giants, the Cassini Belt—as the local scientific community named it—has spread out into a snake-like string that plods along its orbital path. The string contains more than two million identified asteroids, with more than 900 of them at least 50 km or larger across.

Because of the high mineral content of both intersecting planetoids, the Cassini Belt is known in the Federated Suns as among the best sources of germanium, nickel, zinc and silver.

—From the *Federated Atlas* (3065 edition)

SITUATION

Site 2B, Cassini Belt

Caselton, Federated Suns

10 September 3069

Every once in a while, you get a contract offer that you have to take—not because it's a peach or on some exotic ocean world, but because it's the proverbial "tough nut." Caselton, at first glance, is one of them.

A challenge, to be sure, but the payoff is worth it. Seems Mr. Askai's employers are all hot to trot in cracking this particular nut. Several clauses of the contract contain so much legalese, they practically scream "corporate," but other parts seem ill defined. After brief but intense negotiations, your unit landed the contract to break open Site 2B, part of the Caselton Mining Corporation's string of germanium mines.

Why take it when it looks so tough? Ego. Break this sucker and bragging rights are yours—as well as a justified increase in rates. And right now, with mercs under the microscope everywhere, nailing a place like this can only enhance your reputation, guaranteeing more solid work ahead.

Time to break out those nutcrackers. So where is the rest of the crew?

CHAOS UNLEASHED: BRUTE FORCE

GAME SET-UP

CBT: Use Mountain Terrain maps. The gamemaster should place the HQ (Level 2; CF 80) within five hexes of one map edge. Place the power station (Level 1; CF 50) within ten hexes of the HQ building. This track uses the Low Gravity and vacuum rules (see pp. 84-85, *BMR*).

AT2: Use Space maps. The gamemaster should place the HQ space station (Armor 50; SI 30) within five hexes of one map edge. Place the power station (Armor 40; SI 10) on an asteroid within five hexes of the HQ station.

RPG: Gamemasters may set up for a space or ground battle using the above rules as a guideline. Gamemasters will need to prepare blueprints of each section in case the player group decides to go the infiltration route. Security should be difficult but not impossible, with most TNs around 10.

Attacker

The Attacker consists of up to 100 percent of the players' total force. The Attacker deploys on the map edge farthest from the HQ building. Starting Velocity (if applicable) must be 3 or lower.

Defender

The Defender consists of elements of the Second Davion Guards RCT. The Defender's force equals 100 percent of the Attacker's total deployed force and has Elite experience. Add five RAC 2 turrets (CF 60; 20 rounds per turret) and place the turrets before the Attacker deploys. Turrets must be no farther than twelve hexes from the power station. Space turrets (Armor: 50, SI: 10, armed as ground turrets) are placed on stationary asteroids.

The Defender enters on the map edge closest to the HQ building. Starting Velocity (if applicable) must be 5 or lower.

WARCHEST

Track Cost: 700 WP

Optional Bonuses (all bonuses cumulative):

+250 Transport Glitch: Part of the Attacker's transportation gets separated from the main group or develops mechanical problems; reduce the Attacker's force build to 75 percent of the players' total force.

+400 Sandstorm: Use rules for Blowing Sand (see p. 153, *CBTComp* or p. 11, *MT*). For AT2 games, consider the track as taking

CHAOS UNLEASHED : BRUTE FORCE



place in a heavy dust cloud trailing the asteroid field and use the same effects.

Victory Bonuses (not cumulative):

- +600 Partial Victory:** Complete one objective.
- +1,000 Complete Victory:** Complete all objectives.
- 300 Total Defeat:** Complete no objectives.

OBJECTIVES

- 1. Take down that network!** Destroy the power hub and all turrets.
- 2. Sever system coordination:** Destroy the headquarters building.
- 3. Soften 'em up!** Destroy or cripple at least 75 percent of the Defender's force.

SPECIAL RULES

The following rules are in effect for this track.

Forced Withdrawal

The Second Davion Guards follow the *Forced Withdrawal* rule.

Initiative Bonus

The gamemaster should designate one of the Defender's units as the operational leader. As long as that leader remains on the battlefield, the Defender gains a +2 Initiative bonus. This bonus is lost once the leader is removed from battle.

Turrets

In addition to following the rules for Gun Emplacements (see p. 53, *BMR*), each turret is independently powered and rotated, and so the destruction of the power station does not affect them. All turrets have Gunnery Skill 3 for this track. To reflect their quirky fire

control systems, each turret suffers a +1 penalty to all to-hit rolls if the hex containing the turret is covered by enemy ECM.

AFTERMATH

You gave it your best. Shattered the turrets and blew the power station just like you were told. Too bad that whole setup didn't even affect Site 2B. Seems Askai's contacts had really crappy intel. Not sure you want to hook up with this fool again, unless you negotiate your own intel operation next time.

As you burn out-system, your transport captain points out a cluster of dots on his threat board. "Unidentified, as far as they're transmitting, but all of those are transports loaded to the gills. One of the boys on the *Gulag Savior* owes me a favor, sent me a scan of that little gaggle. No transmissions, no CAP, nuthin'. Dunno if that's an invasion force waiting to go in on the signal or a recharging effort. Either way, someone nearby's gonna get hammered soon...."

ADDITIONAL HOOKS

What other defenses lurk in the Caselton mines? And just how tough a nut is this place to crack? Someone out there would love to have that intel, no doubt.

Expansion Ideas

Gamemasters can link several scenarios in this track, possibly splitting up the objective buildings among several maps. Alternatively, the players' force can help assist another small merc command hitting an asteroid mine nearby. Regardless of what the players decide, it becomes obvious that a full-scale assault on the Cassini Belt is underway. Someone wants those resources, bad.

NEXT TRACK

Living Dead Men; Panic and Pain; Binge, Purge, Flush



CHAOS UNLEASHED : LIVING DEAD MEN

LIVING DEAD MEN

[HPG Command]: "Unidentified DropShip, you are infringing on restricted airspace. Change your vector now or we will assume you have hostile intent."

[Badger One]: "Command, DropShip is not responding. Vector has not changed."

[HPG Command]: "Unidentified DropShip, this is your final warning. Abort your current trajectory and divert to Kalidasa Port. We do not wish to burn you from the sky."

[Badger Two]: "One, I'm reading active fire control. We're being targeted."

[Badger One]: "Back off to two thousand meters. Any sign of attack, go evasive."

[HPG Command]: "Course unchanged. Badger flight, the Precentor has authorized weapons free. Repeat, you are weapons free. Divert that DropShip."

[Badger One]: "Roger, Command. Weapons free. Be advised, the DropShip is opening bay doors. Prepare ground troops for landside attack. Badger Two, punch it. Let's go hunting."

SITUATION

HPG Compound AA-2, Tagus Metropolis

Talitha, Free Worlds League

8 December 3069

During a passing stint through the Free Worlds, your Galatean liaison notified you of a quick month-long contract to beef up a garrison on Talitha. The Precentor there is missing his standing force, and during the ensuing flurry of merc contracts, he neglected to cover a gap in December. A garrison contract usually blows, but it's only a month, giving you just enough time to stand down for repair and refit without getting too bored. Another merc command is due at the turn of the year, so what's the harm?

Turns out some other mercs—apparently part of the decimated AMC—heard about the gap in coverage and decided to launch a raid. Too bad their intel wasn't good. Now you not only get to rest up, but some easy salvage is dropping in, ripe for the picking.

CHAOS UNLEASHED: LIVING DEAD MEN

GAME SET-UP

CBT: Use any Urban Terrain maps. Gamemasters should place and designate a building as the HPG station (minimum Heavy Level 3 building).

AT2: Use at least two Space maps and the *Atmospheric Operations* rules (see p. 18, *AT2*). Gamemasters should place a satellite uplink station (Armor 60; SI 25) within three hexes of the Planet Interface row.

RPG: Gamemasters should use a similar setup as described above for a ground or space battle. All station personnel should use the standard Soldier NPC template (see p. 207, *CBT: RPG*).

Attacker

The Attacker is elements of the Third Dismal Disinherited and Burton's Brigade mercenary commands. The AMC units should be 150% of the Defender's total deployed force and are of Veteran skill level. The Disinherited units roll on Column B of any Mercenary Random Assignment Table (see 122, *Field Manual: Mercenaries, Revised*). The Brigade's units (of which there should be no more than nine 'Mechs) roll on Column C of any Mercenary Random Assignment Table (see 122, *Field Manual: Mercenaries, Revised*).

The Attacker may choose two map edges from which to enter, but must declare one edge as his "home" edge for any forced withdrawals. Starting Velocity (if applicable) should be less than 6.

Defender

The Defender is the player group; they may use up to 100 percent of their total force. The Defender sets up anywhere within ten hexes of the HPG/uplink satellite. Starting Velocity (if applicable) should be less than 3.

WARCHEST

Track Cost: 750 WP

Optional Bonuses (all bonuses cumulative):

+300 Combat Drop! (CBT Only): The Attacker may deploy up to all of his available force through a combat drop maneuver (see *Dropping Troops*, p. 78, *BMR*).

+300 High Speed Insertion! (AT2 only): The Attacker enters the battlefield at a minimum velocity of 7 and receives a +2 bonus to Initiative rolls for the first two turns.

CHAOS UNLEASHED: LIVING DEAD MEN



+300 High Winds: See High Wind rules, p. 153, *CBTComp* or 12, *MT*. For a space battle, a combination of massive sunspot activity, strong local magnetic fields and gravity creates the same effect.

–500 Early Reinforcements: The Defender may bring in additional reinforcements. These troops are Regular and may equal 50 percent of the Defender's total deployed force. To determine units, roll on Column A of the ComStar, Word of Blake and/or Mercenary RATs. The reinforcements enter from the map edge closest to the HPG/satellite station.

Victory Bonuses (not cumulative):

+900 Partial Victory: Completing two objectives.

+1,200 Total Victory: Completing all objectives.

–400 (cumulative): If Objective One is not completed.

OBJECTIVES

1. Defend with your lives! The HPG/orbital satellite uplink must survive the track.

2. We need information: Capture an enemy soldier by crippling or capturing an attacking unit.

3. Remain in control until reinforcements can arrive: At least 50 percent of the Defender's deployed force should survive for at least ten turns.

SPECIAL RULES

The following rules are in effect for this track.

Third Dismal Disinherited

When rolling to randomly determine lance composition, twice per lance (or wing) the player controlling any of the Disinherited units may roll on Column C of either the Random Assignment Table: Federated Suns (see p. 139, *Field Manual: Federated Suns* or p. 225, *Field Manual: Updates*) or Random Assignment Table: Lyran Alliance (see p. 127, *Field Manual: Lyran Alliance* or p. 227, *Field Manual: Updates*).

Gift

If the player group achieves a Total Victory, their employer gives them an additional 200 Warchest Points with which to purchase new units. These points may not be used for any other purpose.

AFTERMATH

After Action Report 4992-T

Okay, maybe not so easy. Those AMC jocks fought with their lives to get at the HPG station—but ultimately to no avail. Good

salvage though. These mercs've been living on the hog lately. They must've mauled a Blakist force or raided a supply base—some of their machines were Word designs.

We got some argument from the WoB Precentor at the HPG regarding that. He claims it's all Blakist property and offered us a small sum of money in exchange, but good ol' Harrison looked it up on the Interweb and noted that the equipment we scored is worth a hell of a lot more than what he offered. We reached an agreement eventually—we handed over the C*i* equipment but got to keep the 'Mechs and vehicles. The Blakie gizmos are pretty sweet, but those machines we brought down will last a lot longer. Plus, we finagled some time in the garrison's empty repair bays, so the Blakies will bring us up to fighting trim a lot quicker.

While we don't trust the Word all that much, considering that they caused some of the problems out there, I've got a better feel for this crew. Being abandoned by the Blakie high command also stands in their favor—seems the First Circuit (or whatever they call them now) doesn't much like these "Expatriates". My guess is, the big boys are just looking for a way to whack these folks without doing it themselves. Of course, I wouldn't put it past the Blakies to have hired out the Dismal D to do just that.

ADDITIONAL HOOKS

The AMC forces may decide to hit the garrison through more covert means, or may bring in additional help. They may even subvert some of the citizenry to their cause and gain other, less orthodox help in taking down the HPG compound. Regardless, there's no love lost between the Word of Blake and the AMC.

Expansion Ideas

If the AMC forces come in covertly, the gamemaster may need to run recon scenarios in order to pinpoint their location. The Defender can use Stand Up and Fight proactively to avert an attack, or the mini-campaign may dovetail into a brutal Base Defense scenario.

More covert operations can occur using the *CBT: RPG* rules, with players rooting out nascent rebel cells or even using a double agent to spring a trap. Alternatively, clever player groups may launch a pre-emptive strike on the Stalking Horse before they are ready to begin operations.

NEXT TRACK

Click, Click, Boom; Binge, Purge, Flush



CHAOS UNLEASHED: STIRRING THE ANTHILL

STIRRING THE ANTHILL

[Sword One]: "Repeat, our position is grid YY by five. Requesting immediate recovery. Respond."

[Torch Two]: "Roger, Sword. This is Torch Two. ETA five minutes. Extraction zone is fubarred, fallback position Tango is now live."

[Sword One]: "Copy that, Torch Two. Better hurry, we've got some nice prizes for the R&D boys."

[Torch Two]: "Good to hear. Don't worry, we'll get you out. No problem."

[Sword One]: "May want to can the optimism, Torch. We've got company coming. Ocelot at range two kilometers."

[Torch Two]: "Ocelot? What the frag is that?"

[Sword One]: "Get your ass down here and find out. Going silent. Sword out."

SITUATION

Mighty Spine Mountains, Badlands

Avon, Draconis Combine

25 December 3069

The Combine seems to be hiring mercs for everything nowadays. Considering your success back in 3068 during the Dieron campaign, the Dracs wanted to know if you'd be interested in another hush-hush mission. The amount of money they're offering made it a pretty easy decision.

The Dracs have been doing some small-unit training on Nova Cat worlds, helping the Clan bring its counter-intrusion operations up to snuff. The Watch, after all, isn't known for covert intelligence. So they've hired your command to sneak in and see if you can extract a small DEST squad from under the noses of the resident kittens.

CHAOS UNLEASHED: STIRRING THE ANTHILL

GAME SET-UP

CBT: Use Hills/Flatlands Terrain maps in a Chase format. The gamemaster should designate one edge as the entry edge for the DEST squad.

RPG: Set up the track following the CBT rules as a guide. The gamemaster should have a map of the area for reference.

Attacker

The Attacker is the player group; they may use up to 25 percent of their total force. The DEST force is a single squad of Kage battle armor.

The Attacker enters via the opposite edge of the battlefield from the Kage unit. The DEST unit is placed within six hexes of the gamemaster-designated edge.

Defender

The Defender is elements of the First Nova Cat Guards, all Elite troops, and equals 150 percent of the Attacker's total deployed force. The Defender's force should include one to three *Ocelots* (see p. 138).

Up to half of the Defender's force enters on Turn Two from the gamemaster's designated edge. The other half enters the track after the Kage unit has made contact (within one hex of a mercenary unit) and enters from the Attacker's home edge.

WARCHEST

Track Cost: 900 WP

Optional Bonuses (all bonuses cumulative):

+600 Polar Mission: The track occurs on the polar caps. Consider all Clear hexes as covered in ice (see p. 83-84, *BMR*), and use the optional Ice rules on p. 152, *CBTComp*. In addition, replace all Forest terrain hexes with Deep Snow (see p. 152, *CBTComp*).

+500 Visionaries: Deploy up to 25 percent of the Defender's force per the Hidden Units rule (see p. 83, *BMR*).

+400 Extra Boom: Add one SM1 Tank Destroyer (see p. 135) to the Defender's force for every two units the Attacker deploys.

Victory Bonuses (not cumulative):

+ 850 Partial Victory: Complete two objectives.

+1,400 Total Victory: Complete all objectives.

OBJECTIVES

1. New 'Mech, new toys: Capture an *Ocelot* by crippling it.

2. Smackdown! Destroy or cripple all defending forces.

3. Safe haven: At least one trooper in the Kage unit must survive the track.

4. ISF intel wanted: Capture at least three Nova Cat MechWarriors (destroy or cripple Defender units without killing the pilot).

CHAOS UNLEASHED: STIRRING THE ANTHILL



SPECIAL RULES

The following rules are in effect for this track.

Clan Honor

The Nova Cats do not honor *zellbrigen* with mercenaries, but do suffer a +2 penalty to all physical attack rolls.

Salvage

No salvage is possible during this track.

AFTERMATH

So the Nova Cats haven't been cowering in their caves like most everyone in the Inner Sphere thinks. They've been barreling down the research and development path, building a new BattleMech that frankly scares the heck out of your recon boys.

And the ISF helping the Cats with counter-intrusion? If you didn't know better, you'd swear the ISF was more about spying on the Cats than helping them. Especially considering the merry chase those aerjocks gave you on the outbound flight. They sure didn't seem to be playing around on a training mission!

So what in the world is the real relationship between the Cats and the Dragon?

ADDITIONAL HOOKS

Once a secret is known, can it be taken back? How far will the Nova Cats go to suppress the knowledge of their new design—and who would benefit from this information? Or better yet, the design specs? And what, exactly, did the ISF find out at that facility that the Cats were willing to fry some DEST troopers over?

What other secrets do the Cats harbor in that facility on Avon?

Expansion Ideas

Considering the zeal the Nova Cats may have in eliminating a mercenary threat to a research facility, the Clansmen could spend awhile pursuing the merc command, leading to many scenarios through various terrains. Weather and environment may also become factors, especially if the players take the polar route to completion.

NEXT TRACK

Click, Click, Boom; Panic and Pain; Binge, Purge, Flush



EARLY 3070: BLAKE ASCENDANT



EARLY 3070: BLAKE ASCENDANT

This third year of the new “succession war” (though we doubt the Blakists would call it that) continued to bring only dark news. Coordinator Theodore Kurita’s passing at the dawning of the year only perpetuated the bleakness that began to encompass even the unaffected citizen. Continued war on Dieron and other worlds close to Terra brought to light rumors of civilian atrocities, prison camps that saw their occupants slaughtered like cattle or brain-washed into mindless zombies of the Blakist will.

Former allies in the Free Worlds League saw whole provinces “surrender” to the Word of Blake as the League continued to fracture, offering no protection to more independent worlds like Zion, Dubhe and Zosma. Rumors of entire League regiments switching sides to the Blakists ran rampant, causing many citizens of that once-grand alliance to begin questioning their own protectors.

The Clans took advantage of this chaos, with the Falcons and Wolves going from strong raids and feints into all-out invasion. The Falcons seized several Alliance planets weakened by the continued lack of united leadership, while the Wolves moved in parallel, seizing worlds of their own from the Falcons and the Alliance.

The Federated Suns fared no better, with continued war on New Avalon and the March lords carrying out their own agendas in neighboring realms. Duke Hasek’s assassination at the hands of the Word of Blake brought fighting in the Confederation to a screeching halt, however, allowing troops on both sides a chance to breathe for the first time in two years.

The dawning of 3070 also saw the spread of the terror war. With the horror of bio-engineered plagues capable of killing entire worlds now confirmed on Galax and Alarion, other victims of such attacks—like Galedon—soon faced even greater tragedy as governments began to undertake extreme measures to contain the spread.

Peace does not appear to be on the horizon—only darker clouds that promise more war and death. In this “new age” of quick wars and instant results, the continued lingering conflict that seemingly engulfs the entire Inner Sphere has begun to drag down even the most stalwart proponents of peace. Meanwhile, the Blakists wage their war on all those who do not share their vision, intent on becoming the only dominant power left in the universe. We have seen the birth of a new Succession War unlike those that came before—a war not of leadership, but of tyranny and fear.

—Michael Bosworth, INN Special Correspondent

STANDING ALONE

TO THE END OF ALL THINGS

8 Dec 3069—Wei

The Blakists have been here for only three days, but it seems as though three years have passed. More than half my platoon is dead; I no longer recognize the brave young faces of my soldiers, and can only guess which of the still, mangled bodies may have once been troopers under my command. Only *San-ben-bing* Ji-gin

THE REAL ENEMY REVEALED

“Citizens of the Confederation, it is my sad duty as your Chancellor to inform you that an injustice on a monolithic scale was perpetrated against our beloved Sian. This outrage you may already know, but while we originally believed that the Federated Suns committed this act against us, earlier today I received undeniable proof that WarShips belonging to the Word of Blake actually launched this barbaric attack. Using modified IFF beacons to simulate Davion identification beacons, these traitors to humanity laid waste to the Forbidden City and most of the capital.

“Thanks to diligent efforts by the Maskirovka, our operatives uncovered the truth. Furthermore, we know who is ultimately responsible for the attacks in and around the Liao Commonality—the Word of Blake. In addition, though Hasek launched an illegal invasion against the peaceful citizens of the Confederation, he did not authorize any attack using WarShips against Sian. I recognize my government’s responsibility in accusing the Federated Suns and hereby recant that claim.

“We have a common enemy. Instead of battling each other, the CCAF and AFFS should turn their focus toward the Word of Blake. They pose a clear and present danger to the security and stability of the Capellan Confederation and the Federated Suns. For us to continue our current actions will only sap our strength and weaken our ability to defend against those who seek to destroy our way of life. Therefore, I am offering to Duke George Hasek a cessation of all hostilities and an immediate cease-fire. Together our respective militaries must focus on eliminating the military threat posed by the Word of Blake. Thank you and good night.”

—Confederation-wide broadcast by Chancellor Sun-Tzu Liao, Sian, 7 January 3070

and I remain from the original complement; the rest are battlefield orphans we took in from other squads.

Somehow—on whose authority I know not—I have been promoted to the rank of *Sao-wei*, bypassing the senior enlisted ranks completely, and I now command a “platoon” of a dozen scared but resolute *Shia-ben-bing*. The oldest of them is nineteen. All are acutely aware of the duty before them and the gravity of their families’ expectations, and will do the Confederation honor...as will their replacements.

The invaders claim noble purpose, but we on the front recognize their pretentious calls of “unity” for what they are. To the last man, we will resist the invasion of our glorious realm, and never will we forget the sacrifice of those who have come before us.

Xin Sheng!

—Excerpt from the diary of *Sang-wei* Tan Won, candidate for the Cluster of Conspicuous Heroism (KIA on Wei, 11 January 3070)

EARLY 3070: BLAKE ASCENDANT

CAPELLAN BARBARITY CONDEMNED ACROSS THE SPHERE

As we look back, only now are we finally beginning to comprehend the confusion blanketing the Inner Sphere. Nevertheless, closer to home we have a clearer picture of Hasek's failure in Operation Sovereign Justice, and the effects of the Capellans' brutal advance with the collapse of the Davion front. Moving rapidly, Confederation forces now control close to a third of the Capellan March's rimward territory.

Meanwhile, leaders throughout the Inner Sphere have voiced their shock, dismay or bemused surprise at the pace and methods of the Capellan advance.

From the Lyran Alliance, our affiliate station on Arc-Royal recorded this clip from General Adam Steiner's news briefing:

"What is the Lyran position on the Confederation's actions? We decry these actions taken against the Capellan March, the systematic destruction of infrastructure that helped maintain lives. Furthermore, we challenge the Chancellor to withdraw his troops to their original borders. The CCAF has proven its point; there's enough death now without them adding to it."

From embattled New Avalon (where FedSuns forces continue to clash with Word of Blake invaders), a press release attributed the following comments to Marshal Jackson Davion:

"On Talon, the Blackwind Lancers deployed nuclear weapons to kill millions! Though we condemned Hasek for his illegal actions against the Confederation and sent notice to Sian, nothing can justify this heinous attack! I call on the CCAF to condemn the Lancers as a rogue unit and bring them to justice. The Confederation should be condemned in the strongest of terms for such acts of wanton and merciless violence."

From our affiliate Ashio, representatives of the Combine's Coordinator had this to say:

"While the Dragon appreciates the Confederation's desire to preserve its integrity and to throw off the yoke of Davion oppression, we categorically condemn the unwarranted aggression in their drive to harshly punish the Davionist invaders with uncontrolled warfare that can only bring dishonor on House Liao. The Dragon politely cautions the Celestial Wisdom to temper his anger and respond only with the force needed to reclaim what was lost."

—Wilma Helms, Senior Editor, *INN Tonight*, Demeter, 2 January 3070

CAPELLANS FLEE NEW SYRTIS!

(12 February 3070)

New Syrtis [FSNS]—The Liao dogs have fled! With their tails between their legs, their entire force beat a hasty retreat from the surface and headed for the nadir jump point in disarray.

The fate of the *CCS Zhejiang* vividly illustrated the folly of their attack on New Syrtis. The *Impavido*-class destroyer was in the

BLOOD FEUD

4 February

Un-fucking-believable! These goddamned Davions really don't see that they're done. We've been kicking their asses from the moment we landed. Yesterday, my company led the assault on the enemy infantry's skirmish line. My platoon cut through their APCs and light armored vehicles like a vibrodagger through plastic.

But these FedRats didn't flinch. They stood right there and fought for every inch of ground we took from them. I counted thirteen vehicle kills and one light 'Mech by my modified Patton. Damn, my hat's off to them, but hell! They kept fighting as if they were Capellans of old! Hah! It was a bloodbath, nearly 200 KIAs and only 20 POWs. We took heavy losses, too. I lost a third of my platoon, and we had it light. The company suffered 50 percent casualties.

HQ sent the company to the rear to rest and refit. Rumor mill is going strong. I learned from *Si-ben-bing* Carter in Echo Company that we're being recalled. I asked him where he heard this; he said he overheard it while a couple of O-gangers were talking shop in the can. I hope he's right. I'm ready to go home. We all are. I think we've kicked enough Davion ass to last us a lifetime.

[Editor's Note: *Si-ben-bing Sanders* died in the line of duty during the recall to St. Ives.]

—Excerpt from the diary of *Si-ben-bing* Abraham Sanders, Second Battalion of the First St. Ives Lancers' Thirty-third Armored

vanguard of the Liao fleet that jumped in-system in September last year and its approach to New Syrtis was bitterly contested. Despite heroic efforts by AFFC and mercenary forces, Capellan troops succeeded in reaching the ground—but not before the *Zhejiang* received a pounding from the *Bellerophon*, flagship of the Medusans' Basilisk Squadron. Though the mercenary assault DropShips were forced to quit the system, the invaders' troubles were just beginning. Whether because of the inferior technical skills of her Liao crew or as the result of battle damage sustained while trying to reach New Syrtis, the *Zhejiang* suffered a catastrophic drive failure when she attempted to jump out with the other fleeing Capellan units.

With House Liao now in full retreat, the question facing Duke Hasek is whether or not to allow the valiant defenders of the Capellan March to administer the chastisement the Capellans deserve. Or should he listen to Chancellor Liao's mewling cries for mercy and turn to deal with the marauding Word of Blake troops that even now strike into the Capellan March?

OUR OWN INTERESTS

"...Thankfully, Protector Shraplen has once again remained steadfast in putting the interests of the Concordant over that of his allies. Today his stated refusal to send more troops to the aid of the Capellan Confederation, a fellow Trinity Alliance member, sends the signal that we *will* act in our own best interests when necessary.

"Citing lack of available resources since the outbreak of the Second Civil War, Shraplen has dodged the unfair obligations of the Trinity Alliance accords while maintaining the ability to claim he is assisting the Confederation by distracting Hasek with the continuing campaign for the Pleiades Cluster.

"It is time to debate whether or not we should stay in this tilted Alliance. Getting no assistance from either of our allies, who are both larger than the Concordat and not as thinly stretched, is not right. We, the public, need to realize that we should not be our allies' piggy bank, a resource from which to continually make withdrawals without giving something back..."

—Excerpt from an editorial aired by the Taurian Public Broadcast Network, 20 February 3070

ALONE IN THE DARK

With the Word of Blake attacking nearly every substantial power in (and possibly outside) the Inner Sphere, the lack of willing cooperation against a common foe (unlike the Clans invasion, when the FedCom eagerly joined with the Kuritas), is disheartening. Yet the Celestial Wisdom, Chancellor Liao, has extended the olive branch to every neighbor and potential ally.

The response?

None from the Free Worlds League, likely in the conspiracy with the Blakists.

The Davions? Hit just as hard (if not harder) by the Word of Blake, they continued their violation of our space.

And our allies, the Taurian Concordat? They have refused to send troops to help defend us from the Blakists—but against our common enemy, the Federated Suns, that's another story. They pursue their own agenda, loosely covered with poor excuses of "providing a distraction" for our benefit.

Were it not for our closest friends in the Magistracy of Canopus (such as they are), we would be all alone in the dark, and in many ways we still are.

Indeed, the Magistracy has not given an official response, what with Canopus still apparently dark. However, several regiments of Canopian soldiers led by Naomi Centrella—betrothed of the Celestial Wisdom—have remained in Confederation space to assist us. But against the warriors of Blake, with the Davions at our door and the Mariks poised behind, is this small token enough, or are we truly on our own against the universe?

—Excerpt from an editorial published by Victoria News Service, 2 March 3070

LAKE ASCENDANT

HASEK MURDERED!

Breaking News

(19 March 3070)

New Syrtis [NSNN]—House Hasek and AFFS officials on New Syrtis confirmed today that Duke George Hasek, leader of the Capellan March and architect of Operation Sovereign Justice, was assassinated this morning in his palace on New Syrtis. Officials would not

THE DEVIL IS DEAD!

Taur-ren-ren-ren: Wasn't that supposed to have happened by now?

Illus: They never really gave a date, just "3070," IIRC.

Moammer: Well, can you blame them? Last thing anyone wants to see on statewide media is a bunch of Wobbie wedding crashers...

Taur-ren-ren-ren: True that.

SianeseSunshine has entered the chat

SianeseSunshine: The Devil's dead!

Illus: Which one?

SianeseSunshine: Hasek! Hasek's dead, dead, dead!

Illus: Terrific!

Lumous: Awesome!

Taur-ren-ren-ren: About [CENSORED by MODBOT] time!

Illus: Great! Now the cursed Davion war effort is bound to collapse in on itself!

Moammer: Are you stupid? Now that we're diverting our focus to the damned Blakists, we're fighting almost as hard to disengage as we did to invade.

Illus: All right there, buzzkill. Don't you think that with Hasek gone, the Davions will stop obsessing over our rightful counterattack and start looking at the Blakists as well, like they should have all along?

Moammer: OK, so you *are* stupid. Thanks for taking the time to confirm that. No, all this murder will do is cause the equally dumb Davions to blame us, again. You'd think that after all the public exposure of Hasek's various crimes, they'd have a clue, but if they had half a brain, they'd be Taurian, not Davion.

Taur-ren-ren-ren: Hey! How about we meet face to face and you repeat that statement!

Moammer: Whatever. Mark my words, cattle. The Davions will just get nastier, and this might be exactly what the Blakists need to divert them back to us. This may be the first high-ranking murder pinned on the Word that they actually perpetrated. It certainly doesn't do us any good.

@Gertrude: Ooooookay. How about you check the rules, and don't flame people in here. Goodbye.

Moammer is banned by @Gertrude

Moammer is kicked from #Inspiration by @Gertrude

—Excerpt from Sian network chat room (moderated), 28 March 3070

EARLY 3070: BLAKE ASCENDANT

release details of the slaying, except to indicate that evidence left at the scene pointed strongly at Word of Blake operatives.

This news comes as another blow to our nation, as New Syrtis has certainly lost one of its most stalwart sons. The Blakists may hope to crush our spirit, now that the Capellans are withdrawing and we can focus more fully on the Blakist threat. But just as the burned towns and fields they leave in their wake only strengthen our resolve, so to will this additional loss to our nation. We will see George Hasek's legacy fulfilled!

As Duke Hasek's principal aide over the past several years, Field Marshall Ally Swanson has taken temporary command of the March war effort and the ongoing push against the invading Capellan and Blakist forces. Swanson is expected to retain command of the ongoing push to expel all remaining Capellan and Blakist units in the Capellan March, until such time as Angela Hasek, the late duke's eldest living sibling, can be installed as duchess-regent of the Capellan March. After that, sources on New Syrtis say, military command of the March may fall to Field Marshall Nathaniel Hasek, current commander of the Edgeward Combat Theater.

THE SUNDERED LEAGUE

FRACTURED ALLIANCES

ARM: Too little, too late. It appears "family unity" isn't all it's cracked up to be.

TBM: Don't take your frustrations out on us, Alys. We've done as much as we can to stabilize the situation inside the League and with our neighbors. It was Paul who pulled the rug from under our feet.

ARM: I trusted Corr and yet she's in the thick of things, from what I hear. And her protesting that she had no desire for power. Lying cow. Look where she is now: self-declared Captain-bleedin'-General!

JB: I suspect she was played as much as Tommy and we were. Who would've suspected the quietest and most studious of us was working hand-in-hand with the Enemy and would go so far as to kill children?

ARM: Paul is a creep, but I don't believe Corrine's "Oh woe is me, let me declare myself Captain-General" act for a moment.

TBM: Given Cameron-Jones' stunt, I don't think there was much choice. Irrespective of Paul's actions, Tom's position was untenable and someone in the family had to step up to the plate. Would you have done so? I considered it, and to be honest have yet to rule it out.

ARM: God, what is this? Every man for himself? You'd really claim the post?

TBM: I am Janos' oldest surviving child. Under the Succession Act, my claim has the greatest strength, greater even than that of the real Thomas, should he ever emerge from the shadows.

ARM: Apart from the fact that granddad disowned you.

TBM: He didn't speak to me. He never removed my legal right, and back then I had no interest in the post.

HELL IN A HANDBASKET

Thoughtful Reader, your humble servant is weary and finds it difficult to bring you any words at all, much less words of good cheer.

We live in strange times indeed.

The shockwaves emanating from the discovery a few months ago that our Captain-General is not who he should be have yet to subside—if indeed they ever should. Already fracture lines are forming between our member states.

One hears Jeremy Brett is now pulling back from the Lyran war to meet threats within our borders. And there are tales of palace alliances forming as rivals—who might in years past have been characterized as "loyal opposition"—come together to forestall the coming crisis.

Or, more properly, contain the crisis already upon us.

This consolidation of resources, this formation of new alliances, on the face of it appears to be a good thing. The binding of wounds, the braiding together of strands to form a stronger rope. But that this rope must be woven—that the dynamics which made our government a vital, living thing must be set aside—indicates how grave the situation has become.

All around us states less resilient, less free, than the Free Worlds League are falling apart because they relied too heavily on central governments unaccountable to their people. When these governments fail, as they inevitably must, the people are left without leaders and are ill prepared to raise leaders from among themselves.

As the Terran poet Yeats warned twelve hundred years ago, when the center no longer holds, mere anarchy is loosed upon the world.

Which is why, Thoughtful Reader, your humble servant is so gravely concerned. For we are dangerously close to meeting this crisis by making the same mistake our neighbors have long made: the formation of a monolithic central government upon which we will become dependent.

We must take great care, as we teeter on the edge of this abyss, that we do not give up the rule of the people. For what is the point of surviving in name, if all we stand for goes to hell in a handbasket?

—Keith D'Candide, *The Candid View*, Free Worlds Features, 29 June 3070

ARM: I don't think you're still considering it. I think you've already decided.

TBM: Yes.

ARM: There was an old saying, "Hang together or hang separately." I guess I'll see you at the gallows, Captain-General.

—Communications log attributed to Marik family officials, dated January 3070, leaked to ISAP by unknown sources

HIGHER PURPOSE

Fr: Office of the Sixth FWL Legionnaires, Oliver
To: General Calderon Bengé, FWL Legionnaire High Command, Andurien
Date: 4 March 3070

General Bengé:

This is to inform you officially that the entire the Sixth Legionnaires has severed all command and control with the LCCC. We are transferring overall command to Precentor-Martial Cameron St. Jamais and will continue to garrison Oliver—for the Word of Blake and their new Protectorate. We are now part of the new Twelfth Division garrisoning these worlds.

Any threat of force from LCCC units will receive swift and decisive action to protect our men, materiel and civilian charges. Of the fourteen men and women who resisted this change, thirteen are being sent to you on the tramp freighter *Lucinda*. Force Commander Alld Sood is being held for criminal charges, and depending on the tribunal's decision, may be repatriated at a future date.

Cal, you have to see the writing on the wall. Marik's lost total control of the situation—hell, he's played us all for fools. I'm not going to let my people get slaughtered for a nation that no longer seems to care, or even knows what the hell is going on. We've not seen parts, men or even pay for more than six months now. I'm sorry, Cal, but this has gone beyond unacceptable. The Word of Blake offers us pay, supplies, food, and most important, a cause.

Goodbye, Cal. I hope we don't meet across the battlefield from each other; I'd hate myself forever if I had to kill you.

Demi-Precentor Sola Pepper

Dreams of Sunrise III-alpha

Twelfth Division, Word of Blake

—FWLM official correspondence (veracity later confirmed) obtained by undisclosed ISAP sources.

FIGHTING ON!

To our suborned League brothers, listen! You are not forgotten, you are not alone, and your voices are being heard!

Alys Rousset-Marik hears your painful cries for freedom and assistance. The League as you knew it no longer exists—a dinosaur of an era that has finally breathed its last, as the shocks of these past years have proven. But justice and freedom are *still* ours to hold if we continue to resist the efforts of our onetime allies to convert us to their evil desires!

Your leaders have deserted you, deceived you! Your enemy is not the Confederation or the Alliance, but the Blakists themselves.

BLAKE ASCENDANT

You have not heard of the tragedies on Coventry, on St. Ives, on Kittery, on Dieron, because our own government followed the Blakists' puppet strings. Innocents just like you have died for no reason other than that they work in factories, on shipyards or at military posts that pose a "threat" to the Word's superiority. Do not fall for the propaganda that only *they* can save you! If they could, why did they kill tens—if not hundreds—of thousands of League men, women and children on Irian, Procyon and Sirius? Why did they "cleanse" the League world of Berenson of legitimate opposing voices?

Rally to the cause! Throw off the yoke of Blakist oppression! Bring down your duped and deceived leaders! Let us re-create the League of the Free Worlds!

—"A Rallying Call" pamphlet circulating on Oliver and Hall, circa May 3070

WARRIORS OF THE LEAGUE EMBRACE BLAKE'S WORD

(20 May 3070)

Zion [VOICE OF BLAKE]—In our Grand Crusade to bring peace and enlightenment to all humankind, we who follow Blake's true words thought our valiant struggle would be a lonely one.

But such has not been the case!

From the rapidly disintegrating Free Worlds League has come heartening news. With the impostor who had sought to twist the League to his own dark ends revealed at last, many have flocked to our banner. The valiant Silver Hawk Irregulars—loyal to their homeworlds to the last—have rejected the vile pretender and stand with us.

Last week, in an impassioned speech, Colonel Ricardo Catere-Jones and the warriors of the Third Free Worlds Guard declared their allegiance and Zion has been welcomed into the Word of Blake Protectorate. The people of Stewart have also sought our protection, and their Home Guard is just as committed to protecting their world as we who speak Blake's Word.

After years of neglect by the League while they languished under the heavy hand of the Federated Commonwealth, the warriors of the Border Protectorates were happy to receive our aid. Now the Steel and Hematite Guards have chosen to join us—though they mourn the misguided loyalty maintained by their brothers in the Iron Guard for the sham that the Free Worlds League has become.

Warriors of the League, we entreat you to look around! The great nation you have defended so valiantly from external threats has fallen to greed and incompetence from within. No longer is it worthy of the sacrifices you have been asked to make. Look around you! If the League cannot help you defend your homes, why do you march to do its bidding?

Follow the example of your brave comrades. Join us, and together we will bring peace to the Inner Sphere once more.



EARLY 3070: BLAKE ASCENDANT

TRINITY WORLDS AT WAR

(7 June 3070)

Galisteo [LWN]—The violence on the Trinity Worlds began spiraling out of control when what started as a dispute over new taxes exploded into a full-scale rebellion after the infamous “Bad Rock Massacre.”

With FWL military units committed to other fronts, and Swann’s Cavaliers thinly spread between Cerillos, Galisteo and Sierra, the situation had become a stalemate. Rebels and the government’s remaining loyal militia units (with mercenary support) exchanged small-scale raids and reprisals, but neither side achieved much except adding to a growing list of casualties.

All that changed in April, when Camacho’s Caballeros (formally known as the Seventeenth Recon Regiment) arrived on Galisteo, under the command of Colonel Carlos Camacho, *patrón* of the Vado Ancho hacienda and Knight of Galisteo. Like their commander, many members of the Caballeros hail from the Trinity Worlds. When Don Carlos received word of the events unfolding on his homeworld, he requested and received release from his unit’s contract with Tanadi Computers (a subsidiary of Hachiman Taro Electronics in the Draconis Combine). Unprepared for intervention by a well-equipped mercenary regiment, half the Cavaliers’ aerospace assets got caught on the ground, and their Charlie Battalion was overwhelmed.

Since the Caballeros’ victory, Camacho has accepted the post of President of Galisteo’s new provisional government, and has retired from the mercenary trade.

The disposition of the surviving members of Swann’s Cavaliers remains a mystery. Rumors abound that their forces on Sierra and Cerillos have abandoned their posts and departed aboard unmarked DropShips, even though pockets of violence persist on both worlds.

TRAITORS!

They dragged us into an unwanted war with the Lyran Alliance, and now the Sirian Concordance shows its true colors by seceding from the Free Worlds and joining the Blakist hegemony. Until now, a shadow of doubt remained over Sirius’ complicity in the invasion of Skye. No more. It now appears that the Concordance government has worked hand-in-glove with the Blakists since the outset. They probably carried out the attack themselves, to foment strife between the League and the Alliance—two realms that had previously enjoyed functional, if not cordial, relations. It even seems likely that pro-Blakist Sirians engineered the assassination of moderate Helen Thrall as part of a junta that may extend as far back as the mad reign of Alisendar Gyrn. Even money says that someone planned this all along, during the years between the formation of the Chaos March and the liberation of the “Sirian Holds.”

The Border Protectorate and Silver Hawks betrayals are a little harder to fathom. While the League lost many of their worlds to the Steiner-Davions during the FedCom’s brief existence, the Protectorate has never seen the factionalism or anarchy that plagued their spinward neighbors or those in the Silver Hawks Coalition. But they *have* frequently suffered Lyran assaults, and their defection to the Blakist hegemony might represent a vain attempt to place themselves outside the conflict currently wracking the Inner Sphere.

However, if they think the League is doomed and will sit idly by, they are sadly mistaken. Marshal van Creveld of the Dieudonné Military District is believed to be carrying out operations to limit Blakist encroachment into League territories, even though her command center appears in grave danger of isolation as many independent worlds fall to the Jihad.

—Richard Hanniseck, *Hanniseck’s World* syndicated column, Commonwealth Times, 28 June 3070

NEWS DOWNLOADER v3.7



Date & Title	Service	Status
(22 May 3069) “Davions Retreat from Galedon”	[VotD]	COMPLETED
(24 May 3069) “Blakists Stopped at Kessel”	[VotD]	DOWNLOADING
(9 June 3069) “Deia, Mkuranga Under Attack”	[ARNN]	ACCESSING

A SERVICE OF IRIAN NEWS INTERSTELLAR



EARLY 3070: BLAKE ASCENDANT

ALLIANCE IN FLAMES

SOLARIS HOME DEFENSE LEAGUE HOLDS NOWHERE

"What you are about to hear is real. No factoids have been fabricated, no truths massaged, no statistics distorted. This is Adam Kristoff from the Solaris underground. Despite what the Word of Blake mouthpieces spout, the resistance is alive and well. Last night I was on the scene as Erik Gray's Solaris Home Defense League hit a Word of Blake forward position near the city of Nowhere.

"The full company of SHDL 'Mechs, with battle armor support, hit the six Blakist defenders hard and fast, with Gray's *Emperor* blowing apart a *Phoenix Hawk* in the first few seconds. The other 'Mechs fell as well, though local hero Karl Edwards was killed when an enemy *Scorpion* struck his *Valkyrie* in the cockpit. Cavalier troopers quickly secured the enemy barracks and marched the Blakists out. One by one the enemy pilots, soldiers, techs and even cooks were interrogated, and most gave the SHDL what they wanted. The few who did not suffered for their resistance.

"Meanwhile, SHDL 'Mechs scavenged the remnants of the seven downed Blakist 'Mechs, though some continued to attack

the fallen invaders. What debris the SHDL did not haul back was left piled on the ruins of the Blakist outpost and the bodies of the defiant fanatics, a disturbing reminder of the carnage of war and a brutal sign of the totality of this conflict, where no quarter is asked or given.

"This is the truth on Solaris. With the Solaris underground press, I'm Adam Kristoff."

—Audio report dated 9 January 3070, smuggled to off-world ISAP sources by local resistance

FALCONS ASSAULT KANDERSTEG, BOUNTIFUL HARVEST

(2 February 3070)

Bountiful Harvest [ARNN]—Just a few days ago, several Jade Falcon Clusters made landfall on the Grandeur continent of Bountiful Harvest, apparently as part of a two-world assault that represents the latest wave in what officials are calling a new Falcon Incursion. On Bountiful Harvest, the Falcons almost immediately engaged the Second Wolf Strike Grenadiers outside KevGlen City. Observers have told INN that the fighting was brutal, with neither side apparently conforming to the ritualized warfare common to the Clans. Reliable sources indicate that the Falcons refused the *batchall* issued by Star Colonel Terret Radick, apparently condemning the exiled Wolf Clan as bandits unworthy of the challenge.

Despite the Falcons' numerical superiority, the Grenadiers have held their own. One Wolf MechWarrior told ARNN that the Falcon ranks are "littered with children and substandard warrior-rejects, who would have flushed out of their sibkos in any real Clan." She further suggested that the Grenadiers faced only a Cluster or so of "noteworthy" troops, spread across the three Clusters that landed on the world.

On nearby Kandersteg, a similar number of Falcon troops engaged elements of ComStar's 208th Division. The Com Guard forces, spread thin among nearby worlds from their base on Hamilton, have not fared as well as the Wolf forces, and are expected by some experts to quit Kandersteg within the week. However, other sources indicate that the 208th's remaining troops are attempting to secure several strategic drop zones planetwide in anticipation of possible reinforcements from Hamilton. ARNN cannot confirm either report at this time.

MOPPING UP

Honored Master Kernoff,

Resistance has ended. I am pleased to report that Hesperus II is now part of the holdings of the Blessed Blake. After two weeks of hard fighting, we have successfully cleared all resistance to our Order, with minimal damage to the factory complexes. The last rebel died at 1421 hours on 19 Feb, 3070. Maria's Elegy had to be cleansed of infestation by a local pest, but the loss of the city is a minimal setback.

WE SHALL NOT FAIL

Attention, all employees of Defiance Hesperus!

As you are aware, we are under attack by Word of Blake forces. All outside access has been restricted at this time. Please remain in your operational area. Anyone found outside his or her work zone will be detained, and security cannot guarantee your safety.

We apologize to those employees who rely on the Myoo MR line for transportation. That line is experiencing technical difficulties and will be operating within seventy-two days. Until then, see your supervisor for alternate avenues of transport.

All current leaves and off-shifts are hereby cancelled. Off-duty employees report to Sector HH-19 for the time being.

We apologize for the inconvenience to our extended employee family. Defiance Hesperus has never fallen to an enemy force, and we take these precautions so that we may maintain that proud tradition.

Anyone seeing any unusual activity inside or outside the factory complex should report such incidents to Plant Security immediately. We rely on the cooperation of our valued employees to help our company repel audacious and foolish attacks against our corporate sovereignty, and we will not succumb to a group of techno-religious fanatics. We have stood against the might of the Combine, the Federated Suns, the Free Worlders and even rebels in our own Alliance. We will not fall.

Management thanks you for your cooperation and patience as we deal with this interruption to our stellar service. We will inform you when these restrictions are lifted.

Attention, all employees....

—Complex-wide PA address during the second day of the Word of Blake siege of Hesperus II, 6 February 3070



EARLY 3070: BLAKE ASCENDANT

The Creeping Death III-zeta performed extremely well under the new programming. Personnel losses amounted to only three Tau soldiers and a handful of conventionals from the actions of a suicidal Fifteenth Guards *Nightstar*. I believe Ciamba herself foolishly tried to sabotage her own 'Mech to deny us the south entrance. She failed to execute her foolhardy plan before one of my men crushed the life from her in a personal meeting.

I am also pleased to report that we managed to salvage three *Excalibur*-class DropShips fully loaded for shipment. The materiel gained should help offset the Fortieth Shadow's losses against our other prize, despite our inability to capture the *LAS Melissa Steiner* intact. In a final tally, we have secured more than a division's worth of equipment in various stages of development and retained more than three-quarters of the facility's production lines, which can be made operational as soon as we can relocate our new converts here.

We do not require much in the way of refit or repair. I await your next orders; I understand Tamar is nice this time of year.

Toyama's word be spread, Blake's name be praised.

(signed) GH

—Blakist military communiqué intercepted by Hesperan resistance (veracity unconfirmed), Hesperus II, circa 20 February 3070

CULLING THE FLOCK

Protocol: 700223-INT146T (Authorization Code Eta)

Source: 013T-T146 Classified (Eyes Only)

Interview Subject: Tau-146 (adult female subject)

Upon entry to interrogation chamber, subject gave no response to my presence. Subject was unclothed and bedraggled; closer examination revealed signs of physical trauma to arms, legs, abdomen, left breast, neck, head and face in the form of abrasions and obvious swelling, with extensive evidence of approved interrogation techniques to face, head, underarms, palms of hands, soles of feet and genitals. Moderate burn trauma evident on subject's left side and forearm, source unknown; partial signs of healing suggests that subject may have sustained injuries in combat before the complex fell.

Subject was initially unresponsive to communication attempts; ammonium ampoule usage was required to restore consciousness, after which subject offered no resistance to verbal or physical interrogation techniques. Report follows:

CONFIRM POSITIVE RESPONSE: Evidence of undocumented egress within walls of DefHes facility or underground within or nearby; several access points inside and outside facility suspected.

CONFIRM POSITIVE RESPONSE: No knowledge of placement of these points.

CONFIRM POSITIVE RESPONSE: Projection 50-65 trained guerrilla personnel with access to egress and further 100-120 incidentals (both figures conjectural).

CONFIRM POSITIVE RESPONSE: Lack of knowledge specific to these assertions; subject yielded only rumor and supposition, with no change in position during or after application of further approved techniques.

CONFIRM NEGATIVE RESPONSE: Rumor of active 'Mech force within DefHes facility.

CONFIRM NEGATIVE RESPONSE: Rumor of professional resistance cell, other than noted above.

CONFIRM NEGATIVE RESPONSE: Connection to any relation, either personal or professional, among active resistance.

FINAL EVALUATION: Tau-146 is of no further use, even as labor; recommend termination and disposal.

COMMENTS: Psych-op tech analysis projects 98.3 percent likelihood that information is authentic, 99.8 percent confirmation that subject's will to resist was broken. My compliments to initial interrogator technique and procedure.

—Word of Blake interrogation report (intercepted by Hesperan resistance and relayed to ISAP sources)

THE FINAL CALL

"Ladies and gentlemen, this is probably the last broadcast DBC Donegal will make for some time. As we speak, Word of Blake forces are coming down the city streets toward our headquarters and transmitter tower in an effort to create an information blackout. In response, we will share with you all the information we have accumulated before they shut us down..."

[Explosions rumble in the distance.]

"The Blakists have complete air and space superiority, using their WarShips and escorts to prevent any traffic in and out, though we believe the *Ian McQuiston* may have made a successful jump out-system. This has given them the ability to call massive fire support anywhere on the planet, almost at will. Every time the garrison has appeared on the battlefield, orbital fire has decimated them. Only a few companies of armored units remain scattered across the area, staying underground for fear of instant annihilation..."

[More explosions. Static for a few seconds.]

"The only remaining active defenders are the several regiments of hastily organized infantry militia protecting Media City with man-pack and support weapons. Casualties, military and civilian, have been horrendous. The Blakists' liberal use of orbital fire has claimed well over six hundred thousand lives since troops landed in mid-February—not counting those killed in the Blakist raid almost two years ago. We've seen this same tactic used on Hesperus II, which fell more than three weeks ago..."

[Explosions rumble louder. Cries of alarm are heard, mixed with angry shouts and unintelligible commands.]

"The resistance has captured several Blakist infantry, and they have learned that the Word's fleet is operating from a hidden base over..."

[Explosions rumble louder than ever. Short yelp. Transmission ends.]

—Final audio broadcast from DBC Headquarters, Donegal, 27 February 3070

EARLY 3070: BLAKE ASCENDANT



THE AWFUL TRUTH

[Karen Silverford]: "Colonel Hogarth. What's your reaction to the news from Hesperus?"

[Thomas Hogarth]: "Well, Karen—you don't mind if I call you Karen?"

[Silverford]: "Not at all, Colonel."

[Hogarth]: "Frankly, I was shocked. Absolutely shocked. Lieutenant-General Peter Zambos was an acquaintance. I know all his close friends will be devastated at losing him."

[Silverford]: "And what about losing Defiance Industries?"

[Hogarth]: "Well, we'll find it inconvenient, I suppose. I remember back in '61, Peter threw an absolutely delightful dinner. Always the life and soul of the party. We'll all miss him terribly."

[Silverford]: "Er...yes, Colonel. But with Twycross, Sudeten and Pandora lost to the Falcons, and no production coming from Tharkad and Coventry, surely the LAAF is facing a supply crisis?"

[Hogarth]: "Oh, the boys and girls in Supply are frightfully resourceful. I'm sure they'll manage—they always have. I remember a time—back in '27 it was—Peter, Gina Ciampa and I served on Colonel Petroff's staff in the Twenty-second Skye Rangers. Now there was a man with style, I can tell you! Well, anyway, we were supposed to be moving our headquarters, and there was an absolutely dreadful foul-up with transport allocation. We just didn't have the transport we needed to get the colonel's wardrobe aboard the DropShips in time for our scheduled departure. What a mix-up! Anyway, a terribly resourceful sergeant managed to find a company of VTOLs to help out—"

[Silverford]: "Umm...thank you for your insight, Colonel."

[Hogarth]: "Not at all, Karen. It's been an absolute pleasure."

—From a DBC interview with Colonel Thomas Hogarth, (former) commanding officer of the Furillo BPM, Furillo, 1 March 3070

LOSING GROUND, LOSING HOPE

I just heard that the authorities consider Coventry under Blakist control as well. Together with Tharkad, Hesperus and Donegal, that puts maybe eighteen worlds in their hands...or worse. The importance of those worlds is obvious to anyone. They represent the bulk of our nation's military industry, an enormous chunk of our economy and governmental structure. I'd hoped we'd start recovering from the initial strikes on Donegal, Coventry and Hesperus two years ago, but apparently those were just a prelude to the outright invasions they've suffered.

Our capital is occupied. Our Archon remains out of contact. Meanwhile, our borders are under attack by the League and the Falcons. I've heard rumors that even the Ward Wolf Clan (not the Kell one) is attacking our planets.

Faced with all this, how can we go on? All our enemies seem to be conspiring to take us down. The only thing missing so far is a new Drac invasion.

I don't know where to turn anymore. So much adversity. So much suffering. What's left? Where can we turn? Will I still be a Lyran next year?

—Excerpt from a private blog by PaxSus07 on the Chukchi InterWeb, 15 June 3070

NEWS DOWNLOADER v3.7



Date & Title	Service	Status
(20 June 3069) "Liberated Allard-Liao Decries 'FedSuns Criminals'"	[XSFP]	COMPLETED
(17 July 3069) "Deneb Kaitos, Ruchbah Fall" ("Deneb Light Cavalry...	[NSNS]	DOWNLOADING
(13 August 3069) "Coup on Atreus?"	[ISAP]	ACCESSING

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HAIL THE PASSING STAR

*****For immediate release to all VOTD affiliates. Lead with this story. All broadcasts must end with a moment of reflection. Honor the twilight.*****

(5 January 3070)

New Samarkand [VOTD]—Citizens, the Honorable Coordinator Theodore Kurita has passed from this mortal coil. The Dragon's Soul has moved beyond the gates to the Golden Realm.

On 5 January 3070, the Dragon lost its brightest star. Theodore Kurita was revered by all, respected by many and feared by others. He embodied the True Soul of the Dragon. And his star will be missed in the heavens.

Born on 1 July 2997 to Takashi Kurita and Jasmine Isu, Theodore led a life that would shape him for the troubled days of the Dragon that lay ahead. Rising to the mantle of Coordinator in 3053, he has single-handedly reshaped the might and majesty of the Dragon into the most powerful nation in the Human Sphere.

The Coordinator refused to be bound by traditions that he recognized as strangling the Dragon. Even during his time as *Gunji-no-Kanrei*, he at times took actions initially regarded poorly, but that ultimately brought strength and honor to the Combine. In 3034, he granted the Rasalhague people the separate nation they desired, and created a buffer state with the Lyran Commonwealth. His strategic brilliance overshadowed even that of the Davion Fox in protecting the Dragon from the Suns' predation during the War of 3039. His vision for the Combine's future put him at odds with his own father—but Theodore knew he owed his duty to the Dragon, not to blood and kin.

Because he embodied the ideals of *ninjo* and *giri*, he formed a non-aggression pact with the hated FedCom alliance so that the greater—and far more deadly—threat of the Clan Invasion could be dealt with. His leadership in the former Star League led to the downfall of Clan Smoke Jaguar and liberation for many of the Dragon's people. His compassion also shone through, with his acceptance of Nova Cat refugees among several worlds in the Irece Prefecture, simultaneously bonding the Clan to the Dragon with the sacrifice of his own blood kin to that Clan.

During the opening days of the Blakist Jihad, our beloved Coordinator was at the front once more, planning and leading the Combine's forces to free our imprisoned citizens on Luthien and Dieron. Even when the Blakists captured and tortured the Dragon's Heir, the Coordinator stood strong. Our Coordinator knew where true honor and duty lay.

So today, as you go about your lives, send your thoughts to the stars and honor Theodore Kurita, Duke of Luthien, Warlord of the Dragon, Coordinator of the Draconis Combine. He will be missed, but his duty and honor remain in us all.

*By the Dragon's Throne
Lilies weep and winds draw still
Dragon's Soul departs*

BLAKE ASCENDANT

THE DRAGON'S TEETH

THE HONORABLE CHOICE

Honorable Warlord,

I wish to commend you on your excellent choice of director for the new Internal Security Force. While many will undoubtedly question your elevation of a *Chu-sa* to such a lofty height, I know you have chosen him because he is a loyal Son, much like his half-brother, who was tragically killed in the failed Davion strike on Benjamin two years ago. Do not let the critics bother you. They do not see the big picture, and we sorely need that vision right now.

Chu-sa Shakir Jerrar has a solid career, with many successful DEST operations under his belt. He also received the Bushido Blade in 3063, during the Ghost Bear War. He is one of my best commanders, and I am sorry to see him go, but content in the knowledge that our security lies in his very capable hands.

My only concern is that his brother's loss may have taken an emotional toll on him. He and Toma were very close after their father died during the initial Clan invasion. This is a small concern, however, as I have heard he recently wed Toma's widow, the striking Kikiyra. I am sure Shakir will have more than enough to occupy him with the Blakist war still engulfing the Dieron District and satiating his thirst for revenge.

I am impressed with your decisions, *Kanrei*. You have been a calming and stable influence for our troops and I know we can beat back these technopaths with your guiding hand. With Jerrar's influence on our psychologically weakened heir to the Dragon, we will finally see the dawning of a new era for the Combine.

Your servant,

Tai-sho Paul Omishita

—Intercepted DCMS memo (veracity unconfirmed), posted by the Irurzun Drake InterWeb site, 23 January 3070

THE SPREADING CURSE

(20 April 3070)

Kirei Na Niwa [THE DRAKE]—So what's really going on over on An Ting? Government tells us they're just conducting a massive influenza vaccination protocol, due to some "outbreak" that just happens to regularly pop up. Yet that system's never had a recorded outbreak on such a scale before, much less an epidemic. An Ting's got a perfect bill of health, according to several decades of travelogues we've scrounged off the netlinks. Yet here comes the mighty Combine state, telling us that all of a sudden they have to quarantine an entire continent to contain an influenza epidemic? *Riiiiight*.

Listen up, readers. The Drake's done some digging. Those symptoms they're touting as "normal for a non-lethal pandemic episode" closely match those reported by DCMS troops that fought the Davions on Galedon V. They called it the "Curse of Galedon," and it apparently made the rounds during the final days of fight-

EARLY 3070: BLAKE ASCENDANT



ing between Suns and Combine forces (and has been blamed on everyone from the Snow Ravens to the Word of Blake). From what we've managed to gather, other systems in other nations have had similar "outbreaks"—Alarion, Kathil, Atreus, Liao, even Orestes and Dieron. It's pretty obvious some Blakist bio-weapon is at work here. Whole planets are now going dark—anyone heard anything from Galedon lately?

So "influenza vaccination protocol," our ruby-scaled behinds! It's a sure bet An Ting got tagged with whatever hit Galedon and those other worlds, only here the good state is trying to contain it. Or exterminate it.

Take that as you will, good reader.

HACHIMAN TARO DESTROYED

(3 May 3070)

Hachiman [VOTD]—The city of Masamori is no stranger to the destruction inflicted by the self-styled followers of the "Word of Blake." In 3056 the Blakists launched three separate attacks in and around the city. The first two—aimed at Hachiman Taro Electronics—were defeated by the heroic efforts of the Ninth Ghost Regiment. The third claimed the life of Percival Fillington, Earl of Hachiman and Planetary Chairman.

Yesterday the Blakists struck once more.

This time their target appears to have been no less a personage than Chandrasekhar Kurita, CEO of Hachiman Taro Electronics. The honorable Kurita has been as successful in the realm of the Pillar of Jade as his illustrious forebears who distinguished themselves on the battlefield under the Pillar of Steel. Building HTE up from nothing, the esteemed Chandrasekhar acquired a controlling interest in Tanadi Computers following the death of Marquis Edmond Hosoya in an air crash.

The Blakist attack force entered the Hachiman system masquerading as a tramp merchant JumpShip transporting a DropShip with cargo destined for the HTE compound. Not until they entered atmosphere did a routine security enquiry uncover the deception, by which time it was almost too late. Despite the best efforts of valiant HTE Security, approximately two companies of Blakist 'Mechs and infantry stormed the compound and razed the facility before making good their escape.

Thankfully, the CEO's personal bodyguards received sufficient warning to whisk their charge to safety.

COUNCIL OF GEMS, II

[Sapphire]: "It seems I owe you an apology, Ruby."

[Ruby]: "Oh?"

[Sapphire]: "Director Jerrar is indeed a wise choice for his position. I commend you and Jade on your judgment."

[Opal]: "Indeed. Dealing with the Dragoons' Delta regiment in such a fashion was a master stroke."

[Ruby]: "Ah. Understand that the idea came from our protégé. He and Jerrar had already dealt with the situation before I was even aware."

[Diamond]: "While I applaud their ingenuity and independence, we must make sure they do not decide to slip our leash."

[Jade]: "No fears, Diamond. Ultimately, they acted for the good of the Combine."

[Obsidian]: "So ka? Explain."

[Ruby]: "As you know, ever since Buckminster suffered heavy raiding last year, it has been left nearly defenseless. According to intelligence Director Jerrar has acquired regarding other Blakist attacks, it seems that the Blakists hammer key worlds with massive orbital strikes, then follow up with ground operations within a set time."

[Opal]: "I have heard similar stories from my corporate contacts in the Alliance. Donegal and Hesperus were both struck this way. And both fell."

[Ruby]: "Precisely. Now, consider that in the wake of such a brutal attack, Lady Miyako herself organized an O5P relief operation to help assist recovery and rescue efforts there, since she was in the Prefecture at that time. The ISF got wind of a Word of Blake force near—" [heavy, persistent coughing]

[Jade]: "Save your strength, sensei."

[Diamond]: "So the ISF heard of a new attack on Buckminster?"

[Jade]: "Not quite. Jerrar knew there was a battle group in the area, a sizeable one. Considering that our forces on Dieron were—at the time—in position to finally overwhelm and expel the Blakist invasion, we needed a plan to keep the Word from reinforcing and taking the system."

[Ruby]: "The Warlord ordered the Dragoons to Buckminster to safeguard the Keeper of the House Honor. He informed them that a Blakist attack might be forthcoming and that a small force was nearby. At the same time, the Director leaked information about the Dragoons' presence on Buckminster to one of the few agents we suspect of ties to ROM. He also got Lady Miyako to leave the system, but did not tell the Dragoons."

[Obsidian]: "So the Blakists found out that the Dragoons were on Buckminster and redirected their reinforcements there instead of to Dieron?"

[Jade]: "Hai. As a result, Buckminster weathered another Blakist assault, where the Dragoons fought honorably to safeguard the Keeper but were brutally beaten down. The Word of Blake lost at least two-thirds of their attacking force—no matter what they trumpet—and Buckminster remains ours. And, by design, we now also know the identity of at least one ROM double agent in the ISF."

[Ruby]: "And the Dragoons have been crushed on Dragon soil. We have taught them the lesson they should have learned years ago."

[Diamond]: "As long as your convoluted revenge will also save the Combine, Ruby, I don't think we much care about the reason behind it."

[Opal]: "Indeed. Now, on to newer business. I have discussed the plans Obsidian and I have made for Luthien Armor Works with Nathaniel. He is in agreement and has already instituted the initial



EARLY 3070: BLAKE

purchase of the engineering designs. We can save LAW for the Dragon—and further tie them to our cause, once the old board is removed. Director Rivarez has given us his assurances....”

—Partial recording made by ISF agent 3-86, undetermined location, circa May 3070, posted by the Kuzuu Drake InterWeb site (veracity unconfirmed)

GALEDON IN FLAMES!

(17 May 3070)

New Ivaarsen [DMNS]—Sources within DMI have informed the DMNS that Galedon V is being—or has already been—subjected to a systematic strategic thermonuclear bombardment, the goal of which is the extermination of all life on the planet. A nuclear bombardment on this scale has not been executed since the First Succession War, even by the Blakists. Indeed, according to our reliable sources, the DCMS is undertaking the operation in response to an epidemic that has raged unchecked across the planet. This outbreak apparently started shortly after the Snow Raven bombardment last year, but it remains unclear whether the Clan deliberately unleashed this plague. If so, it would be the first recorded instance of a Clan deploying a biological weapon, and a panel of Clan experts suggests that the timing of the epidemic is either coincidental (and thus wholly unrelated to the bombardment) or only an indirect effect of the Raven strike.

The nuclear bombardment began back in February, and was well on its way toward accomplishing its horrible task as of the last time our sources made contact with the Galedon system. Indeed, some sources in the DMI have suggested that the task may already be complete, leaving roughly 1.5 billion Galedonians dead.

“If the Dracs can exterminate themselves so thoroughly in response to a disease, what do you think they will do to their hated and ancient enemy?”

At this time, we have no word regarding the undisclosed Davion units that raided Galedon V prior to the epidemic and the subsequent massacre, though DMI and the AFFS both strongly believe that all Davion assets made it offworld before the Ravens’ attack.

AND IN OTHER NEWS...

RUMORS OR ORDERS?

>>>Transmit Code AA-4221-RedRedGamma<<<

Precentor:

Verifying the attached now—it came in on a side-packet with standard comm traffic to Kathil. Used black-black Suns cryptography. May want to alert the PM, considering it concerns his home turf. If this is true, then the Capellan March is more screwed up than we thought. Possible targets are Duke Allard-Liao, Duke Hasek, Marshall Stromp, Marshall Zibler or Marshall Swanson. Could be higher, if Duke Sandoval or the Regent is visiting the area.

—BY

GENERAL DIRECTIVE 72

Receiver: Precentor XIII Charles Reanner, 323rd Division, Robinson
From: Precentor XII Alexander Durbin, Third Army V-lambda

Chuck:

I wanted to make this a personal message, considering what I’m about to order you to do. I know your command’s been hit badly since Mermentau. Hell, you’re one of my last cohesive commands, since we’ve not heard from Grandi after Fletcher got hit and Tang’s unit is more body parts than machines.

I need you to integrate with the AFFS on Robinson. In the event the Blakists hit the system—and ROM believes an attack is imminent—you are to defend the town of Purki from any assault.

Here’s the thing. That town, while it doesn’t look like much—bland, drab and smells like a rotten Orlab egg farm, thanks to the sulfur pits nearby—it houses one of our hidden Brian Caches. The entrance is through the library complex, to give you an idea of where it sits. If—no, *when*—the fanatics hit, if they make a move for that town, I need you to defend it with your lives. Them moving on Purki means they know what’s there, because otherwise it’s strategically and tactically useless.

The Precentor Martial has already alerted Marshall Johnson about your cooperation, so expect the Robinson DMM to contact you shortly.

Chuck, it’s extremely important that the Brian Cache not fall into Blakist hands. What’s in there isn’t your concern, just know that if they get to it...well, this Jihad of theirs will get worse.

If the situation looks lost, you are ordered to execute General Directive 72, *regardless of civilian and allied forces present*. Deploy the Santa Ana with extreme prejudice. Don’t worry about the consequences; I’ll make sure that I take the blame if Purki becomes a nuclear wasteland. It’s a better alternative to what would come to the surface otherwise.

Good luck, Charles. Hopefully I’ll see you on the other end of this thing.

Alex

—Alleged internal Com Guard document, posted on the Kervil Drake InterWeb site, 4 April 3070

>>>YY-32-XX-UltraBlack///FX 99-99-99-1<<<

YOU ARE AUTHORIZED TO PROCEED WITH ORDER THIRTY-NINE. AVOID COLLATERAL DAMAGE AT ALL COSTS. PRIMARY MISSION IS TO END CURRENT UNAUTHORIZED ACTIVITY, USE ANY MEANS NECESSARY TO FULFILL. TARGET LAST KNOWN LOCATION ON NEW SYRTIS OR KATHIL. EXIT CODES TREY-TREY-RED AND BLUE-NINE-EXETER ARE AT YOUR DISPOSAL. REPORT THROUGH **FX 81-88-42-2** UNDER ULTRA-BLACK PROTOCOL. GOOD LUCK.

—Inter-office communiqué attributed to ComStar ROM (veracity unconfirmed), posted on the Bethel InterWeb site *Think About It* by “Agents of Starling,” mid-January 3070

EARLY 3070: BLAKE ASCENDANT

**MAKING THEM PAY**

(18 February 3070)

Midale [MIDALE PLANET]—Today's destruction of the last raiding company on-planet heralded the end of the three-day campaign by the mercenary Hansen's Roughriders to systematically destroy the estimated two battalions of the Second Taurian Lancers, which attacked Midale days ago.

The Second Lancers, known for their recent killing of approximately seven thousand of the Roughriders' dependents, were en route to the Pleiades Cluster to assist in the guerrilla campaign to hold onto that group of worlds when they landed on Midale for a "recon in force" operation to net as many FedSuns supplies as possible. Upon learning the raiding party was the Second Lancers, the entire Roughriders regiment mobilized. The Third Battalion immediately combat-dropped around the attackers' landing zone, capturing the enemy's DropShips.

The Second Lancers turned around to attempt an immediate extraction, only to find themselves trapped between the Third Battalion at the landing zone and the other two Roughriders battalions. Falling on the Lancers' rear guard, the second day saw the raiding party mostly destroyed, along with the confirmed death of the Second Lancers' CO, Colonel William Mouat, who fell under a massed artillery barrage.

The fighting occurred inside the Great Midale Rockies mountain range, where outside observers report that no Taurian prisoners were taken, as none survived the operation.

PROTECTORATE INVASION!

(21 March 3070)

Carvajal [TPB]—Components of the First Taurian Pride landed on Carvajal and Mirfak more than a week ago. While they still struggle with local defenders, these forces from Baron Kithrong's breakaway Calderon Protectorate have claimed both worlds "in the name of the Taurian people," stating their intent to "liberate all Taurians from Shraplen's destructive obsessions." These statements, continuously broadcast from orbit over both worlds, assert that Protector Grover Shraplen is unfit to rule the Concordat and is leading the Taurian nation to doom and destitution by obsessing

over the Davions and the liberation of the Pleiades Cluster, while the Word of Blake "wages war on all humanity."

Protector Shraplen has denounced these attacks as "common piracy, revealing the true nature of Kithrong's rebels and his imperialistic objectives." Indicating that the invasion would be turned back, Shraplen promised the loyal Taurian defenders that the "upstart traitor" would be brought to justice, and encouraged all loyal Taurians to "stand fast; help is on the way."

Unconfirmed reports from both worlds indicate that the invaders are inexplicably receiving a great deal of popular support, and that riots are breaking out in many cities and population centers between pro- and anti-Shraplen gangs. Official sources denounce these reports as "Protectorate propaganda."

FAR LOOKERS MARCH ON TAURUS

(1 April 3070)

Taurus [FREEDOM PRESS]—Traffic came to a standstill in the capital today as thousands marched through the streets protesting Protector Shraplen's policies toward the worlds of the self-declared Calderon Protectorate.

Led by Sonja Couvert and Jane DuKirk (both prominent members of the social movement collectively known as the Far Lookers), the marchers called for an end to hostilities and renewed efforts to seek a negotiated settlement with Cham Kithrong's rebel state. Public opinion is strongly against continued hostilities with the so-called "Calderon Protectorate," especially given the continuing conflict with Federated Suns forces in the Pleiades Cluster. Elements of the Taurian Guard were deployed to block the protesters' route to the Protector's Palace, and Protector Shraplen has once more declined to meet with representatives from the protesters to discuss the current situation.

Political commentators note that the Protector's two-front war threatens to leave him politically isolated. If the Concordat is to avoid a constitutional crisis, Protector Shraplen desperately needs to bring one of these conflicts to a conclusion. Some speculate that the Protector may call upon other Trinity Alliance member states for military assistance.

**Date & Title****Service****Status**

(19 August 3069)

"Addicks, Tybalt Join Blake Protectorate"

[VoB]

COMPLETED

(26 September 3069)

"Military, Clan Forces Besiege Dante" ("Thousands Killed...")

[OANS]

DOWNLOADING

(15 October 3069)

"Pocket WarShips: A Look at the Word's Latest Weapon"

[MRBC]

ACCESSING



EARLY 3070: BLAKE ASCENDANT

LURKING DANGERS

>>>TRNDH/MERCH-CHAT/DS-PRIV#331<<4members>>>

BergusHawk: Labov is to be commended. Reworking our navy into this new structure has increased our operational efficiency while reducing our time-in-system. We can attend to more systems in a lesser amount of time, meaning more profit.

DropMasterClyde: Always a good thing. How goes the *Spectral Skate's* configuration?

ShatterShark: Excellent. The *Poseidon* is on schedule and should be finished in two weeks. Her hold has been modified, at the expense of some other systems, but with the new additions this will not be a problem. We can execute the Khan's plan with minimal discovery now, with the new Horses "arrangement."

BergusHawk: Superb. I shall let the Khan's office know.

Shark42: Do we have a destination for the Horses yet? We have maximized the load from Tokasha and delivered it to staging point Gamma. Though we did have an encounter.

DropMasterClyde: Oh? What kind?

Shark42: Not much. At the time it seemed odd, but after the latest news from Hector, I am not so sure.

ShatterShark: Hector? So it is true, then? The Hellions have only a token force there?

Shark42: Seems that way. Four sources confirm it, two of which were bargained for during the *Black Diamond's* last transfer.

BergusHawk: So what was the encounter?

Shark42: When we arrived at Gamma, we found a Hellion ship on-station.

BergusHawk: Oh?

Shark42: Yes. The *Scarlet Eye*.

ShatterShark: The Hellions' lone *Bug Eye*, three jumps from the Isles? But that ship is normally at Hector. They have not moved that ship for at least fifteen generations!

BergusHawk: Interesting. I will need to add this to our Watch's list.

DropMasterClyde: Heard something else interesting when the *Trail of Tears* came through Tamar. Seems the Wolves have stumbled on part of the Adders' force. Though the numbers were odd.

BergusHawk: How so?

DropMasterClyde: They estimate Upsilon at only four Clusters. Seems they missed at least half the fleet.

ShatterShark: Not surprising. The Adders seem to have split them up for precisely that reason. Either they do not want the others to know their full strength, or they are expanding their coverage. Neither bodes well. Are we the only ones who know the truth?

BergusHawk: I have reliable sources who tell me that the Ravens and the Bears also know, or suspect as much. We, however, have a lock on the actual numbers, thanks to the Adders' willingness to use our supply ships along the Road.

Shark42: The Deep seems to have gotten a lot more crowded lately...

—Excerpted from a Diamond Shark Chatterweb log (merchant caste), mid-March 3070

NEWS DOWNLOADER v3.7



Date & Title	Service	Status
(20 October 3069) "Blakist Marauders Hit Buckminster" ("Millions Dead in...	[VotD]	COMPLETED
(31 October 3069) "Menkent Bombed!"	[FSP]	DOWNLOADING
(11 November 3069) "Cyclops, Inc Debuts New APC: the Saxon"	[Warrior Magazine]	ACCESSING



CHAOS UNLEASHED: CLICK, CLICK, BOOM



CLICK, CLICK, BOOM

Intercepted transmission:

"...are located near the Nag's Head Plains. Transponder codes are a 100 percent match. HK Team Omega-4 is en route with orders to exterminate the target."

"Be advised hostiles are inbound toward target area. Eliminate with extreme prejudice."

"Understood. ETA four minutes. Inform the Precentor that Code Blue is in effect."

"Code Blue underway, copy. Good hunting, Shadow One."

SITUATION

Agro Farm BB-8, Nag's Head Plains

Donegal, Lyrans Alliance

19 April 3070

Even though Donegal has been silent for several months, many in the Alliance held out hope that the system's HPG had only been knocked offline and that the planet was not "sterilized"—as apparently happened on Alarion. When the LIC got word from an unknown source that a contingent of Very Important People were trying to get off the planet, they jumped at the chance to get some intel. Oh, and those prominent Lyrans citizens, too. With the LAAF tied up elsewhere on other important missions, the LIC turned to the mercenary trade. Your command is garnering a rep and came highly recommended.

Go in, get the VIPs and get out. Now.

Oh, by the way—they're in the badlands with a busted vehicle.

CHAOS UNLEASHED: CLICK, CLICK, BOOM



GAME SETUP

CBT: Use Badlands/Mountain Terrain maps. The gamemaster designates one map edge as the objective edge.

AT2: Use Space maps. The gamemaster designates one map edge as the objective edge.

RPG: Ideally, this track occurs in a non-civilized location—either in space or in the blasted remains of one of the larger agrofarms near Conquessa.

Attacker

The Attacker consists of Veteran elements of a Word of Blake Hunter force. The Attacker's force equals 100 percent of the Defender's total deployed force. In addition, for every six units fielded by the Attacker, one unit is Elite (or comprised of Tau soldiers, if the gamemaster has *Interstellar Players* handy; see pp. 131-134, *IP*, for rules). The Attacker's force should include at least one Elite unit. Determine the Word of Blake force composition on the A column of any faction Random Assignment Table; the Blakist units enter from the gamemaster-designated objective edge.

Defender

The Defender consists of up to 50 percent of the players' total force and enters from the edge farthest from the gamemaster-designated objective edge. In addition, place an appropriate unit (the objective) near the center of the playing area. This unit has Regular experience and a starting Velocity of 0 (if applicable).

CBT: The unit is a Goblin Infantry Support Vehicle (–2 Cruising MP due to motive system damage)

AT2: The unit is a *Leopard CV DropShip* (–2 Safe Thrust due to engine damage)

RPG: The gamemaster chooses the unit, depending on how the player group decides to approach the track. The VIP characters have a maximum +3 bonus to any combat skills they possess.

WARCHEST

Track Cost: 1,000 WP

Optional Bonuses (all bonuses cumulative):

+500 Brutality: Increase the ratio of Elite warriors on the Attacker's side to one for every four Veterans.

+500 On the Lam: Rather than in the middle of the playing area, the objective unit begins within three hexes of the objective edge.

Victory Bonuses (not cumulative):

–600 Total Defeat: No objectives completed.

+1,300 Partial Victory: Two objectives completed.

+1,800 Total Victory: All objectives completed.

OBJECTIVES

1. Save the suits! The objective vehicle must survive the track and/or exit off the Defender's starting edge.

2. Break the Blakist spine: Destroy every Elite warrior in the Attacker's force.

3. Burn the body: Destroy every attacking unit.



CHAOS UNLEASHED: CLICK, CLICK, BOOM

SPECIAL RULES

The following rules are in effect for this track.

Word of Blake

The Blakists become more aggressive as they take damage. For every two hits suffered by the pilot, each pilot gains -1 to all weapon-to-hit rolls. Conversely, for every two Elite warriors eliminated from battle, the Word of Blake forces suffer a -1 penalty to Initiative rolls.

The Word of Blake forces will not surrender or retreat.

AFTERMATH

After a brutal ten hours of hide and seek among the rocks and cliffs of the badlands, you finally manage to exfiltrate—but at a price. And you don't find it very comforting to know that the Important People the LIC was so hot about saving were just press junkies. Sure, one of them happens to be Ruth Kirkland, CEO of ComPress. But really—rescuing a glorified tri-vid news exec and her overpaid executive staff? So much for the vaunted intel assets of the LIC.

ADDITIONAL HOOKS

Is there more to Kirkland's story or is it really as simple it seems—a botched intel mission that rescues some scandal-vid reporters? And why in hell were those Blakist fanatics so hot to kill you and your charges? There's something more going on here—but what?

Maybe WoB-ROM's tentacles go deeper than everyone thought....

Expansion Ideas

A prolonged battle can turn into a series of raids and recon moves, trying to pin the opposing force down. The Word of Blake will not give up until the players are destroyed or captured, so this track could take a long time if the players keep running.

NEXT TRACK

Binge, Purge, Flush; Celestial Calamity; Grim Death

CHAOS UNLEASHED: PANIC AND PAIN

PANIC AND PAIN

[Announcer]: "...massive panic in Algonquin Province. Seven more cases of the epidemic have been confirmed in the area, fueling speculation that refugees from Galedon have indeed brought a viral bug to An Ting. Freeway 75 has been clogged with traffic for more than ten hours as thousands of families flee the area. Residents in Algonquin are advised to stay indoors and not add to the congestion that has practically shut down the Takashi Memorial Bridgeway.

"In other news, An Ting officials have confirmed that outside help has been brought in to ascertain the nature of the recent outbreak and to provide assistance in relief efforts. Civilians are advised to heed emergency personnel instructions and report any unusual symptoms to the nearest medical facility."

SITUATION

The Burrens, Algonquin Island

An Ting, Draconis Combine

23 April 3070

At the tail end of 3069, four DropShips carrying refugees from the devastating Federated Suns attacks on Galedon landed on Algonquin Island. While planetary officials worked with the refugees—who were short on food and shelter, and had left everything behind on the burned-out husk of a Combine prefecture capital—life began to regain some measure of sanity for the displaced citizenry... until signs of the flu outbreak appeared.

Not much was known of the epidemic beyond the Combine officials involved in dealing with Galedon, but rumors and false accounts criss-crossed the Prefecture IntraWeb and underground press regarding the "Curse of Galedon." Within days, the refugees—once pitied by the An Ting citizenry—were being shunned and corralled in their small tent city outside Algo Port. Armed guards—supposedly placed to protect the refugees from violence—were posted outside the camp. Rumors flew about some sort of "containment plan" being concocted by the planetary government, prompting a mass exodus of refugees and residents outside the camp that overwhelmed the local militia.

The An Ting government panicked and hired the first merc group passing through the system to help contain the mad rush, hoping also to contain the disease before it wiped out yet another world.

CHAOS UNLEASHED: PANIC AND PAIN

GAME SETUP

CBT: Use at least two maps, any Terrain, set up in a Chase format. The gamemaster designates the Attacker's and Defender's home edges.

AT2: Use at least two maps set up in a Chase format. The gamemaster designates the Attacker's and Defender's home edges. Gamemasters may make this track space-based or use the *Aerospace on BattleTech Maps* rules (see p. 18, AT2), or a combination thereof.

RPG: Gamemasters should have a map for reference but may use any type of terrain for this track.

Attacker

The player group is the Attacker for this track and may use up to 25 percent of their total force. The Attacker sets up within eight hexes of its designated home edge. Units begin with a starting Velocity of 5 or less (if applicable).

Defender

The Defender's force consists of elements of the poorly armed planetary militia and several civilian vehicles. The armed portion of this force equals 50 percent of the Attacker's total deployed force. There are twenty civilian vehicles, determined either by gamemaster selection or at random. Any weapons on these vehicles are considered inoperable. All Defender units are Green.

Up to three civilian vehicles enter on every odd turn. The militia force enters the area on Turn Five.

WARCHEST

Track Cost: 1,100 WP

Optional Bonuses (all bonuses cumulative):

+500 Human flood: A veritable tidal wave of refugees surges through the area. Add another twenty civilian vehicles to the Defender's force. These units enter on every even turn after Turn Four (up to four vehicles may enter per turn).

+500 The Dragon is watching: Add +2 modifier to all Attacker to-hit rolls, to reflect extra care being taken as several Combine officials watch for casualties.

+300 Kittens with claws: Any weapons on the civilian vehicles are functional; weapon operators are considered Green. These vehicles only fire when fired upon.

Victory Bonuses (not cumulative):

+700 Partial Victory: Complete Objective Two.

+100 Cumulative Bonus: For every civilian vehicle successfully prevented from leaving the area.

-200 Cumulative Penalty: For every civilian vehicle destroyed by an attacker.

OBJECTIVES

1. Contain the outbreak! Stop as many vehicles as possible from exiting the area.

2. Stand down, dammit! Cripple (but do not destroy) all militia forces.



CHAOS UNLEASHED: PANIC AND PAIN

SPECIAL RULES

The following rules are in effect for this track.

Civilian Vehicles

In order to get a vehicle to stop, an attacking unit must move within one hex (or 50 meters) of a civilian unit and call for that unit's surrender. During the End Phase, roll 1D6 for that civilian vehicle. On a result of 1 to 4, the unit ignores the command. On a 5 or 6, the unit surrenders. The Attacker may modify the roll by hitting the vehicle with a non-lethal attack (any attack that causes damage of 3 points or less), which adds a +1 bonus. For each successive attempt, add +1 to the roll.

Civilian vehicles may be any unit that has a motive system of Airship, VTOL, Hover, Wheeled, Tracked, or Fixed Wing. If in space, then vehicles can be any DropShip, Small Craft, or Aerospace fighter.

Attacking units may only demand the surrender of one civilian unit per turn. Civilian vehicles that exit the battlefield are considered escaped.

Salvage

There is no salvage for this track.

AFTERMATH

Any time the military is brought in to contain civilian panic, tragedy ensues. An Ting is no exception. While the mercenaries hired by the government succeeded in stemming the tide from one side of the island with minimal force, more violent measures erupted near the main port facilities. A massive explosion, caused by a riot of people carrying torches and burning an effigy of the planetary governor, tracked back underground and blew the main

lines that ran underneath the Takashi Memorial Bridgeway, collapsing the entire four-kilometer span and drowning thousands of civilians. 'Mech forces were brought in from the local militia to help with disaster control, but by then the PR damage was done. The underground newsnets broadcast vids of the bridge collapse, interspersed with images of mercenaries firing on civilian vehicles, which got picked up and broadcast by the Word of Blake.

And during this time, the Curse of Galedon began to spread....

ADDITIONAL HOOKS

How deadly is the Curse? Is it transmittable by touch, air or water? Player characters who come into contact with infected civilians may find out the hard way.

Public relations battles can be just as hard to fight as 'Mech combat. Journalist-oriented groups may find additional challenges in assisting the underground press or the government agencies in fighting such a battle that rages out of control on An Ting and surrounding worlds.

Expansion Ideas

Gamemasters can expand this track into a series of rolling Chase scenarios through a variety of terrain. Civilian vehicles can be any type, including support vehicles and watercraft. Determined players can conduct "chase" missions, running down any vehicles that gave them the slip the first time or even attempting to reunite families split up in the recent chaos.

NEXT TRACK

Grim Death



connection/JIHAD HOT SPOTS:3070/section08: LATE 3070: THE TIME OF TRIALS

LATE 3070: THE TIME OF TRIALS



LATE 3070: THE TIME OF TRIALS

As 3070 settled into the same pace as the prior years—constant reports of new wars, new conquests, and darker terrors—it seems humanity is devolving to our baser impulses. No one has made any genuine attempt to unify the warring nations against a common enemy—indeed, while the Blakists fight seemingly everyone by any means necessary, old and long-standing animosities continue to hold sway and bring neighbors into clashes that defy reason. While old hatreds play out with savage intensity, the Blakists' continued expansion of their Protectorate seems puny in comparison.

The Confederation finally declares victory along the Suns border worlds, leaving a mauled AFFS to pull back and face the continuing war on New Avalon. Yet even as the Federated Suns' actions become apparent, the Taurians—in their infinite paranoia—believe they are the next target and begin preparations and probing attacks into Suns territory to stem off the “inevitable” invasion.

Fracture lines in the Free Worlds League become canyons as political rivals and enemies turn to military force to ram home their ideologies. Rampant Word of Blake defections and propaganda continue to rise, turning small fires into raging infernos of hate, greed and domination. Through it all, the political wars for control of the League continue to escalate—a harbinger of darker days ahead for a realm that remains a nation in name only.

Just as the Confederation trumpets its victory over the Suns, erasing years of perceived shame after the Fourth Succession War, the Word of Blake unleashes an attack on Sian, finally hitting the last House capital world (the alleged bombardment of Sian notwithstanding). Reports trickle in about the Word's betrayal of their last remaining ally as St. Ives and other Confederation worlds—so recently removed from Davion aggression—begin to suffer Blakist assaults.

Just as it seems things can't get any worse, the Clans resume their invasion, with evidence of yet another Clan from their far-off homeworlds arriving to finish what the Falcons, Wolves and Bears could not.

So the darkness continues. The only flames that light the nights now are not of hope or peace. They are funeral pyres, rising on hundreds of worlds as the savage human beast is unleashed.

—Michael Bosworth, INN Special Correspondent

EMBRACING UNITY

KHAN'S ORDERS

[saKhan Broderick Sukhanov]: “Loremaster, you need to step up the pace of these ‘negotiations.’ With the damage we sustained at Lum, we will require all of the Alliance's resources.”

[Loremaster Klaus Harper]: “Understood, my Khan. However, the President remains reluctant to allow us more forces in the Alliance because of his predisposition to nonviolence. And our...zeal...in

GHOST BEARS COME TO ORESTES

Prince Ragnar speaks to the Riksdag

“Rasalhagians, my citizens! It has been a long time since I last stood before any of you. It has likewise been a time of changes and—especially of late—a time of chaos. Where once we knew mostly peace and tranquility, we now see war and death. Where once my duties to my new adopted nation kept me busy, now I can no longer ignore the cries of my fellow citizens—cries for help, and for vengeance!

“You elected me your leader, even though I am sworn to the Ghost Bear Dominion. I cannot ignore your call, especially now that the need is so grave. Your brothers and sisters in the Dominion have pleaded to their Clan for help on your behalf, to free the besieged people on Tukayyid. And now the Ghost Bears have answered. Together, led by our newest Rasalhagian forces—the First Rasalhague Bears, the Gunzberg Eagles and the WarShip *Rasalhague*—we went to Tukayyid side by side with the Ghost Bears, and removed once and for all the brutal murderers who still held that world in thrall. They threw all they had at us: fighters, missiles, even nuclear weapons. But they could not stop the combined wrath of the Bears and Rasalhague.

“Now I stand here before you, as your Elected Prince—no longer in exile, yet still bound to my Clan—to ask our Riksdag that we work together toward creating one nation where two now exist. As before, in ancient times, our ancestors joined their three nations into one to create the Kalmar Union. But this time, it will be a union of equals. It will take time and effort to bridge the gap between our cultures, to find the proper way forward. But for the sake of all our people, this gap must be bridged.”

—Excerpt from Elected Prince Ragnar Magnusson's speech to the Riksdag, Orestes, 21 August 3070

the Dante solution has given the more pacifistic voices in his government impetus to block our new enclaves on Risin, Cerberus and Rushaven.”

[kaKhan Lynn McKenna]: “That is unfortunate. We did them a favor by removing such a vile infestation from their midst. To deny us what we require? This is maddening.”

[Harper]: “It is also reality, and we must adapt to it. I have more respect for Khan Jorgensson now, after seeing how the Bears have adapted to their surroundings. Perhaps the Invaders have the right of it—only the Clans with the capacity to adapt to these changing times can truly survive contact with the rest of humanity.”

[Sukhanov]: “Then we must endeavor to learn. And quickly.”

[McKenna]: “Regardless of vision or fortitude, our immediate need is to secure appropriate facilities to handle the rest of our fleet as it arrives. If the Adders continue to pursue us, we will be in scant position to defend even our new enclaves.”

LATE 3070: THE TIME OF TRIALS

[Sukhanov]: "Perhaps we should include our merchants in your negotiations, then. While our assistance in upgrading their aerospace hardware has done much to forge our current relationship, perhaps other avenues—non-military ones—will entice them further."

[Harper]: "Very possible, saKhan. I shall contact Merchant Louis at once. He is currently still finalizing our mercantile enclave on Port Krin, and the forces assigned there have done well in ridding that world of the pirate stink. Indeed, the latest Watch reports suggest he is close to finding the prize there of which our Founders spoke."

[McKenna]: "Excellent. Then carry on, Loremaster. And remember, time is short. If we do not secure a reliable, amicable accord with the Alliance soon, we will have no true place to call home. And the Järnfölk lifestyle will not suit our proud heritage. We are Ravens, not Sharks. We must roost."

[Sukhanov]: "I daresay if we do not secure a home soon, the Alliance may well pay for it in blood, however costly it may be. Let us hope it does not come to that."

[Harper]: "Aff, saKhan. I have grown fond of these people. I do not wish to see another Dante, either. I will do what I can and more. Harper out."

—Real-time HPG transmission log reportedly intercepted by Ghost Bear Watch ship *Arcturus' Halo*, 1 July 3070 (released to ISAP by the Shadows of Radstadt resistance group)

TUKAYYID FREE AT LAST!

(20 July 3070)

Tukayyid [INN]—The bleak situation here on Tukayyid has been completely reversed over the past two weeks, as officials confirmed today that the Blakist forces that have blockaded and bedeviled this world since early 3068 have finally been vanquished by none other than the military forces of the Ghost Bear Dominion.

The first word received by Tukayyid's remaining planetary defenders about the impending liberation came on 11 July, when a terse message flooded the entire intra-system communication network:

"I am Prince Ragnar Magnusson of the Free Rasalhague Republic, Star Colonel of the First Rasalhague Bears of the Ghost Bear Dominion. In the name of the Republic and the Dominion, all Word of Blake forces in the Tukayyid system will surrender and lay down their arms, or be destroyed. This is your only warning."

The ensuing space battle appeared on several news channels thanks to a direct feed provided by the Ghost Bear vessels. The Bear fleet, led by a *Leviathan*-class WarShip named *Rasalhague* and a *Nightlord*-class battleship, met the Blakist vessels—the *McKenna*-class *Blake's Sword* and *Essex*-class *Deliverance*—as planetside viewers watched. The Dominion vessels swiftly disabled the *Blake's Sword*. In their desperate last struggle, the fanatics allegedly launched nuclear weapons against the Ghost Bears, apparently hitting the *Rasalhague* with at least one warhead that the mammoth vessel amazingly shrugged off. Minutes later, the *Deliverance* fell, torn apart by a hellish broadside from the *Rasalhague's* guns.

ALLIANCE AT A CROSSROADS

My fellows, we are at a crossroads in Alliance history. We face tremendous opportunity and potential. The Clan Snow Raven proposal would indeed grant us the security and military defense that we have sorely lacked for centuries. Only with their aid can we stop worrying about an *en passant* invasion and absorption by the Draconis Combine or Federated Suns. Only with their help can we hope to be rid of such dangerous terrorists and fanatics as Dante's Inferno and the Word of Blake. Only with their assistance can we expect our economy, technology and education to advance significantly. With limited resources, they have achieved great power and inner strength, achievements we would do well to emulate only half as successfully as the Ravens have.

Such a tempting offer is hard to refuse. Very hard. But our fellows from Baligorra and Raldamax have no trouble refusing it. Their calls to shed the brutal Snow Ravens are interpreted by many as an anti-Alliance stance, or as ungrateful considering all the Ravens have done for us. But we do ourselves and our brethren a disservice by simply dismissing their concerns as self-serving propaganda to further the gains of the famed Raldamaxan Frederique Muller, the most prominent Raven opponent. Our tolerance toward their almost alien culture, and its apparent incompatibility with all others in the Alliance, is a hallmark of our enlightened perspective on life. This tolerance has allowed us all to coexist peacefully for centuries. But it also forces us to close our eyes to the excesses of strangers. We've become afraid to condemn guests for their infractions lest we be considered intolerant of their ways.

Dante. Galedon. Are they worth it? Is this the new style of justice and peace the Alliance will dispense toward ourselves and our neighbors?

—Nathaniel Rodriguez, syndicated columnist, Outworlds Alliance Media Services, 30 July 3070

With the *Deliverance* destroyed and the *Blake's Sword* adrift beyond Tukayyid's gravitational pull, the few Blakist forces planetside scattered in an effort to hide from the inevitable Bear assault. The bulk of these forces were discovered and destroyed by the First Rasalhague Bears and the Gunzberg Eagles, two of the newest formations in the Dominion's armed forces.

Since their heroic victory, these brave children of Rasalhague—once thought lost forever to the land of their birth—have announced their next step in the liberation of the Republic with Prince Ragnar's journey to the Riksdag on Orestes. Meanwhile, two Ghost Bear Clusters and their *Nightlord* battleship have remained behind, pledged to ensure that the Blakists do not return to challenge Tukayyid's liberty again.



RESPECT AND PRIDE

For two days since the massive Dominion fleet made its presence known in the Orestes system, the population has held its breath with dread and anticipation. No one knew if the massive Ghost Bear fleet had come to conquer or worse. Rumors abounded of other Clan attacks on the scale of the Jaguars' scouring of Edo. The entire planet let loose a collective sigh of relief after First Prince Ragnar Magnusson's incredible address only hours ago.

The Bears had not come to conquer, but to save.

"The past three years have clearly shown that ComStar can no longer protect the Republic. The Com Guards lie shattered on Terra, on Tukayyid and on a dozen other worlds. Their fleet is all but destroyed.

"In the name of the Khans of the Ghost Bear Dominion, I pledge from now on that the military forces of the Ghost Bear Dominion will be deployed to protect not only the Dominion, but if Parliament wishes, the entire Free Rasalhague Republic as well. The time has come to stand together against the *stravags* of the Blakists as we decide our common destiny."

Magnusson's epic speech was punctuated by the dispatching of several Dominion DropShips to various locations across Orestes, loaded with food, supplies and other resources. Even now at press time, still more ships are inbound, showing the Dominion's determination to carry out the Prince's promise.

And not a moment too soon.

It's about time someone came to our aid. ComStar lies in shambles around us, their shattered bases amid the ruins of our own decimated cities a mute testimony to the savage Blakist attacks against this world over the past two years. The Blakists killed indiscriminately, wiping out entire metropolises in order to decimate the Com Guard forces stationed there.

For all the good it did us. The Com Guard held back the Blakists as effectively as tissue paper holds back a polar typhoon. And the innocents of Orestes paid the price. Our time of harboring ComStar has run its course.

We hope this is merely a beginning of the reunification of the Rasalhagian people across the former ComStar-held worlds and the Dominion. We urge our brethren on other worlds of the Republic to give serious thought to the offer of our First Prince—after all, we elected him as our ruler even though he was a ward of our former enemy.

The past is the past. The Rasalhagian people have suffered much and yet we continue to survive because we are a hardy people. We have fallen down seven times. But we got up eight times. Here, now, is our chance to once again know unity and strength with a people who—for all their differences—may not be so unlike us after all.

We welcome our Prince home. Long live the Republic! Long live the Dominion!

—Op/Ed by Gustav Ashigo, Senior Editor, Republican News Services (RNS), Orestes, 21 August 3070

TIME OF TRIALS

THE DEVIL'S OFFER

Given his ultimate rejection by the rest of his fellow countrymen, is it any real surprise to find the deposed Prince Magnusson journeying back to the world of his birth, with his new pets in tow?

Oh, I'm sorry; I meant *as* a pet of his new "brethren." See how magnanimously they treat with him? After all, he is their leader....

Are we such curs ourselves as to accept this scrap of fodder from our conquerors under the guise of "protection?" Has the pride of Rasalhague fallen so far and fast as to forget the shame of the defeat imposed on us by the very troops the Great Boor himself now purports to lead into what shattered remains of our realm he can claim as a hereditary landhold, merely for the pathetic gesture of returning to them?

No! I say, *NO!*

This has gone far enough, beyond even the maniacal imposition by ComStar when they so callously chose Tukayyid for their "Final Showdown" with the Clans in 3052! To allow occupation by the very people behind the war machine that brought forth our decline—and the wholesale decline of civilization itself!—and to allow such without opposition is too far *all over again!* We must dissent! We must defend ourselves!

We must fight!

Politics be damned, and the Bears, too! For each and every one of us killed thus far, we must shed the avenging blood of the fanatic! We have felt the searing bite of pain...now it is time for those hardships to give way to honor restored!

—Anonymous editorial published in *The Free Republican*, Grumium Publishing, 30 August 3070

COMSTAR OUT!

(12 September 3070)

Orestes [RFP]—Many citizens of the Free Rasalhague Republic have viewed ComStar's presence in a negative light. With so many centuries lost under Combine tyranny, the Republic's citizens, passionate about their independence from Combine and Commonwealth, have at best considered the Order's presence a necessary evil in the face of the Clan invasion.

But while the Com Guards undoubtedly prevented the Republic from being swallowed whole, they have also turned our worlds into targets for their "evil twins" in the marauding Word of Blake. Recent heavy fighting on Tukayyid and Orestes resulted in devastating collateral damage to both of the Republic's remaining industrial worlds. Additional raids by Blakist troops and their mercenaries have been visited on the rest of the nation.

How much longer must citizens of the Republic be involved in a war not their own? In the wake of Elected Prince Ragnar's visit to Orestes, the question on everyone's lips is whether the Republic would fare better under the benevolent protection of the Ghost

SHADOWS OF DANTE

(29 November 3070)

Anjin, the Voice just gave us access to the following intercept made by some ISF watchers in the Outworlds. It's cleared for broadcast as-is, if you can believe it; looks like a transcript from some unfortunate Raven's flight recorder data recovered from wreckage over Dante. Refreshing to see that the Ravens are not all-powerful, no? —Lindon

>>>Recording Begins<<<

[Point Mu-Alpha]: "Command, crossing zenith of object zero-six-six...now."

[Raven Command]: "Aff, Mu-Alpha. Proceed to waypoint Epsilon; bypass all others. Picking up faint IR signatures in that area. Will transmit all data as you complete approach to Epsilon."

[Mu-Alpha]: "Aff, Command. Waypoint Epsilon..."

[Silence for a minute]

[Mu-Alpha]: "Command, I see nothing here, I—Contact! I have contact! Sensors confirm small craft drive plume! Advancing for positive ID."

[Command]: "Acknowledged, Mu-Alpha. Be advised: there is no registered friendly traffic in your area."

[Mu-Alpha]: "Understood, Command. No chance of friendly fire."

[Command]: "Or support. The Star Colonel will be extremely displeased if you manage to get yourself killed out there, Point Commander."

[Mu-Alpha]: [Chuckles] "Aff, Star Captain. I do not have permission to die..."

[Command]: "Mu-Beta, be advised. Mu-Alpha has contact in sector zero-niner-seven. Alter vector as appropriate for support, full burn."

[Mu-Alpha]: "Warbook has positive ID on contact. Contact is a single *Ahab*. Say again, contact is a single *Ahab* fighter of indeterminate configuration. Engaging target..."

[Command]: "Neg, Point Commander! Pursue target only. That is possibly the same *Ahab* that has been sniping away at our Binary for the past week. Command says he has proven that bidding a single fighter is well below cutdown. Find his base; we will arrange a proper Trial—"

[Mu-Alpha]: "Neg, Star Captain! Target has come about, matching vectors! It is already too late to disengage."

[Command]: "Mu-Beta?"

[Mu-Beta]: "ETA to contact waypoint one-two minutes, Command."

[Command]: "Savashri! You had better defeat your opponent, Uter. A Circle awaits your return..."

[Mu-Alpha]: "Chalcas! Freebirth son of a surat! Command, hostile *Ahab* is heavily modified! Being engaged by several particle cannons! He already destroyed one of my weapons!"

[Command]: "Break off, Point Commander! Try to lead him to—"

[Mu-Alpha]: "Neg! Direct hit! He has disabled my drive! I am coasting on a hea—!"

>>>Recording Ends<<<

THE TIME OF TRIALS

Bear Dominion. When the Clans attacked the Inner Sphere, they were an unknown quantity—seemingly alien invaders bringing death and destruction. However, over time we have become more familiar with the invaders—thanks in no small part to the efforts of Prince Ragnar.

It has become increasingly clear that the people of the Republic have more in common with Clan Ghost Bear than with ComStar. While the Republic Parliament debates the matter, the people have not been slow in giving voice to their dissatisfaction. "ComStar Out!" is a phrase now heard across the Republic.

FALLING BACK

DAVIONS CRUSHED IN THE CONFEDERATION

(7 July 3070)

St. Ives [CBS]—CBS News received confirmed reports this morning of the surrender and withdrawal of the last of Hasek's invading forces still operating in Confederation territory. Many of these forces made their final stands in the St. Ives Commonality, erroneously believing that the people of these worlds would be more sympathetic to their failed effort to annex a portion of the Celestial Realm. Here on St. Ives, our forces crushed the remnants of three separate commands, including the First Federated Suns Lancers RCT.

On Ares, where the Fourth McCarron's and the Home Guard secured the world with surprise support from the Blackwind Lancers, normality has already begun to return in the wake of the Davion assault. Across the surrounding duchies, other Davion units faced total or near-total destruction, with their remaining commands on Necromo, Warlock and Hustaing barely able to retreat back to the Capellan March with more than a handful of their original troops intact.

Chancellor Liao released this statement in honor of those who paid the ultimate sacrifice:

"The valiant defenders of the Confederation willingly gave their lives in the face of certain death to repel the barbarian force George Hasek sent to destroy our nation and our way of life. We, the citizens of the Confederation, owe our very existence to those who selflessly gave their lives in our defense. To those thousand of patriots who answered the call to arms and rose up to aid our forces in the struggle against tyranny and oppression, we honor you."

Here on St. Ives, and elsewhere throughout the Confederation, we echo our beloved Chancellor and bow our heads in memory of those who gave themselves for our freedom.

CONFEDERATION TROOPS RETURN TRIUMPHANT

[Lunsford]: "This is Pamela Lunsford reporting for CNS from Warlock. Today the First St. Ives Lancers returned home victorious from their recent campaign on New Syrtis. As this heroic command marches down Celestial Boulevard in what has become a



LATE 3070: THE TIME OF TRIALS

CAPELLANS IN RETREAT

(21 July 3070)

New Syrtis [NANS]—Capellan March officials announced today that Capellan forces are continuing their retreat from FedSuns space, following the defeat of their invasion at New Syrtis five months ago. The announcement, released by Duchess-Regent Angela Hasek's office, stated the following:

"CCAF forces continue to retreat after facing insurmountable odds and certain destruction at the hands of the elite troops of the Federated Suns. Every attempt made by Capellan units to take control of New Syrtis resulted in devastating losses. Our valiant defenders defeated Chancellor Liao's troops at every turn. Though their forces reached deep into our realm, at no time was the safety and security of the Capellan March threatened by House Liao's ill-advised and ill-conceived attack on the citizens of the Federated Suns. At this moment in time, the remnants of the Capellan military are a shattered, ill-equipped force with no conceivable way to defend themselves for some time to come. Davion forces once again have proven their prowess and strength. Long live the Capellan March!"

Casualties among the retreating Capellan forces are estimated at or above 75 percent in most cases, while our own losses—though great—were substantially less. The barbaric invasion of New Syrtis caused significant collateral damage, but officials have stated that reconstruction should take less than a year. Unfortunately, civilian casualties ran extremely high, a result of retreating CCAF units randomly firing in heavily populated residential centers as they ran for their DropShips, while cover fire from orbiting WarShips caused grievous damage to outlying areas.

Even the revelation of this information cannot put a damper on the victory our military achieved here on New Syrtis and continues to achieve elsewhere in the Capellan March.

spectacular impromptu victory parade in the planetary capital, we go to Tom Stulner for live coverage. Tom?"

[The CNS newsroom is replaced by a male reporter standing before a scene of vehicles and infantry in CCAF colors, moving down a broad street past screaming and cheering masses, amid clouds of colorful streamers and confetti.]

[Stulner]: "Thank you, Pamela! I'm here at the corner of Vine Street and Celestial Boulevard, where elements of the St Ives' premier line regiment can be seen marching with military precision down the center of the capital city. Thousands of well-wishers and patriots pack both sides of the street as far as the eye can see, all waving flags with the Liao and St. Ives insignia as they frantically cheer on their victorious troops...[*Enormous uproar and shouts of jubilation.*] Pam, the crowd is going absolutely crazy here, as a single BattleMech turns the corner. Bob, pan the camera, and zoom in..." *[Camera zooms in on a lone Centurion BattleMech.]*

"Yen-lo-Wang! It's Duke Kai Allard-Liao! Returning home in triumph! The crowd's outpouring of love is as overpowering as it is awesome, and the Duke's 'Mech moves with such fluid grace..." *[Camera scans the crowd as they begin singing.]*

"The crowd seems to have broken into a spontaneous song...It sounds like...yes, the Capellan national anthem, ringing with pride as others shout 'Xin Sheng' in the background. It's a massive party here and throughout the capital! With pride and hope in abundance! Back to you, Pamela."

[Lunsford]: "Thank you, Tom. We have received reports of similar celebrations on Sian, Capella and Victoria. Truly, this has been a great day for the Capellan Confederation."

—Canopian News Service broadcast, Warlock, 14 September 3070

FINAL NOTICE

Field Marshal Hasek,

Again, I command you to do your sworn duty to your state and sovereign, as current head of the Capellan March forces. You are to rescind George's "no mercy" directive to your troops at once, or face dire consequences. I am losing patience with your stubbornness and your inability to see beyond petty personal vendettas during a national emergency. This is dereliction of duty and gross insubordination. Enough Federated Suns blood has been spilled against your private foes, while the true enemies of the state run rampant over us. Follow your legal orders immediately.

I am through warning you, Nathaniel.

—Intercepted AFFS message attributed to Princess-Regent Yvonne Steiner-Davion (veracity unconfirmed), posted to the Kathil InterWeb by "Ikonoklast," 8 November 3070

TAURUS NEXT?

The recent fizzle of our vaunted allies' offensive into Davion space once again leaves us high and dry. These events conspire not only to remove the initiative of our Pleiades offensive, but are liable to kill it off completely. Without the Capellans as a greater threat, the Davions are left with no restrictions to utilize their full force against us.

No sensible person can doubt the attack will come. Our inability to completely consolidate the Cluster is practically begging the Capellan March to dislodge us wholesale this time. Certainly, the public claims are that both nations intend to focus fully on the Blakist problem. But that is a cop-out. Our "allies" were always all too eager to dump us, and Hasek's people have been practically foaming at the mouth to dig their teeth into the Concordat without Capellan distraction. One wonders how profitable the weapons trade from the Confederation is to the Concordat? Enough to start a war for us, then not be around to see it through?

LATE 3070: THE TIME OF TRIALS

That question is mostly irrelevant because the Davions have vowed to build a palace on Taurus from the rubble of the capital. All of it. Yes, I know numerous "official sources" indicate that reports about those claims are all unsubstantiated, but who did they ask?

Speaking of high-level official sources, the real ones are telling me that the FedRats have been building up supplies to engage us as soon as they can rotate troops back to and over our borders. Even various Davion news outlets are making reports to that effect.

So what are we going to do? Keep our focus on rebels, bandits, pirates and Blakists who have done us no harm? Or put it where the *real* threat lurks: the Federated Suns, a disaster waiting to happen? They have no other priorities left beyond the extermination of Taurus, to finally put an end to the Concordat as the major Periphery power. And we'd better be ready to show them the error of their ways.

—Sean Stemens, syndicated columnist for Taurian Public Broadcasting, Taurus, 15 November 3070

A SEPARATE PEACE

LONG LIVE THE KNIGHTS!

(6 August 3070)

Atreus [ISAP]—For almost a year now, the world of Atreus, capital of the embattled Free Worlds League, has been a stronghold dominated by allies of the Word of Blake, reportedly under the aegis of Corinne Marik and her father, Intelligence Minister Paul Marik. But for all those Atrean citizens oppressed by the Word, there is still hope. Over the past several months now, survivors of the Second Knights of the Inner Sphere—thought destroyed in late October of 3068—have emerged to engage the Blakists in a pitched guerrilla warfare campaign. Constantly eluding pursuit, these resisters remain at large and operational, carrying out exploits that have destroyed more than a battalion of Blakist troops.

"It is true that a small band of terrorists operates on Atreus. But their likeness to the Second Knights of the Inner Sphere is only as deep as the paint that covers their 'Mechs."

"In truth, this band is no better than a collection of pirates. They have inflicted damage mostly on civilian assets, and caused a substantial amount of civilian casualties with their wanton acts of terror. The deluded and subversive are lifting these criminals up as a symbol for their struggle against the order and peace of Blake that we have provided for months. This type of opportunistic propaganda only serves to strengthen the resolve of those who resist the truth and justice we have dispensed ever since the false Marik fled. All law-abiding citizens should report any subversive activities to the authorities, to help us provide a safe environment for all."

FIGHTING RAGES IN WORD-OCCUPIED LEAGUE

(30 August 3070)

Irian [ISAP]—Despite the best efforts of the Word of Blake to eradicate resistance to their occupation of the Free Worlds, hope survives. Efforts to kill or capture prominent figures such as Alys Rousset-Marik and Jeremy Brett have come to nothing, and even the false Thomas Marik remains at large.

The Duchess of Augustine has captured the popular imagination with the daring exploits of her resistance movement, centered on the remains of the Krushers, her father's mercenary command. Likened to a modern-day Robin Hood, her actions behind enemy lines are often little more than pinpricks but have driven the Blakists to distraction, pinning down a large contingent of their troops and collaborators.

Brett's defense of Tamarind and of his wife, Captain-General Therese Marik, is less romantic than his niece's actions but no less dramatic and significant for the League. His pragmatic abandonment of outlying worlds to concentrate his forces brought cries of outrage but has allowed him to beat off no less than three Blakist assaults on his territory, solidifying his reputation as one of the pre-eminent commanders of the modern era. However, it seems unlikely that even his genius can hold out forever against the Blake juggernaut, particularly now that Atreus and much of the Marik Commonwealth lies in Blakist hands. In one bright spot, rumors of friction between Paul Marik and his daughter, the Captain-General, imply that the Word of Blake's control is far from absolute.

The continued survival of Captain-General Thomas Marik—who still uses that name despite his own admission that it is not truly his, and that title despite his ouster from Atreus—must stick in the Blakist craw. The scars of orbital bombardment and troop landings mar Oriente, but it has held out against enemy assaults, with troops loyal to Duke Christopher Halas rallying to the defense of their lord and his son-in-law. Rumors of assassination attempts are rife, but to date none has come close to succeeding (as far as we know). How long can Oriente survive, an island surrounded by a sea of enemies?

FLEET ADVISORY: SHILOH

Attention, all shipping:

This is an all-points fleet advisory issued from Atreus Command, 1200 GST on 4 September 3070. Be advised that renegade vessels may be operating in the vicinity of the holy world of Shiloh. At 2315 GST on 22 August 3070, disaster beacons were picked up from the WoBS *Xanthos*, a *Black Lion*-class battlecruiser, and the WoBS *Impetuous* (formerly the FWLS *Nueva Badajoz*), an *Aegis*-

LATE 3070: THE

class vessel, both of which were on routine patrols in the system. Additional vessels dispatched to render aid recovered some 165 crewmen from the two distressed ships, both of which had been destroyed.

The crews revealed that a group of merchant vessels pretending to be disabled had lured them into an ambush. A renegade flotilla then struck without warning or mercy, employing an *Agamemnon*-class heavy cruiser and two *Eagle*-class frigates. The identity of these vessels has not been established beyond doubt, but transponder signals broadcast during the battle indicate they were the *Menelaus*, the *Lancelot* and the *Galahad*, all vessels that subverted the systems installed during their construction and thus were not brought under our blessed command.

The post-battle status of these Heretic WarShips is unknown, but shipping should assume that all are extremely dangerous and will attack without provocation. Do not approach or engage them; leave that task to Blake Militia capital ships with due authority.

—Advisory report issued by LCCC headquarters on Atreus to all allied posts within ninety light-years of Shiloh, 5 September 3070

FADING LIGHTS

On 27 July 3070, we were forced to alter our intended itinerary and use Alarion as a recharge point. We knew the planet was no longer communicating and had heard the advisories to avoid the system, but did not realize a full quarantine was in effect until we jumped in-system.

We did not at any time attempt to contact the planet. We observed apparently derelict DropShips near the jump point but did not attempt to communicate or to investigate.

We didn't get the whole message at once. There was heavy interference, probably from the quarantine satellites' jamming. It was obviously a recording, playing and replaying, so we heard bits and snatches from a few dozen repetitions before we could put together what it said. This is what we got:

"Anyone, any JumpShip, any WarShip, anyone out there: We know you've been warned to keep clear. But listen. You can help. You can save our children. We have children here. Asymptomatic—no sign of any disease. You could use DropShips with sealed holds. Wear hazmat suits. Or environmental suits. Load them in the holds, scrub the air—pump in fresh, whatever. Get them off this world. Keep them isolated as long as you think you need to. You'll see. They're healthy. It's too late for us, but they still have a chance. If you help. Please!"

We did not reply. And we did not stay in the system any longer than we needed to recharge. We left ASAP and completed our run.

Not that we've gotten a hell of a lot of sleep since then.

—Report filed on 4 August 3070 with the Lyran Free Traders Association by Captain Richard Marshburn of the *Harbinger*, a *Tramp*-class JumpShip (registered to Akfata-Zaprudy Transport)

DEAD ENDS

Lord Thomas,

Our mutual friend has confirmed the details of the world you were interested in and that we discussed in our prior conversation. The information uncovered matches your recollections and supports the proposition that it was a major center of enemy operations until recently, perhaps even a staging post for the present hostilities. However, once we jumped in system and neared the planet, we discovered that the largest, northern continent (according to your recollections and accounts to be host to the planet's population and activities) was undergoing volcanic activity the likes of which I have never seen, much less imagined. Most of the continent was completely obscured by a cloud of ash, mixed with astonishing amounts of sulfur dioxide, carbon dioxide (and a host of others I didn't care to note). We braved atmospheric entry, only to find something my eyes could not understand. In place of a mammoth volcano (or even super volcano, which I'm aware of), there was no single cone or ejection point we could discover; not even a crater, as I first surmised the Enemy might have used the first known instance of a strategic nuclear weapon in this war, to eradicate their presence, but accidentally set off the eruption. But this?! As far as we could determine from our cursory pass before the extreme sheer of venting heat and noxious gas threatened our safety, forcing us to burn back to orbit, over hundred-thousand square kilometers of land were already inundated under a flow of magma possibly tens of meters (if not hundreds) thick. And it was growing and growing and growing, literally as we watched. My comms-officer (who knew he was a closet volcanist aficionado), practically wet himself when he realized what we were seeing. A traps volcano. Apparently it starts with a plume from the very core of the planet that sends up an overabundance of basalt magma, which pools directly underneath the crust, after which it begins working its way through various fissures, until it finally finds outlets (how long something like that might take was beyond his knowledge) and then begins flowing from such egress points in unimaginable volumes (well for me; Rodney began spouting off numbers in volumes, cube roots and I shut him down, especially when he began talking about how such a basalt flood could last tens of thousands, if not millions of years!). What I did verify, however, is he confirmed that they are exceptional rare (he's never heard of one so late in a planet's life cycle and knew any one of a hundred scientific organizations that would sell their mothers to observe this; he will be discrete, I have been assured) and when asked whether such a traps volcano might be caused by human hands, he laughed so hard I believe he did wet himself at that point; started spewing off about how all the nuclear weapons ever used by man was a small flame compared with what we witnessed, and that none of that could possible effect the core in such a way to cause a plume. . . sorry, I'm babbling, but this is just astonishing. . . the forces involved.

Everything is gone, as though it never existed. As far as I could surmise from our quick observations, it is though no human hand has ever touched this place. Did the Enemy simply run afoul of cosmic karma attempting to balance out the murderous, soulless actions of the Master? Somehow, despite all the horrifyingly real evidence before me, I can't help but doubt. . .

Regardless. . . we are back to square one. And yet I refuse to believe—as I know you do also—that this was the only such world hidden away, and will continue to work through channels to discover the location and disposition of other nests.

Your humble servant,

E

—Verigraphed message (veracity unconfirmed) addressed to "TH" on Oriente (intercepted by the Scourge of Atreus resistance group and posted anonymously on the Keystone InterWeb, 13 October 3070)

LATE 3070: THE

SACRIFICES

Mark!

Got this from a friend. Apparently the Blakists are using the Solaris police to help them process prisoners, and in typical cop fashion they logged this into the evidence room despite the fact that there were no trials going on for political prisoners. He swapped a bootleg of *Stranded*, Season 3 for it.

—Giselle

[Camera briefly catches a glimpse of a wild-eyed woman who barely two years ago graced Solaris holovids with an award-winning smile. The scene pans to catch sight of smoke and flames and a marching BattleMech of indeterminate type, weathering a swarm of small arms fire. In the lower-right corner, the date: "08/11/70" appears.]

[Cooper]: "This is Kiva Cooper, reporting for freedom-loving people everywhere. A few blocks down Jade Street, you can see the Solaris Home Defense League assaulting the Central Utilities Building. A lance each of 'Mechs and vehicles are holding off an enemy unit while infantry troopers plant explosives on one of the major lines.

"This is not an attempt to 'throw the city in chaos' so that the cavalry can come rushing in to save us. There is no cavalry. This will shut down the spaceport for a few days. While many say that the SHDL is just hurting the people of Solaris by resisting, what it's really doing is making the Blakists' job harder. Their job entails murder, enslavement and horrors one can only imagine unless they've been to your homeworld.

[A rumble shakes the ground and the camera as 'Mechs stomp forward amid the loud rattle of heavy autocannon fire. Cooper begins to cover the action blow-by-blow as the combatants stumble into view.]

[Cooper]: "Off Burl Street, you can see a *Buccaneer* and...oh shit!...a *Legacy*...getting past the League line. Jeanette Mason has pursued them with her custom *Stalker* and is taking them both on. Lasers, cannons and missiles are flying. The *Buccaneer* goes in to use its axe..."

[Male Voice]: "Stop!"

[Camera swings wildly around to zero in on a man in police riot fatigues approaching Kiva Cooper. At least four others flank him.]

[Cooper]: "We're filming for SBC!"

[Cop]: "No, you escaped there last week."

[Cooper]: *[suddenly drawing a pistol]* "Run, Chris! Get the footage out, I've got this one!"

[Cooper fires a shot, and the cop doubles over from a hit to the groin. Camera spins wildly, catching a blurry glimpse of more infantry, the pavement, a gloved hand and the overcast sky before suddenly going black.]

VOICE OF THE FORGOTTEN II

Hi Mom,

I know the men in suits have probably scared you and told you I was dead, missing or captured. It's the latter, but they're treating me well. Your boy went down swinging here on *[censored]*. I took down three 'Mechs helping cover the retreat. I hope some of the guys made it off-planet. Don't worry, I can handle the Eagles and I'll come back to you when this little war is over. Some of the guys say some units are a few jumps from Atreus, so I'm sure a peace treaty is coming soon. I'll write again when they give us a chance.

Love, Jeremy

Mom,

I want to go home. It's getting worse. The war keeps going and going. Supplies are getting harder to come by and they're cutting back our rations. They moved us a few jumps away. I think we're on *[censored]* or maybe *[censored]*. The Eagles are okay, but it's the other guys that make it horrid. Those Wobblers come by occasionally, and when they do, we get interrogated. It's so brutal, it's near torture. And we can't give them anything. I don't know what forces are on Zebebelgenubi! I just drive a 'Mech! What do they want? How much longer will this last? I can't take much more. Some guys are disappearing, especially officers and nobles. I don't want to be next. The Eagles hate the Wobblers almost as much as we do. Write the Duke for me, Momma.

Love, Jeremy

—Private letters attributed to Leutnant Jeremy Minderhoff (POW, captured on McAfee on 27 November 3069), dated early November 3070

SKYE STILL A THREAT

In the general excitement over the cease-fire with the Lyran Alliance and high tensions on the home front, many people have overlooked the reality that Skye—specifically, Skye's duke, Robert Kelswa-Steiner—has remained silent.

Duke Kelswa-Steiner unilaterally declared war on the Free Worlds League in February of 3068, long before any other Lyran Alliance province looked toward us with hostile intent. He has never rescinded that declaration, nor apologized for the false charges upon which it was predicated.

Now as our Free Worlds League Military concentrates within our borders, Skye is left unwatched. Skye, which has at its disposal at least one powerful *Mjolnir*-class WarShip, the duke's private army of cavaliers—cleverly withheld from combat and kept safe from harm until such a time as this—and who knows how many other military assets. Skye, which has already invaded, sacked and



LATE 3070: THE TIME OF TRIALS

occupied sovereign Free Worlds planets in a transparent grab for power and territory during this time of crisis.

Can there be any doubt that the duke has his eye on the verdant worlds that lie across his rimward border? Worlds now undefended or minimally defended as we turn our attention toward healing our nation? Worlds that will soon—unless the League Central Coordination and Command recognizes the danger and reallocates defenses—be crushed under the Lyran jackboots of “free” Skye?

The time to act is now, before our reliance on the integrity and good will of forces that have never given us cause to trust them leads to disaster. Before our shortsighted lack of preparation costs our brothers and sisters on worlds closer to the coiled serpent of Skye their homes, their freedoms and their lives.

—Jesse Winley, *The Miaplacidus Perspective*, Commonwealth Press, 4 October 3070

UNLEASHING HELL

WORD OF BLAKE RETURNS TO SIAN!

*** Breaking News! ***

“This is Kim Soo Li reporting live from an underground location. Six days ago, a massive invasion force comprised of three Blakist Militia divisions and supported by two WarShips launched a surprise assault against Sian at the peak of celebrations marking the return of our valiant troops from the war against Duke Hasek. Indeed, their arrival was so sudden that, had it not been for the efforts of our own naval forces, the situation here in the capital would surely have spun out of control within hours of the first volleys.

“Instead, the newly modified *Feng Huang*-class heavy cruisers, *Ilsa Hyung* and *Aleisha Kris*, together with two *Impavido*-class destroyers, engaged both Blakist WarShips while a massive fighter screen deployed by the *Feng Huangs* dealt with the enemy’s inbound DropShips. As of this report, at least one Blakist heavy cruiser was reportedly destroyed, with the other either crippled or driven off. No word on the damage done to our own vessels has yet been released.

“Elements from two Blakist divisions—tentatively designated as the Seventeenth and Twenty-fourth—survived to land on Sian. Both initiated a massive attack on the Forbidden City and its outlying areas, but the gallant efforts of the Red Lancers and Warrior House Imarra kept Sian from falling.

“According to field reports, one of the Blakist divisions surrounded the capital in an attempt to crush the Lancers, while the other cut a swath of destruction through every city and town within a hundred kilometers of the capital, and the battle became a bloody stalemate for a time.

“Twenty-four hours ago, the surprise arrival of the Blackwind Lancers turned the tide against the Blakists. Apparently returning to their Capellan roots, the renegade Lancers executed a combat

SETTLING THE SCORE

[*Star Colonel Teresa Sender*]: “So the Horses have reared their ugly heads once more in Invader space.”

[*Star Colonel Meagan Johnston*]: “Tremble in fear, Wolf cur. I am Star Colonel Meagan Johnston of the 412th Mechanized Strike Cluster assigned to Kappa Galaxy. I am here to take Paulus Prime from your limp and rotten jaws. What forces do you bid to defend yourselves, if you even dare?”

[*Sender*]: “I am Star Colonel Teresa Sender of the Thirteenth Wolf Regulars. Try to take this planet, my pretty pink ponies. We will defend it with all resources available to us.”

[*Johnston*]: “Wolves resorting to Spheroid tricks? We wish to fight this battle honorably, but I should have known better, considering that you Wolves have lost your way in honorable combat.”

[*Sender*]: “So you say. I think the Horses have no taste for reality.”

[*Johnston*]: “Apparently news of Tiber has yet to reach your ears. This unit is a proud inheritor of many veterans of our victorious campaign.”

[*Sender*]: “Tiber? You mean the world where your tankmen tried to claim honor and only reduced themselves further by not bowing to our inherent superiority? We are the Founder’s Clan. You are a pale horse.”

[*Johnston*]: “Then perhaps we can decide this more simply. I bid a point of tanks to take this world. Specifically, Star Commanders Andrew and Robert, who as commanders of a Mars crew in our Eighty-fifth BattleMech Cluster rightfully claimed seventeen kills on Tiber, seven on the plains of Tokasha and nine more of your feeble kin on Oberon IV. Or are you Wolves so lost that you cannot even bring yourselves to face down two ‘useless’ vehicles and their crews?”

[*Sender*]: “You speak impudence, Meagan. All right, Ponyrider, I accept your bid. I shall defend with myself in my *Nova* on the rim of the Arlington Chasm. And I will show you the error of your ways.”

[*Johnston*]: “Say it, Teresa. Or are you trying yet more Spheroid word play?”

[*Sender*]: “Fine, Gelding. This battle shall decide who may claim Paulus Prime, as it shall be until we all fall. Or is that too complicated for your lowborn bloodline to understand?”

[*Johnston*]: “Bargained well and done, cur. *Seyla!* Say your goodbyes now while you have a chance—I doubt your fellow Wolves will want you back after you lose in shame.”

—Transcript of the Hell’s Horses’ *batchall* for Paulus Prime, 12 December 3070

drop directly atop the Blakists’ southern front and drove for the heart of the capital, where Blackwind commander Warner Doles reportedly led his command directly to the main government building to personally rescue the Chancellor.

THE HASEK CONSPIRACY

Somebody actually put a bullet through his brain. George Hasek's invasion came to a halt not because he was outmaneuvered, or out-fought, but by one person with a pair of brass ones between his legs. Of course, being a sniper means you're issued a pair anyway. But whoever he is, he managed to penetrate the Davions' most stringent security measures, set up his rifle, wait for Old George to put his head in the crosshairs and squeeze that trigger just enough to end things.

Here's the thing about that. Who actually pulled that trigger? Hasek's sharp; his security must have been intense, especially while he's in a shooting war against the Capellans—a nation-state known for its use of irregular tactics—and let's not forget the first assassination attempt. Yes, the Death Commandos are more than capable of having done this, but I don't think they did. To hit George means you have to get close enough to see him. Considering he only uses hand-picked people with the proper political leanings in his security forces, and brings in more if he doesn't feel secure enough, the Death Commandos are a tough sell. Extracting Kai, maybe; croaking the duke himself? Nah.

Which means if the Death Commandos, or any other Capellan group, did it, they got very lucky. That kind of luck does not grow on trees, not even for the Capellans. Locals? Not even a remote possibility. That leaves somebody from Hasek's own security forces. The next question is, were they subverted? As I said, they're loyal. To a fault. So I don't think the Capellans got to the shooter. Rather, I think another Davion is behind this. Considering the target, only one person could have ordered the hit.

That would be the seated Regent.

Now, why would *she* do that? Well, that's obvious. The Word of Blake blockaded her home, her military is needed to defend the realm, and what does Hasek do? He goes against the Capellans in a foolish war that can gain nothing and lose everything. What should Hasek have done? Turned his forces inward to help break the Word's blockade.

What did his sovereign ask him to do? Break off hostilities against the Capellans and assist his realm.

What did he do? Continue his attacks against the Capellans.

What did it cost him? His life.

Think about it!

—Renegade Exeter InterWeb posting by "Starling," 30 July 3070

"With the arrival of the Free Capellan forces, the Red Lancers and House Imarra appear to have finally shattered the Blakists' siege. Two hours ago, I'm told, the last of the surviving Blakist units lifted, leaving a devastated but free Sian in their wake.

"For CBS news, I'm Kim Soo Li."

—CBS News special report, Sian, 21 September 3070

THE TIME OF TRIALS

FREE CAPELLA DISSOLVES

[Shen]: "Good evening, viewers, this is Peter Shen. The local Free Capellan ambassador, Tamara Quinn, has called a special news conference. We take you live to City Hall where Ken Franks is standing by. Ken?"

[Ken]: "Thank you, Peter, I'm standing here in Shin Low Hall in Xin Singapore, awaiting the start of this unprecedented news conference, called by representatives of the renegade Free Capella movement. Rumor has it a major shake-up in the movement's ranks is imminent, concerning the state of its remaining combat commands and—. Ah, wait... Here comes Tamara Quinn now, the movement's local representative."

[Background sounds of camera and the murmurs of the gathered reporters.]

[Quinn]: [Long pause] "Good evening, ladies and gentlemen of the press. I'm Tamara Quinn, and I have come here on behalf of Mandrinn Treyhang Liao...[Pause] "Two days ago, Blakist Manei Domini assassins brutally attacked Mandrinn Liao while he was visiting on St. Ives—"

[Audible gasps and murmurs from the crowd; a few unintelligible questions are shouted out over the din.]

[Quinn]: "He survived the attack, but succumbed to his injuries a few hours later. Before he died, he gave these final instructions. [Pause, sound of paper being unfolded.]

[Quinn]: [Reading] "With the Jie Fang Legion's destruction at the hands of the Death Commandos, and the Blackwind Lancers' heroic return to the Capellan fold after relieving Sian and rescuing the Celestial Wisdom, I hereby dissolve the Free Capella Movement. The time has come for all Capellans to stand and defend the Confederation against those who seek its destruction, as one Capellan people, united in body and spirit."

[Quinn]: [Clears throat] "These instructions were to be carried out immediately. Thank you, fellow citizens. That is all."

[More murmurs and inaudible questions.]

—Excerpt from a special report issued by CBS News' affiliate (KIDS Channel 7) on Indicass, 1 November 3070

NO NOBLER SACRIFICE

(18 September 3070)

XSFP [St. Ives]—*Tian-tin* is burning ["with the purification of the guilty"]. Even at the time of this editorial, our beloved capital still burns ["with cleansing fire"] from the savage fighting that has occurred there over the past seventy-two hours. It began in orbit, with the crews of the *Elias Jung* and her escorts selling themselves dearly ["foolishly"] to keep the Word of Blake's Eighth Division from invading in force. In their noble defense of our sacred planet, the *Elias* took an unnamed Blakist *Dante* ["The Jung exploded from within, barely scratching the Perdition"] with it in a heroic ["foolish"] final stand.

Though the Blakist DropShips filled our skies and landed their troops with murderous ["blessed"] intent, our Capellan forces stood true ["Impeding progress, leading to judgment."]. Every one



LATE 3070: THE TIME OF TRIALS

of our heroes who fell took two Blakists with them. Our unity has stiffened our spines and shattered theirs.

They then resorted to burning our homes, our property, our lands [*"Only after the citizens began looting."*]. They torched our offices, cut off our power, poisoned our water and brought death to thousands of innocents at a time [*"Only to shift blame from yourselves, who would rather poison your world than let us refine it."*]. Yet our will did not break. We opposed them with whatever we had on hand—rakes, knives, our bare hands. I remember seeing a mob of thousands swarm over a Blakist infantry stronghold, tearing the invaders limb from limb [*"Exaggerations: a common Confederation trait!"*]. All to protect our homes and our loved ones [*"And the honor of your tyrannical dictator."*].

We will continue to stand fast, citizens [*"Only because you do not see the truth of your folly."*]. Because we are the only ones who can help ourselves [*"And therefore, your downfall is secured."*]. We have stood against the Davion aggression and now the Word of Blake. And we will survive, because we are Capellan. And they are nothing [*"Nothing but the embodiment of Truth and Wisdom, unlike your own ruler—who shall pay for his own crimes very soon."*].

So honor our fallen heroes as you sleep tonight. Light a candle for them. Light up the night [*"with purifying flame"*] and show our

"honored guests" that we will not tolerate their presence [*"Nor we yours!"*]. Because there is no nobler sacrifice than to die for the world you love [*"Unless you die for a Cause greater than yourself. Blake be praised!"*]. Xin Sheng! Xin Sheng! Xin Sheng!

ADMISSION OF HONOR

"The Hell's Horses are...possessed of a powerful will to fight to victory. They do not purport to fight until the end, only to victory; any sacrifice along the road to victory is acceptable to a Hell's Horseman. Such a perspective is not unique to them, however, and any Clan warrior could swear by that, or by a similar credo.

"All things considered, we Wolves remain the most capable of all the Clans in combat. Honor, valor and fortitude are our bywords, flexibility and speed our doctrine, all concepts ingrained in us. I tell you now: once the Wolf seizes hold, any opponent would be wise to make his peace quickly, and then fight as if his very legacy is endangered.

"The Hell's Horses also honor and embody these concepts in every conceivable fashion. To engage them is daunting for even a seasoned warrior, and to be engaged by them is a deadly matter..."

—Amendment to an after-action report filed by Star Colonel Juanita, Second Wolf Guards Grenadiers Cluster, after the battle for Nyserta, 3 December 3070

LOOMING THREATS

Foremaster:

We have received information from the remnants of WolfNet and our Lyran friends that confirms some type of imminent Blakist operation may be aimed at the Arc-Royal theater, perhaps even against the world of Arc-Royal. I realize we are operating on a few incomplete reports, and that we have seen only a small percentage of the likely operational logistics network, but presuming that we are indeed seeing a buildup to support a strike-in-force on another major system in this area, I feel we must accept that Arc-Royal remains the only significant target in this part of the Commonwealth that fits the bill for what amounts to a typical Word of Blake headhunter strike. I postulate that they hope to use the current preoccupation with the Jade Falcons to facilitate this strike.

They may have mustered sufficient force to engage our standing Arc-Royal garrison, but I feel we know enough of their unholy war so far to establish that they try never to use more than they strictly need. We therefore have a chance to repel this Blakist strike. I realize that an attempt to prepare for this may hamper our efforts against the Falcons, but given Outreach, Alarion and Galax, I would consider our hand forced. Perhaps impairing our efforts is sufficient gain for the Blakists, but relocating assets would be the lesser of two evils.

—Star Colonel Rael, Arc-Royal, report dated 13 November 3070 (declassified on 29 December 3070)

NEW CLAN INVASION?

(20 December 3070)

Alexandria [INN]—Following the loss of contact with Eridani Light Horse troops on Huntress, disturbing news has begun to filter out of the Clan Occupation Zones, prompting the LAAF to place forces deployed along the Periphery on high alert.

Word is that Clan Hell's Horses has returned to the Inner Sphere.

While this Clan has reportedly focused its attentions on Clan Wolf territory to date, many experts believe it is only a matter of time before Horses troops drive further into the Inner Sphere. Worse, the reappearance of this one Clan may herald the arrival of others. Already we have seen the Diamond Sharks infiltrate the Inner Sphere in a slow but steady economic invasion, while the Snow Ravens' arrival in the Outworlds Alliance has been a distressing development for the Draconis Combine and the Federated Suns.

With troops spread so thin, the arrival of additional Clans along the Periphery must be ranked as one of the LAAF's worst nightmares. Should the Clans renew their invasion in defiance of the so-called Great Refusal, any Clan attacking from Poulsbo and Kolovraty could have almost a clear run right through to Skye, putting them well ahead of any competitors in the drive to Terra.

LATE 3070: THE TIME OF TRIALS

ASSAULT ON ARC-ROYAL FAILS

(30 December 3070)

Arc-Royal [ARNN]—If there were any who doubted the wisdom of Duke Kell's offer of sanctuary to the members of Clan Wolf exiled from the Wolf Clan Occupation Zone, events over the past week have laid them to rest once and for all. Following the devastating attacks on Outreach, it was inevitable that the Word of Blake would eventually strike Arc-Royal, even before the duke offered sanctuary to Dragoons survivors. The Blakists' war with the AMC had claimed the lives of many mercenaries, among them Lindon's Battalion and the Dismal Disinherited. So far, the Kell Hounds had been spared, but it was only a question of when—not if—the Word would come for them.

Just two days ago, that question was answered.

Rather than bog themselves down with a prolonged ground engagement, the Blakists instead chose once more to employ nuclear weapons. But rather than launch a massed attack with WarShips, assault DropShips and aerospace fighters, this time the enemy attempted to strike by stealth. A lone DropShip infiltrated the Arc-Royal system via a pirate point with one goal in mind—to wipe out all troops on the planet in a suicidal nuclear strike. But they had not counted on the presence of the *Ulric Kerensky*. In-system preparing to escort supplies and fresh troops to the Jade Falcon front, the Clan battlecruiser detected the intruders the moment they arrived and quickly intercepted the bomb-laden DropShip when it refused to surrender. Amid the wreckage they found a combined payload of more than thirty megatons of nuclear ordnance, all of which was promptly disposed of by the Wolf Clan defenders.

TAMAR ATTACKED!

(31 December 3070)

Arc-Royal [DBC]—This morning, a press release issued by the office of the General of the Armies stated that the Wolf Clan capital and former Lyran provincial center, Tamar, has been attacked by unknown vessels that dispensed a massive nuclear assault across the planet's surface. The full extent of damage and casualty figures remains unknown at this time.

The press release contained no additional information about the attack, beyond the fact that it occurred only three days prior.

The Wolf Clan is currently engaged in operations against the Lyran state and the Jade Falcons, and we do not know whom they hold responsible for this attack, though the methods used certainly suggest a hallmark strategy of the Word of Blake. However, we have no information as to what the Wolf Clan believes or knows about the Blakists and their Jihad.

That DBC has received information about the attack so rapidly after its occurrence could suggest that the Wolves are aware of its possible Blakist origins. If so, the attackers—if they are the Word—have made a critical mistake, as the Wolves are highly likely to redirect their focus against Blakist objectives. While that

seems encouraging on the face of things, the path between Clan Wolf and Terra contains several Lyran worlds, and after the atrocity on Tamar, we can no longer be certain to what degree the Wolves will contain themselves.

Khan Kell and Margrave Kell were both unavailable for contributions to this article.

ROYAL WEDDING

(12 October 3070)

Sian [CSN]—Despite war, despite hardship, despite the devastation of two fierce invasions in as many years, the streets of the Forbidden City today are truly alive today! The amount of activity here is awe-inspiring, on the eve of the long-awaited marriage between Chancellor Sun-Tzu Liao and Naomi Centrella, heiress-apparent to the Magistracy of Canopus.

Equally inspiring is the energy and fervor people display while contributing to the ongoing rebuilding efforts. Much of the damage inflicted by the latest attack still scars the city. Months after rebuilding efforts from the first Blakist attack were considered largely complete, the effects of the second assault just weeks ago have caused a mere hiccup in the schedule, with workers resuming their efforts as if not a day had passed since. The Capellan people and their Canopian allies, who rallied here so soon after the first attack, remain dedicated to reviving the capital, and all reports indicate that volunteers organized themselves with incredible efficiency, sometimes even before state organizers were in place. This zeal is a true sign of the Capellan people's strength and proof of their defiance in the face of the Word of Blake's ongoing terror attacks.

An equally strong sign is the unity between our two nations, which will be strengthened considerably by tomorrow's wedding. The union promises a new era for both realms, an era of prosperity, justice and progress as never seen before. It is truly a great time to be Canopian or Capellan.

AND IN OTHER NEWS...**FOCHT'S APPEAL**

Almost two decades ago, I asked the men and women of the Com Guards to stand with me against the greatest threat not just ComStar, but all of humanity, had ever faced. For twenty days, we fought and bled against the Clans. The price of victory came high, almost too high. But from the battlefield of Tukayyid ComStar arose reborn, rededicated to the mission Jerome Blake envisaged for it.

I cannot deny that the events of the past few years have shaken ComStar's very foundations, but today we face a challenge that dwarfs what we accomplished on Tukayyid. This challenge grows



LATE 3070: THE TIME OF TRIALS

all the more difficult because we must now face those who stood beside us in that titanic struggle.

Once again, the fate of humanity hangs in the balance. Our duty in this grave matter is clear. Our oaths demand that we hold to our task, not surrender to disillusionment and despair. In the Word of Blake, we have seen all that is evil and dark in humankind's soul.

To stand against the darkness is the highest calling.

—Com Guard-wide address issued by Anastasius Focht, former Precentor Martial, Orestes, 6 August 3070

MARIAN RAIDERS HIT HUNTINGTON, HAZELDEAN!

(12 August 3070)

Huntington [SAN NICHOLAS TIMES]—Elements of the Marian Hegemony's IV Legion made lightning raids on Huntington and Hazeldean this week.

The raids were apparently purely punitive, targeting militia bases, major infrastructure assets such as DropPorts and power generating plants, and major manufacturing centers. The raiders made no attempt to occupy either planet.

Marian forces entered the Huntington system via a pirate point on 6 August and attacked without warning, overwhelming the Huntington Planetary Militia within hours. Sixty to seventy percent of DropShip support and heavy manufacturing centers throughout the capital city region are believed destroyed, but the attackers left political and commercial targets largely unscathed.

Planetary Governor Hazel Paterson characterized the attack as half a mugging: "They knocked us down, broke our kneecaps, then ran off without robbing us."

On 9 August, what appeared to be the same force—or at least a part of the same force—again used pirate points to strike the nearby Hazeldean system without warning.

The Hazeldean Planetary Militia mounted what observers described as a furious defense, delaying the assault for nearly a day before succumbing with more than 80 percent casualties. Destruction of Hazeldean's capital valley transportation and industrial assets was described as "about equal" to that on Huntington.

In both raids, as the Marian forces left the system, an officer identifying herself as Julie Gupton made an all-frequency broadcast stating that the Prima and Tertia cohorts of the IV Legion had launched these raids as reprisals for "unprovoked attacks on Illyria, Tronheimal and Trasjkis". Ms. Gupton did not specify the nature of those alleged attacks.

The IV Legion is known as the primary anti-pirate and counter-insurgency arm of the *Legiones Marianes*, the Marian Hegemony's armed forces.

INTEL BRIEF: MUNDO NUBLAR

>>>Encrypt/timestamp19:00hrs/08193070OR<<<

To: General Adam Steiner

From: Agent Nigel Hawkins, Outpost Somerset

Date: 19 August 3070

General Steiner,

Hopefully this report finds you well and in higher spirits than the last time we spoke. I know you're busy, Adam, but while my advisors on both sides don't quite agree with my assessment of the situation, I believe my previous reports to you with regard to the Deep Periphery and the Word of Blake justify my recent expenditure of troops.

Recently, our guard intercepted a badly damaged *Manatee* DropShip entering Lyran space from the Deep Periphery. On board was a small mercenary scout force, the Langford Wraiths. Two members were in bad shape, including a now-identified Word of Blake adept. Though he claims he parted company with the Word some time ago, we are holding him in our highest-security cell and have thoroughly interrogated him. Most of the others suffered from dehydration and malnutrition—one small bit of evidence that their allegedly hasty retreat was ill planned.

The merc commander claims their force encountered a base near a world called Mundo Nublar. They say this base was occupied by Blakist forces, mostly scientists and soldiers. But what astounds me, Adam, is their insistence that they saw a fantastic ship that can destroy whole worlds. They claim they encountered it near the Hanseatic League and barely escaped with the stolen *Manatee*.

I know it sounds fantastic, and I would have dismissed their claims outright—especially entering our space the way they did aboard such an ancient relic. Naturally, we assume that if something so ancient as the *Manatee* exists, with the level of internal technology upgrades we found, that it must belong to the Blakists. Most of my men believe the Wraiths are Blakist spies. But if that's true, then I have to hand it to them—they've apparently converted a Clanner to their cause.

I believe that the vessel they claim to have seen exists, at least in some form. Much to my advisors' disapproval, I've assembled a scout team to travel to that region to investigate. If the Blakists have assembled a ship that can destroy worlds, we have to find it and make it ours, or destroy it.

Forever loyal to you and the Alliance,
Agent Nigel Hawkins, Outpost Somerset



LATE 3070: THE TIME OF TRIALS

**"DEFENDERS OF THE OUTBACK UNITE!"**

This phrase—or one like it—has been used countless times to inspire people to join forces against a common threat, people who do not realize they have as much in common as they truly do. People unaware of their strengths, too focused on their individualism and isolation. But that is who we are.

For centuries now, we have all suffered the neglect of our "sovereigns." They constantly war with neighbors, often hundreds of light-years away from us. They come to take our children, our resources, our riches and our food—all for their own causes. In return, we receive promises, empty gestures and under-funded projects, hallmarked by incompetence and lack of commitment.

We ask ourselves, when is it our turn? We pay taxes and contribute. We pull our weight and then some for the team, an alliance wrought centuries ago, and we receive nothing. We need protection just as much as the people of the Capellan March or the Draconis March. Not a world among our ranks has not suffered at the hands of pirates. And in just the past two years, that suffering has increased tenfold. The past few months have seen particularly extensive pirate activity—including the return of the notorious "Lady Death" Trevaline—no doubt supported by the thrice-damned Blakists. Again, the AFFS provides nothing but promises, and the command to relocate the Brockton and Filtvelt training battalions closer to New Avalon, further stripping our home defenses.

We are tired of waiting on our "sovereign" to send us alms, band-aids and crackers to deal with our problems. We can no longer afford to constantly give while receiving nothing in return.

If the AFFS is so eager to abandon us, we no longer owe them enough to follow those suicidal orders. Thus, effective immediately, the Filtvelt Academy Training Battalion will form the core of the First Filtvelt Guardians, a force dedicated to the protection of our neighbors, and the destruction of the pirates we face. It is being joined by the Filtvelt Militia and local forces from Skepptana and Marielund. Together, we will forge a military coalition to oppose any and all invaders.

We ask all of you to join us, for our mutual defense. It is time we provide for ourselves. Together we can face any threat and defeat it.

Respectfully,
Colonel Erich LeBeau

—Official communiqué issued from the office of the Kommandant, Filtvelt Training Academy to "all military, paramilitary and mercenary commands in the Broken Wheel PDZ," Filtvelt, 30 September 3070

BETHEL ASSAULTED, IRREGULARS DESTROYED!

"This is Ashley Matherly, reporting for News 45 with this late-breaking story.

"KDNL News has just received a confirmed report from Capellan March military sources that elements of the Word of Blake's Tenth Division attacked and destroyed the DropShip Irregulars merce-

nary command on Bethel. The resulting attack devastated Bethel City and lay waste much of the northern continent.

"The report suggests Blakist Precentor Rebek Craines led the attack against the mercenary force in a second attempt to capture Dr. Rick Raisley and to avenge a prior defeat against the Irregulars. The Blakists last attempted to capture Dr. Raisley on Acamar, when the Irregulars intervened and saved him.

"The Irregulars deployed to engage the reinforced Level III outside the capital on the Plains of Sarong, where both forces traded artillery barrages before closing in for close-quarters combat. Irregulars commander Colonel Medron Pryde maneuvered his troops to put Craines in an untenable position, but the Blakists did not give up as easily as before.

"The battle finally turned against the Irregulars when Colonel Pryde was killed in 'Mech-to-'Mech combat with Craines. The apparently enraged Irregulars then fell upon the Blakists with reckless abandon, overwhelming Craines and her command.

"At that point—from what we have managed to ascertain—one of the Blakist 'Mechs sent out a special signal, possibly even Craines herself, to forces still in orbit, calling down a barrage of nuclear weapons fire. The assault struck both forces on the Plains of Sarong and annihilated them before moving on to saturate the nearby capital city and much of the northern continent. Casualty estimates from the assault are estimated in millions of lives and billions of pounds in infrastructure.

"We understand Dr. Raisley was in the capital at the time of the Blakist attack. His whereabouts are unknown, but AFFS officials say he is presumed missing, not dead."

—Special report by KDNL News (an FSNS affiliate), Daniels, 25 November 3070

PIRATE'S FEAST

[*Dark Eye*]: "It was too easy, I tell ya. No defense whatsoever, so the Lady was right. Them Suns are totally ripe for the pickin'."

[*Grimner's Blood*]: "Aye, verra true. Even Broken Wheel couldn'a handle our landings. Took off with a pile of raw ore and snagged us a pristine *Union* ta boot."

[*Uli's Hammer*]: "Seems whatever problems those Feddies're havin' up in New Avalon, they've pulled their guard back here. Wonderin' if the Bullies know 'bout it."

[*Silent Death*]: "Mebbe. But the Lady's got plans for the Concordat. They're jus' too ripe a vine to pluck at the moment, with all their attention split between their revolutionaries and the Pleiades."

[*Dark Eye*]: "Is good for us, then, aye? I mean, even Tortuga was never this easy."

[*Talbot*]: "I expect it has a lot more to do with our finally gettin' some decent weapons. With that fancy-pants Tyberias character sellin' us these new *T-bolts* and *Riflemen* for practically nothin', we're finally winnin' fights we'd've lost years ago. Where'd he get 'em, anyways, the back of an *Excalibur*?"

LATE 3070: THE TIME OF TRIALS

[*Silent Death*]: "Don't question the gift horse. Heard the captain of the *Queen Mab* did just that, and he ended up spaced outside of Hellespont."

[*Grimmer's Blood*]: "Long ways away from where we were told to hit."

[*Silent Death*]: "Exactly."

[*Uli's Hammer*]: "So what's the plan now? I heard the Lady's off to meet up with some more recruits. This mean we can't raid anymore?"

[*Dark Eye*]: "Ya kidding, aren't ya, Hazel? We still get half-bounty for what we grab. And from what the scuttlebutt's sayin', we're hookin' up for something big this go-round. Seems the Lady's got a score to settle with the lords an' ladies along the Suns border."

[*Talbot*]: "Hear we're going to drop on Filtvelt. Steal us some more 'Mechs."

[*Grimmer's Blood*]: "Well, we were hearin' something about a 'brown cash,' so most likely it's another ore raid."

[*Silent Death*]: "Eight pirate bands to just steal ore? Not likely. I'm bettin' on a target richer than we've ever hit, much less stolen. With all our groups—an' now the Tortugans, too—we're as strong as a whole passel of those Suns RCTs. Maybe this time, we're goin' ta steal a whole world to call our own...."

—Intercepted transmission dated 03093070; downloaded from MIIO Nadir Sat 9-XT, unknown system, 29 November 3070 (obtained by ISAP via unknown sources, veracity unconfirmed)

TESTING THE WATERS

(20 December 3070)

Taurus [CARTHAGE DAILY]—Taurian Defense Force officials confirmed late last week that recent rumors of an attack on Argos are true. While initial reports grossly exaggerated the attackers' force composition and even identity, Carthage's nearest neighbor was indeed raided on or around the first of the month.

Officials have denied that the attacking force originated in the Magistracy of Canopus, calling those claims "ludicrous and fanciful." They presented video evidence that the raiders were instead

a small Fronc Reaches militia unit. While the raiders' precise origin remains unknown, it is certain that Argos suffered a probing attack by either that fledgling nation or by local bandits.

More surprising than the identity of the raiders, however, is the increasingly persistent rumor that no TDF units were on Argos at the time to defend against just such an attack. The amount of materiel taken in the raid is staggering, considering that any type of defense could have halved the amount of stolen goods. TDF officials refused to comment on the current deployment of nearby TDF units.

With the continued fighting along the Federated Suns borders and the Taurian government's ongoing preoccupation with the Calderon Protectorate, it appears many worlds along the Fronc border are being stripped bare of defenses. After the TDF's statement yesterday, Secession Party leader Professor Cody Bergen posted this message in the Carthage Observer:

"While these actions are certainly strategic in nature, they leave many civilians and valuable resources virtually undefended. If any organized attack comes from the Fronc worlds—or worse, the Magistracy—we may very well see the crippling of the Taurian economy as planets fall swiftly to enemy occupation. Our government's obsession with a pointless border war against the Suns is hurting those of us on the fringes. Will we too be left to defend our homes with kitchen knives and pitchforks, like our lost brothers in the Protectorate? Or is Grover actually going to buy a clue and figure out that it isn't the Suns that needs saving—it's his own people?"

In a quick poll conducted last night, sixty-four percent of the population agrees that Taurus needs to take a stronger look at the Fronc Reaches. Forty-eight percent believe that Protector Shraplen needs to abandon his crusade against the Federated Suns.

NEWS DOWNLOADER v3.7



Date & Title	Service	Status
(10 December 3069) "New Crow Helicopter Soars Into DCMS Arsenal"	[VotD]	COMPLETED
(30 December 3069) "Blakists See Mixed Success, Failure on Capellan Front"	[ISAP]	DOWNLOADING
(10 January 3070) "Official: New Coordinator Hohiro 'Unwell'"	[ISAP]	ACCESSING

CHAOS UNLEASHED : BINGE, PURGE, FLUSH

BINGE, PURGE, FLUSH

Journal Entry #8771

Kalidasa. Never thought I'd return—leastwise, not with a bunch of mercs. Our contract has us hitting the system in a pinpoint raid, so it's a standard run for us. With all the contracts we've been getting lately, this one seems fairly simple.

That has me worried.

Our target is Precentor Timothy Mayo, newly assigned head of the local Word of Blake HPG garrison force. That alone has us triple-checking every system and warhead—those buggers took down an entire Com Guard command on Tall Trees back in the beginning of this whole mess.

Whatever reason our employer wants this force gone doesn't matter to us, really. We just want to make sure we can spend our pay. And maybe nab some nice Blakie gear in salvage—if it doesn't kill us first.

SITUATION

Ennis Weapons Range, Colbert Provincial County

Kalidasa, Blake Protectorate

6 July 3070

Mr. Askai has returned with another lucrative contract. Only a month ago, Kalidasa seceded from the Free Worlds League and went over to the enlarging Word of Blake Protectorate, taking several League militia forces with it. However, much noise has been made among local Leaguers that the planetary government was coerced into secession by the heavy-handed tactics of the local Word of Blake HPG garrison unit. Askai—or whomever he represents—wants the Blakists hammered. Capturing or killing the Precentor would net even more on the contract.

Any way you look at it, it's time to hunt some Wobblies.

CHAOS UNLEASHED: BINGE, PURGE, FLUSH

GAME SETUP

CBT: Use Wooded/Hills Terrain maps. The Defender chooses his home edge first.

AT2: Use at least two Space maps. One edge is the planetary surface and is set up according to the *Atmospheric Operations on the Space Map* rules (see p. 18, AT2).

RPG: Gamemasters may prepare an appropriate environment according to the players' plans. Gamemasters should use a setup similar to those described above for a ground or space battle. All WoB troops use the standard Soldier NPC template (see p. 207, *CBT: RPG*).

Attacker

The Attacker consists of up to 100 percent of the player group's total force. The Attacker begins the track at any two selected map edges. Attacking units may begin with any starting Velocity (if applicable).

Defender

The Defender consists of elements of the Third Division of the WoB Militia and is 125% of the Attacker's total defending force. These units are of Regular experience. The Defender secretly designates one unit as the commander of the on-site forces and two units as "gunslingers." All three of these units are the designated

targets for objective purposes and have Veteran experience (RPG characters use the Elite template, p. 207, *CBT: RPG*). All forces are rolled on the B column of the Random Assignment Table: Word of Blake (see p. 131, *Field Manual: ComStar* or p. 220, *Field Manual: Updates*).

The Defender sets up all units within four hexes of his declared map edge. Defending units begin with a starting Velocity of 3 or less (if applicable).

WARCHEST

Track Cost: 1,000 WP

Optional Bonuses (all bonuses cumulative):

+500 Shorthanded: The Attacker consists of up to 75 percent of the players' total force.

+500 Elite: The commander and up to two additional units of the Defender's force are Elite.

-700 Valuable Intel: The location of the Defender's commander is revealed to the Attacker before the start of the track.

Victory Bonuses (not cumulative):

+1,400 Partial Victory: Completing two objectives.

+1,900 Total Victory: Completing all objectives.



CHAOS UNLEASHED : BINGE, PURGE, FLUSH

OBJECTIVES

1. **Sky high:** Destroy all three designated targets.
2. **Retribution:** Destroy or cripple all defending forces.
3. **POW:** Capture the enemy commander (cripple or destroy his unit without killing the pilot).

SPECIAL RULES

The following rules are in effect for this track.

Fanatical Devotion

If a Defender's unit is reduced to a point where it must make a forced withdrawal, that unit instead increases its experience level to Elite and fights until destroyed or unable to function. The unit does not follow *Forced Withdrawal* rules. For *CBT: RPG* games, all enemy units that receive a Severe Wound gain +2 to Willpower and a +3 bonus to three skills. These bonuses last for the duration of the track.

Commander Loyalty

If the Defender's commander is killed, crippled or captured, all remaining units increase to Veteran and gain a +1 Initiative bonus. All units fight to the death. For *CBT: RPG* games, all enemy units gain +2 to all skill rolls for the duration of the track.

AFTERMATH

They say success comes with a price, and this supposed "milk run" was no exception. Oh, sure, you carried out your contract to the letter—but at what cost? The Word of Blake troops are as

fanatical as the propaganda and the newsfeeds show—or don't. While there may be Blakists out there who are more civil, the troops you just faced down seemed more like rabid ki-rans on Rage than human beings.

The good news is, your boys and girls stared face first into the fire—and came through it alive. While you'll have to go again into the breach at some point, at least now there's hope that the Blakists can be beaten.

ADDITIONAL HOOKS

How does one handle a ticked-off, uncooperative Word of Blake commander? What if the slick-talking Precentor can work a deal another way, maybe converting the player force to the Blakist cause?

Expansion Ideas

Possible expansions depend on how the players want to approach the mission. While not under a pressing time constraint, they should not waste a lot of time here, as Kalidasa is heavily defended with at least two FWL militia forces temporarily stationed in the system.

Gamemasters may want to play up the angle with Mr. Askai. Who exactly is his employer, and why this specific Word of Blake force in this particular system? What part does Kalidasa play in the bigger picture?

NEXT TRACK

Celestial Calamity; Grim Death



CHAOS UNLEASHED: CELESTIAL CALAMITY

CELESTIAL CALAMITY

"Highness, they come as we were told. The Mask has succeeded lately in getting timely intelligence."

"Indeed, Colonel."

"Though I must say, it will put a damper on the coming ceremonies. I know the Chancellor ordered fireworks, but of this magnitude?"

"Yes, the 'Celestial Wisdom' has allowed his unique sense of humor to arise frequently these days. I must admit, in these things, he seems almost...prescient."

"Perhaps his time in the dark has truly perfected him. Such foresight bodes well for us, I would imagine."

"As long as we share the same path, Colonel. Nevertheless, our Capellan friends are threatened, and what kind of betrothed would I be if I allowed my groom to stand alone against these thrice-damned Blakists?"

SITUATION

Orbital Insertion, Polar Orbit

Sian, Capellan Confederation

13 September 3070

The mysterious Mr. Askai has returned with yet another lucrative deal. This one's a doozy: assist the Suns in an all-out assault on Sian. Retribution, you figure, for the way the Capellans humiliated Duke George Hasek. Only a few mercenary forces have been selected for this "honor," mainly as fast-strike forces to hit secondary targets. You receive assurances that a sizeable naval force will draw most of the aerospace defenses to facilitate your combat drop, but that's all your employer is saying. Once you've destroyed your target, the extraction zone coordinates will be transmitted and a Free Capella transport will spirit you away during the main assault.

Riiiiiiight.

It all sounds well and good, but you call in some massive favors to guarantee you won't end up in a Cappie prison. A little inflation goes a long way—and in cases like this, splitting the revenue with other mercs isn't all that bad. You can spend the dough if you're still alive.

CHAOS UNLEASHED: CELESTIAL CALAMITY

GAME SET-UP

CBT: Use any Terrain Maps.

AT2: Use Space maps or any terrain.

RPG: Use any terrain.

Attacker

The Attacker consists of up to 100 percent of the players' total force and up to a full battalion of the Dragon's Breath mercenary force. The Attacker may enter the battlefield from any direction, including a combat drop (if applicable).

Defender

The Defender may field up to 200 percent of the Attacker's total deployed force and consists primarily of the Third Canopian Fusiliers, augmented by elements of the Death Commandos (at a rate of one Death Commandos lance for every full company of Fusiliers units). One of every four defending units may be deployed per Hidden Units rules (see p. 83 *BMR*), if using *CBT* or *CBT: RPG* rules. If played as an *AT2* track, one of every four defending units must be withheld at the start of the scenario, to enter on a later turn (secretly predetermined by the defending player). All of the Defender's units are Elite and will not retreat or surrender under any circumstances.

WARCHEST

Track Cost: 2,000 WP

Optional Bonuses (all bonuses cumulative):

+800 Hurricane (planetside only): Use the *Blizzard* rules (see p. 153, *CBTComp* or p. 11, *MT*).

+800 Unexpected defenders (space only): Add elements of a Regular CCAF naval aerospace fighter squadron to the Defender's force. These additional forces should equal 50 percent of the Attacker's total deployed force.

Victory Bonuses (not cumulative):

+1,750 Partial Victory: Complete one objective.

+2,700 Total Victory: Complete both objectives.

OBJECTIVES

1. Retribution: Destroy 50 percent of the Defender's force.

2. Survival of the Fittest: More than 50 percent of the Attacker's force must survive at least fifteen turns.

SPECIAL RULES

The following rules are in effect for this track:



CHAOS UNLEASHED : CELESTIAL CALAMITY

Dragon's Breath

Recently battered by the ongoing strife in the Draconis Combine, and still struggling with a longstanding debt to the Lyrn Alliance, this BattleMech battalion (augmented by a company of aerospace fighters picked up during their hasty retreat from Keisen) is all that remains battle-worthy of a once-great regiment. The Dragon's Breath has Regular experience. When building this force, roll on the D column of any Random Assignment Table: Mercenary (see p. 126, *FMMercs*).

The Dragon's Breath MechWarriors are adept sharpshooters with an eye toward salvage, and so can reduce the penalty for Called Shots by 1 (see p. 34, *BMR*).

More information on the Dragon's Breath appears in *MS2* (p. 31).

Third Canopian Fusiliers

As the dominant defending force, the Third Fusiliers' controlling player rolls Initiative for the Fusiliers and their Death Commando support. During any turn in which the Third Fusiliers wins the Initiative, they may move half their current units (round down) after all attacking units have moved first.

Time Minimum

In order to fulfill the requirements of the contract, the Attacker must remain on the battlefield for a minimal amount of time in order to draw Capellan troops away from the real objective—the Forbidden City. For every turn after the fifteenth that the Attacker retains at least 50 percent of their force, the Attacker earns an additional 250 Warchest Points. These points cease to be awarded once the Defender falls below 50 percent of his total deployed force.

Gift

If the player group achieves a Total Victory, Mr. Askai's employer gifts the merc command with equipment appropriate to its makeup (up to 10 percent of the players' total force as determined at the end of the track). To determine what units the player group receives, roll on the A column of any Random Assignment Table: Federated Suns (see p. 139, *Field Manual: Federated Suns* or p. 225, *Field Manual: Updates*).

AFTERMATH

Pissed doesn't begin to describe it. Bad intel? How about the fact that your little crystal eight ball gave more reliable intel than those damn Feddies? Not to mention that the only forces you saw hitting Sian were unmarked, which meant your "allies" could've been *anyone* out there. FedSuns, League, Blake—hell, even the Taurians!

All you know is that when you landed, nothing was where it was supposed to be and the place was crawling with Canopian and Death Commando troops. Yeah, you kept them from reinforcing wherever they were going, but the Dragon's Breath bought it. So much for favors. At least they shielded some of your boys and girls from getting smeared all over the planet's surface.

Mr. Askai offered an apology for the poor intelligence. Not much solace there, though that big fat bonus he gave you helped ease just a bit the anger you felt like venting on him. Okay, so he took care of your command, but you can't help feeling something's not right. It's almost like he's got a chip on his shoulder against mercs. Or maybe he just doesn't like the way you look.

Well, at least with the gigantic wad he dropped into your account, you can rest a bit before tearing back into your next target.

ADDITIONAL HOOKS

Fouled Up Beyond All Recognition sums up this nightmare-gone-wrong contract. So what *did* go wrong? Who the hell hit Sian? And how did those fanatic Commandos and Fusiliers know just where you were coming?

Expansion Ideas

From combat drop to extraction, a lot happens in this track. Being hunted isn't a fun feeling, but maybe the players can turn the tables and take some Capellans with them.

NEXT TRACK

Grim Death



CHAOS UNLEASHED: GRIM DEATH

GRIM DEATH

"I'm telling you it's not an option, Colonel Haarhar. I cannot condone such brutal police-state tactics, no matter what kind of violence is occurring out there."

"Dammit, Garin, you're making things too easy for those malcontents. You think they care about freedom and privacy anymore?"

"Yes, I know. Same old argument from you. But if we throw away our freedoms so that a military force can proclaim themselves judge, jury and executioner, we may as well ask the Capellans to take over."

"Look, Governor Latronis, I respect your views, but—" [repeated beeping] "Oh, shit."

"What now, Colonel? Another terror strike?"

"Worse. Invaders. Someone's taken an interest in Sheratan after all. We've got inbound bogies with no IFF from the pirate point."

"Maybe they've come for repairs, or they're on furlough."

"No, Governor Latronis. I suspect they've come to settle the question of who gets to run Sheratan once and for all."

SITUATION

Inbound, Pirate Point K-E7

Sheratan, Chaos March

29 November 3070

Just when you thought things were finally settling down, your Galatean liaison nabs a sweet little deal offered by a "concerned Federated Suns citizen." Backtracking this mysterious employer's identity confirms connections to several Suns and League corporations, with the money to back the sizable contract. So even though you'd like to give your people some rest and refit, it's too good to pass up. Well, that and the fact that you're the only merc command nearby with free time.

The simply worded contract says, "Eliminate the Grim Determination from Sheratan." That's it. Someone out there either has a massive grudge against those hard-luck mercs or wants them removed from the system so whoever it is can swoop right in—which makes the Federated Suns connections a lot clearer.

The Grim Determination has suffered constant terror strikes in and around their bases, as well as around the facilities housing the planetary government—which seems to have pro-Davion leanings, but likes to play the independence game, too. Best guess? Someone down there wants to make a power play and shove the system firmly into the Feddie camp. And they want you to do the dirty work.

Okay. As long as the credit's good.

CHAOS UNLEASHED: GRIM DEATH

GAME SET-UP

For any game system—*CBT*, *AT2* or *CBT: RPG*—use any Terrain Maps.

Attacker

The Attacker consists of 100 percent of the players' total force. This contract calls for the elimination of the Grim Determination as a viable combat command, so the players may use all the assets at their disposal. They have, in essence, free rein.

Defender

The Defender consists of the Grim Determination mercenary regiment. At no time when engaged with the Attacker should the Defender exceed 100 percent of the players' total deployed force.

WARCHEST

Track Cost: 1,800 WP

Optional Bonus Points (all bonuses cumulative):

+500 Groundswell of support: The Sheratan militia sides with the Grim Determination to help save the planet from invasion. Increase the Defender's total force by 25 percent with Green units.

Victory Bonuses (not cumulative):

+2,500 Total Victory: Complete the objective.

OBJECTIVE

Eliminate the Grim Determination: Destroy the mercenary command as a viable combat force (as determined by the game-master).

SPECIAL RULES

The following rules are in effect for this track:

Grim Determination

A troubled mercenary force with a storied past, the Grim Determination has suffered constant terrorist attacks on Sheratan

CHAOS UNLEASHED : GRIM DEATH

for a few years. Ever since the dissolution of the Second Star League, this command has seen an upswing in violent attacks against it and the pro-Federated Suns government. Increased demands by the people for the system to rejoin the Suns is met almost daily with deadly attacks against government officials, military installations, and most recently, power stations, railways and the massive DropPort.

The Grim Determination is a Regular command; for equipment, roll on the C column of any Random Assignment Table: Mercenary (see p. 126, *FMMercs*). When randomly determining force composition, the Grim Determination player may not choose any assault 'Mechs and should re-roll any heavy units that have a Walking/Cruising MP of 4 or less, taking the second result regardless of its MP. In addition, the Determination suffers a -1 Initiative penalty when operating in any formation larger than a company, reflecting its greater emphasis on small-scale warfare and mobility.

AFTERMATH

Breaking a merc force is satisfying and painful. It's got the potential for good PR if played right—or a disaster if the wrong message gets out. So far, breaking the Determination has been neither good nor bad. Absorbing most of the mercs' assets into your own after shattering them was a fat plus, but you have to absorb all their problems, too—like the continued violence now directed at your people as the sole military force on Sheratan.

Sniper attacks, bomb threats and even an exploding package—you get the distinct feeling someone doesn't want any military presence here. So within hours of accounting for the last of the Determination's assets, you boost.

Three days later, you catch wind from the local INN feed that it wasn't the Feddies who wanted the system—it was the Word

of Blake. They've had some business with the planetary government for years, and this new Precentor who just showed up—one Garin Latronis—just declared the system's formal adoption into the Word of Blake Protectorate... Wait, wasn't that Latronis guy the former governor?

Not that it's your business. Actually, Blakist money is worth a hell of a lot more than Suns currency...and you just noticed a fat bonus in your account. Where there's war, there are mercs. What could be better than that?

ADDITIONAL HOOKS

Players may approach this track in an infinite number of ways, and gamemasters should be prepared for anything. Exploring the relationship between the Word of Blake, the Sheratan planetary government and the terror groups might uncover some ugly—or not-so-ugly—truths. Who's funding whom, and what kind of power play is going on here? Who *really* hired you to off the Grim Determination?

Expansion Ideas

While not a planetary invasion per se, gamemasters should help players decide what the best routes may be to destroy the Grim Determination. The possibilities are as endless as the configuration of the player group. Gamemasters can stretch out any number of scenarios into a linked campaign to fit this track.

NEXT TRACK

None. Repair and refit while awaiting the next campaign!



connection/JIHAD HOT SPOTS:3070/section09: TAKING STOCK

TAKING STOCK





TAKING STOCK

After we compiled the reports of the past two years, we received even more recent articles that have yet to be exhaustively researched and verified. But while the reliability of these reports remains suspect, those presented here offer glimpses of events that we at INN feel may yet have deeper significance in the times ahead, possibly too much significance for us to ignore. We therefore present these supplemental reports with the sage advice of eternal vigilance to our readers: take the following information, follow up with your own research and draw your own conclusions. Because this war isn't just about nobles, politics, power plays and territory. It is about the very fabric of our humanity, as the Word of Blake seeks to destroy our way of life, our will.

Let us hope we can survive it.

—Michael Bosworth, INN Special Correspondent

RENDER UNTO CAESAR...

Honored Caesar:

I regret to inform you that the II Legio has left Paulinus. The Secunda Cohors, under my command, suffered sixty percent casualties, two-thirds of which should be recoverable within a month, while the Quinta Cohors under Legatus Geddy West suffered 25 percent losses, most of which should be back in service under the same time-frame. The soldiers of the Secunda Cohors fought well, given that we were pushing back a group of Lothian rebels who boasted mercenary support twenty percent in excess of our own. During the last assault, however, a second force—displaying tactics similar to the Black Warriors—hit us from behind. They destroyed our logistical support units and assaulted my command century. I personally held them off with my forces until the cohort could pull back and regroup.

Normally I would take full responsibility and blame for such a failure. However, the Quinta Cohors had two goals: keep peace in the cities and protect my rear. They did neither. Rather, I was forced to pull back until I reached them. Apparently, Legatus West heard rumors of a Star League facility and went in search of it. I can confirm the Legatus' assertions that he found it; I hope the knowledge of the *Dukempic Foods Flavor Research Center* may allow the Hegemony to achieve the glory it so deserves. I'm sure Legatus West can propose a plan for investigating that while I work to re-take Paulinus for the Hegemony.

Your loyal servant,

Legatus Eren Tloth

—Personal communiqué reportedly found among the remains of an MHAF command post on Paulinus by the Ghosts of Lothario resistance group, dated 17 July 3070

FREE WORLDS REJECT COMSTAR AID

(12 August 3070)

Orestes [INN]—The Word of Blake launched its campaign to disrupt the Inner Sphere's interstellar communications back in 3068. Even now—two years and millions of man-hours of effort

later—the HPG network has yet to be completely restored. Thanks to the dedication and skill of ComStar technicians, great strides have been made in the Lyran Alliance, Draconis Combine and Federated Suns to clean up the disruptions and delays caused by Blakist program viruses and interference. These nations continue to benefit from our services, enjoying a close relationship with ComStar. Unfortunately, without our aid, progress has been painfully slow in the Free Worlds League and Capellan Confederation. Both nations made the critical mistake of relying on the breakaway Word of Blake. Now, with their communications in shambles, the Confederation and the League are suffering great difficulty coordinating their defense against the Blakists.

Understanding the need for unity in these difficult times, Primus Gavin Dow has extended an offer of aid to these two beleaguered states, citing that to date, only ComStar has proved that we possess the resources and skills needed to restore the HPG network to its former capacity. Regretfully, Precentor Adrian Marsh's mission to members of the Free Worlds Parliament has met with reactions ranging from disinterest to outright hostility.

"It appears the League chooses to judge us by the actions of our former brothers and sisters," Marsh reported after departing League space.

Meanwhile, contact with Precentor Maria Hess' mission to offer similar aid to the Capellan Confederation has ceased, though officials on Orestes express optimism that this situation is temporary.

REVENGE ABOVE ALL

I am tired.

I'll never let the crew know it, but I am loath to face the fact that age is winning this battle. Time is beginning to take its toll and I am not happy about it.

It's all those damn Davions' fault. By locking me up for so long, they have stolen decades of my life. If they'd stayed out of my business and let me alone, I'd not be so insistent on burning their ships and killing their people.

Or maybe not. I have to admit, I enjoy putting those puling Davions in their place. It's a matter of pride to see those "high and mighty" House Lords cower because of my actions. I am flattered they spent so much time and effort in capturing me, and in that hole they called my prison! How many D-bills did they burn just to keep me contained?

More than I've stolen from them, I'll wager. But pretty soon I'm sure I'll pass up that total. After all, my debt to them hasn't been repaid yet. They still owe me many, many years of madness for stealing the best years of my life away.

That pile of uranium back in '67 was only the beginning. I still have that *Leopard*—the *Strawberry Bitch* (Such a fitting name; very symbolic, I think). The first of many payments the Davions owe me.

Now it's time to rest and refit. Gerous and Michael are due back soon with more reinforcements. They managed to get the *Shen-sé Tian* to see things my way. Our burning of Filtvelt went

TAKING STOCK



wonderfully, and we snagged those prizes Kernoff wanted in the Orgona Mountains. Never seen a a storehouse like that before—need to see if I can get more info on another one somewhere from Kernoff—or better yet, from Cameron. But for now, we wait for Vicore to get us another shipment. With new bodies, I'll need new machines to put them in.

Then I can get back to killing more Davions. They've got many more payments to make and I intend to collect every last one.

—Excerpt from a purported journal entry by Paula "Lady Death" Trevaline, dated 31 August 3070

BLAKE'S NEW PROGRAM

So why did they leave WarShips parked over New Avalon, Luthien, Tharkad and Northwind? Yeah, I know, they needed them for the initial invasion. They're WarShips after all. They're nice for laying down firepower on the battlefield, assuming you don't get under your own fire. And if you're going to send in strikes against other targets, you definitely want them leading your flotilla of DropShips.

So why did the Word of Blake leave WarShips parked over four planets that can really be defended by their super DropShips? What can be so important about these systems that a traditional blockade will not suffice?

Answer: That's where the Word of Blake is setting up their "re-education" camps.

Brainwashing is a better way to describe it, considering the things I've been hearing. Guys going in, never coming out save for the off-planet transports that launch every week. Some of the people going in are your regular Joes, save for the fact that the Word is taking able-bodied warriors. But everybody with prior military service is at the top of the list. And nobody is exempt. I saw pictures of two kommandants and a major-general going in. Guys you wouldn't think would be handed a rifle and stuck on the line.

When the Lyran government found out about these camps, they sent in a small detachment to attempt a rescue. Led by the semi-famous Harry "Herbie" Clemens, the unit managed to evade Word of Blake patrols for a week as they slowly worked their way toward their goal. The mission was classified, but I did manage to get the name of the mission's second: Jon Clark. Sadly, the mission failed; the entire unit was captured or killed.

The biggest surprise is that the Word of Blake actually distributed a press release about it! They did not name their opponents, but they noted that Demi-Precentor Ricky "Rumor" Iguchi and his Level II (seconded by Adept Tom Brainard) battled unknown forces outside Tharkad City around the time the Lyrans were in the area.

In any case, we have the Word of Blake expanding its pool of military forces through less-than-honorable means. Four strongholds, four important words, and the best people to put up any resistance are being turned into foot soldiers for the next round of assaults by the Word. The only question is, where will it end?

—Renegade Kestrel InterWeb posting by "Starling," 1 October 3070

AUTOPSY REPORT: MORI, S.

Autopsy Report: Mori, S.

Date: 31 October 3068

Attendees: Dr. Irene Quershí, Dr. Peter Olsen (Trainee)

[0925: Voice activation enabled]

[Quershí]: "Autopsy of female, approximately octogenarian, primarily of Asian descent. Victim has minimal bruising and lividity. Large wound across the neck, ventral to dorsal, ragged and uneven. Apparent cause of death—"

[Olsen]: "Apparent? C'mon, IQ, we know she was killed with a shard of glass..."

[Quershí]: "Trainee Olsen, that's enough. We conduct a complete autopsy for every patient. And that's *Doctor* IQ to you. Continuing...we have post-mortem bruising on the face. Oh, such a nice person, a broken rib too. Okay, hand me the saw, we're going to crack her chest..."

[Olsen]: "Yes, ma'am."

[Quershí]: "Stop sulking and using that 'ma'am' stuff, or you're buying lunch. Let's see what we've got in here. You get the stomach contents; I'm going to look at the cardiovascular system. Lungs look pretty good...heart...ahhhh..."

[Olsen]: "What is it?"

[Quershí]: "Kilen-Watts Syndrome. Parasitic infection causing degeneration of the smooth muscles. Destroys the heart. Advanced state. She could've had only few weeks to live anyway, and didn't even know it. This little bugger can lie dormant for quite a while and then boom; you never see it coming. Let's check out the cranium. What do you have on the stomach...?"

[Olsen]: "Nothing unusual. A little wine, some fish and rice, a light dinner..."

[Quershí]: "Wine, eh? Let's weigh the brain and check the tox results..."

[1053: Standby]

[1223: Resumed]

[Quershí]: "Brain weight slightly above normal. Tox scans show nothing other than a little alcohol, 0.02 percent BAC. Short a few pints. Okay, I'm calling it death due to exsanguination. Rest in peace, Primus."

[1302: Autopsy Concluded]

—Autopsy report on Sharilar Mori, late Primus of ComStar, declassified by ComStar Archives 1 November 3070

WHO IS "THE MASTER"?

(1 November 3070)

Alexandria [INN]—Is it destined to become one of the great unanswered questions of the age? Will future generations look back, asking it in the same breath as, "Who assassinated First Lord Simon Cameron?" and "Whatever happened to the LAS *Arthur Steiner-Davion*?"

Who is "The Master"? Who is this shadowy figure rumored to be running the Word of Blake, possibly since its inception?



TAKING STOCK

Are we fated to know this “Master” only as a shadowy figure lurking in the background, manipulating events like some Illuminati bogeyman?

Could it be William Blane? This is the most obvious answer. Considering how many prominent members of the Word of Blake stood out before him, it is amazing that Blane rose to such high position—effectively becoming the Blakist Primus in all but name. Look a little closer and a pattern emerges—a pattern of all opposition to the seemingly benign William Blane being removed with ruthless efficiency. Though he has not appeared in public since the assault on Tharkad, Blane remains a prime candidate.

Another startling theory that recently surfaced proposes that the “Master” is none other than Hanse Davion. For years after the Fourth Succession War, rumors circulated that “the Fox” created a double using cutting-edge cosmetic surgery at the NAIS. Some now believe it was this double—and not the First Prince—who died in 3052, and that the real Hanse was content to remain “dead” until the FedCom Civil War ripped apart everything he had worked so long to create. Using deep-cover agents who had infiltrated ComStar, Hanse allegedly manipulates as “the Master” from behind the scenes, creating conditions ripe for his return to reunify the Inner Sphere under his control.

Another theory claims that the Word of Blake is under the control of another as-yet unknown group. Just who could be pulling the Blakists’ strings remains a hotly debated subject, including such outlandish notions as the descendants of Clan Wolverine or perhaps even intelligent aliens.

TRAGIC NEWS FOR THE ALLARD-LIAOS

(15 November 3070)

St. Ives [XSFP]—With the deepest regret, XSFP must announce that tragedy has once more visited the noble house of Allard-Liao. Still mourning the loss of Duchess Candace Allard-Liao, and the sacrifices made in the recent defense of Tian-tin, Duke Kai Allard-Liao’s family has suffered yet another blow, with news released today that the duke’s eldest son, David Lear, is missing and presumed lost along with the passengers and crew of the JumpShip *Capellan Star*.

When the *Capellan Star* failed to arrive on schedule at Milos five weeks ago, authorities immediately launched an extensive search of the surrounding systems. No trace of the *Merchant*-class JumpShip or its attached *Monarch*-class liner has been discovered, and today CCAF officials formally declared the vessels lost. While authorities consider an engineering casualty during jump to be the most likely cause, the possibility of Davion or Blakist interference cannot be ruled out.

David Lear will be remembered for his unceasing efforts on behalf of the Capellan people in the latest reconstruction efforts on Sian. A promising new student at the prestigious University of Sian, seventeen-year-old David was traveling home to St. Ives to be with his family for the New Year.

Our thoughts and prayers are with the Allard-Liao family in this time of loss.

HOLDING THE LINE

(3 December 3070)

New Syrtis [NSNS]—Last week, Beid became the latest FedSuns world to suffer the horror of the Blakist scourge. A raiding force believed to be operating from Kittery, Maladar or Redfield struck at the planetary capital of Newpost.

Initially, the attackers—reportedly comprised of three or four Level IIs of ‘Mechs and infantry—threatened to rout the poorly equipped local militia, but at the last moment a demi-company of AFFS BattleMechs materialized on the invaders’ flank. Thrown into confusion and facing a reinvigorated militia, the Blakists fell back to their DropShips and fled the system.

When the dust settled on Beid, it became clear that the heroes of the AFFS formation were led by Lieutenant David McKinnon, cousin of Ross McKinnon, captain of the legendary Fox’s Teeth command. Lieutenant McKinnon had cobbled together his relief force from a medium lance temporarily stranded on Beid by a malfunctioning DropShip, along with wounded MechWarriors and damaged BattleMechs in transit back from the Capellan front.

Always outspoken and controversial, Lieutenant McKinnon augmented his ad-hoc command with salvage taken from the retreating Blakists. Speaking from the cockpit of a captured *Black Knight*, McKinnon has announced his intent to remain on-planet and protect Beid until such time as the AFFS command sees fit to dispatch an adequate garrison force.

On New Syrtis, Field Marshal Nathaniel Hasek has yet to comment on McKinnon’s disregard of his existing orders to rejoin the Twentieth Avalon Hussars. Such grand—and possibly futile—gestures will surely do little to redeem McKinnon’s already colorful record.

OVER AND OUT

Rho/Chi:772-ECHO-1029:09.12.70

Precentor Degora—

We finally finished the critical repairs to relay TF4—the “white-out” virus apparently hit most of our relays into Clan space in addition to affecting the HPG-A stations. When we burned through the backlog of gibberish and noise, we managed to download a few gigabytes of messages from our other operatives in the homeworlds as well as some SLDF business. This one seems important, but considering that Tukayyid is a wasteland at this point, I’m unsure where to route it.

I’ve got one more batch to dump out of TF4, but I’m giving my team some time off to recharge. We’ve been at this for two months straight, and we still have five more relays to check. Hopefully we can access them via our HPG; I’d hate to have to send out a team to physically repair them. If it comes to that, I’d recommend it get slotted low on the priority list. Any batch messaging in those will be too outdated to address anyway.

—Stephan

TAKING STOCK

>>Message Date 08/03/68

To: Colonel Andrew Redburn, SLDF

Pardon me for being frank, sir, but it's all gone to hell. I don't even know if you'll get this or not; we've not had any communications from any agency in the Inner Sphere since before the Conference. I've been acting on my own command. I've tried to do what's right according to the Star League Articles we agreed to with the Clans, but it's just gotten out of hand.

We have arranged transport back to an Explorer Corps base—I believe it's called Columbus Station? The Ravens had heard of our situation and offered us a Trial for transport. I'm not completely surprised, as the last I'd heard from intel was that the Ravens had a fleet or two out in that direction. We are, however, leaving without Colonel Barclay and her ELH contingent. The Scorpions informed me that Barclay had accepted another Trial for the Looter complex and the troops therein, though her reasons elude me. Unlike the previous engagement, the ELH lost. Seems the Scorpions are adapting to standard war doctrine—from the battle ROMs I saw, they made no attempt to maintain Clan *zellbrigen*.

So we're abandoning all our nonessential equipment here. We only have room for our staff and important documents, though there's not much of that. I'll contact you from Columbus once we arrive in a few months' time. We can then discuss—if possible—this situation in full.

—EJL

COLUMBUS FALLS!

>>>999-ALPHA-11a7:23.12.70<<<

Precentor Martial:

After exhaustive work, we've finally finished downloading the remaining information from relay station TF9. This relay satellite is located outside of Columbus Station; we only recently coaxed the system back online. The virus that hit TF9 was different than the "white-out" bugs we saw to date, but until last night we couldn't figure out why. This attack on Columbus was planned. What concerns me most is that Blakists knew about TF9; we put that deep sat in place after the Schism, and only Precentor Luchenko, Precentor Trevaine and myself knew about it. I know where I stand on this...and I hope like hell Luchenko didn't turn, because I don't think Death himself would want to face Alexi in a dark alley.

But at least we know what happened to Columbus. Unfortunately, we can add yet more victims to the Blakist scourge—the tagged transmission date is December 3068, almost two years ago. I'll dispatch an EC crew ASAP just in case anyone still survives, but at this point it's going to take an act of God.

—Precentor Marko Stephenson

>>File attached<<

"ALERT! PRIORITY ONE RED S.O.S...."[static]...ease respond!
Repeating, this is Explorer Corps Commander Duncan Sinclair to any vessels within range of Columbus Station. We are in an emergency

situation and need immediate relief! The Word of Blake hit us three days ago and...[static]...rtsmouth is destroyed. The Roslare is destroyed. They burned the entire base to the ground. The 151st is gone, their barracks were vaporized. We've found no survivors...**ALERT! PRIORITY ONE RED S.O.S....**Blake WarShips just burned everything from orbit. All aerospace assets have been torched. We have almost no food and water. Power is minimal and draining. We need immediate evacuation before they come back...[static]...estimate six weeks at maximum rationing. Please assist! Will repeat this message until our power runs out. Main generator destroyed; we are operating on backup generator, not much fuel left... **ALERT! PRIORITY ONE RED S.O.S....**Any vessel, please respond! Repeating, this is Explorer Corps Commander Duncan Sinclair..."

>>End Attachment<<

HEAR THE WORD OF BLAKE

(31 December 3070)

Terra [VOICE OF BLAKE]—As the struggle to save humankind enters its fourth year, let us reflect on the progress made to date. In accordance with the plans laid down by the Blessed Blake—which our Master has revealed in all their glory—we have extended our protection to many worlds near to sacred Terra. Though the corrupt House Lords attempted to prevent us from bringing peace and security to worlds such as New Earth, Dieron and Demeter, we threw back the foul forces of Steiner, Kurita and Davion.

To our sorrow, the brave warriors of the SLDF were beguiled by the lies of the villains who allowed the Star League to fall. They turned down our offer of support and rejected our vision for the future. With great regret we were forced to fight against them.

Then Blessed Terra itself was attacked! But Blake gave us strength, and we stood firm against the onslaught.

Bringing enlightenment, we unmasked the puppet-Primus and the pretender who sat at the head of the Free Worlds League. We did not even have to take action against the spy, as Mori was slain by her own aide. Seeing the truth at last, many of our brothers and sisters returned to embrace the true Word of Blake. Just as heartening were the others who have chosen to join our great crusade, and many from the Free Worlds League flocked to our banner.

Once more we appeal to the peoples of the Inner Sphere! Embrace Blake's vision! Allow us to complete the mission with which he charged us! Re-create the Star League and usher in a golden age for all humanity.

People of the Inner Sphere, listen to us! Embrace Blake's wisdom or prepare to face the full fury of Blake's wrath!



RULES ANNEX



موزی

RULES ANNEX



The following section provides additional rules for the *Classic BattleTech* board game that cover new units and equipment. Though many of the units debuted during the Word of Blake Jihad (specifically, the period from 3068 to 3070), some—such as the weapons of mass destruction featured here—have seen widespread use in other eras, such as the Amaris Civil War and the First and Second Succession Wars.

Terminology: In these rules, the term unit is used as it is in the *BMR*, to refer to a single battlefield unit such as a 'Mech, vehicle or infantry platoon. The term *force* is used to denote a large combat formation, such as a regiment or Galaxy.

NUCLEAR WEAPONS

The best known and most common among modern weapons of mass destruction (WMDs), nuclear weapons come in a variety of sizes and styles. Most of these devices are throwbacks to the Amaris Crisis and the early Succession Wars, mothballed for so long that time has rendered them largely harmless. However, the technology to restore or replace them exists at the heart of the industrial nations in the Inner Sphere and Periphery, and in many cases through the centuries, ancient stockpiles have been opened and refurbished either for desperate measures or to maintain a secret level of nuclear readiness, despite the fact that nearly every civilized state in human-occupied space regards the use of such WMDs as morally repugnant.

It is important to note that these rules are not designed to replicate real-world nuclear weapons, or to simulate all the various ways in which such weapons can be delivered. Instead, these rules provide a relatively realistic framework for the use of “standard” nuclear weapons within *Classic BattleTech* and *AeroTech* 2 game play and within the established fictional setting of the *Classic BattleTech* universe. How these rules are implemented in game play is left up to the gamemaster and the individual gaming group. For example, the detonation of a WMD is effectively an “act of God” and will usually annihilate everything on a playing field. Therefore, in place of simply tossing a nuclear weapon into hex XX of a *CBT* game on four mapsheets and destroying everything, entire campaigns can be played in an effort to stop such a detonation from obliterating a vital target. Or a campaign may take place on the fringes of such a detonation, or gaming groups may generate “to survive despite the horror”-type scenarios and post-apocalyptic storylines. The possibilities are endless.

While nuclear weapons are the best-known WMD, other such weapons exist, including biological and chemical weapons, as well as more esoteric devices. Such WMDs will be covered in future Jihad-related sourcebooks.

GAME RULES

By and large, nuclear weapons should never be used in game play, as even the lightest of such devices can significantly alter

the outcome of a scenario or a campaign. To reflect this, nuclear weapons have no Battle Value to speak of. Game scenarios that use BV as a balancing factor should not permit the use of any nuclear weapons. More importantly, given the overwhelming nature of such weapons in standard game play, all players should read through these rules and agree to their use before play begins.

Nevertheless, for campaign purposes, any military force may acquire functional nuclear weapons. The Standard Nuclear Weaponry Table below indicates the most common nuclear weapon types found in the stockpiles of the various Inner Sphere and Periphery powers. To acquire such weapons, a force's controlling player need only spend the amount of C-bills indicated in the Weapon Acquisition and Costs Modifiers Table, and then make a 2D6 roll against the Availability Target Number (TN) of the weapon's class, modified as appropriate for the force's experience, reliability, size, affiliation and equipment ratings. A roll result equal to or exceeding the target number will grant the force one of the desired weapons. This roll may be made only twice per month, per type of weapon desired, by the force attempting to obtain such weapons. The C-bills are deducted regardless of success. Rolls made for larger commands may not be repeated for sub-forces (such as for a battalion within the same regiment) or vice versa (for each battalion and then the regiment they belong to) within the same month.

Classic BattleTech RPG: Though describing in detail the use and acquisition of nuclear weapons in *Classic BattleTech RPG* (*CBT: RPG*) campaigns is beyond the scope of this book, players and gamemasters wishing to do so may model their own attempts to obtain such weapons on these rules. In such an event, nuclear weapons are considered to have a *minimum* base Tech Level/Availability/Legality rating of C/E/F.

Consequences of WMD Use: Per Articles I and VI of the Ares Conventions, the use of WMDs is considered a “crime against humanity,” and by the letter of the law (even these largely defunct ones), any force that uses said weapons should be branded rogue by every state, including the force's own government. Reality, however, is not so cut and dried. In the fog of war, when the use of such weapons raises its ugly head—such as during the First and Second Succession Wars or the Amaris Crisis—it is all too common to find governments looking the other way, while finding a means to excuse the use of WMDs due to “extreme circumstances.” The Jihad, of course, is no exception. Especially with most governments already declaring the Word of Blake “rogue” for their reported WMD use, it is all too easy for such states to look the other way when one of their own retaliates in kind.

Given the complexities involved—based on era, the type of force wielding the weapon (House, mercenary or others), the general level of WMD use by various states at the time and so on—the gamemaster determines how the consequences of WMD use play out in a given campaign. Guidelines for rogue mercenaries appear on pp. 98-99 of *Mercenaries Supplemental II*; gamemasters are free

RULES ANNEX

NUCLEAR WEAPON ACQUISITION COSTS AND MODIFIERS

Base Weapon Cost: Base Availability TN x Kiloton Yield x 25,000 C-bills

Base Availability TNs	Force Size/Rating Modifiers	Force Affiliation/Equipment Modifiers
Davy Crockett-I 19	Elite -2	Word of Blake/Taurian Concordat* -3
Davy Crockett-M 18	Regular +2	ComStar or Periphery (Non-Taurian) -2
Alamo 17	Green +3	Capellan, Free Worlds or Mercenary -1
Santa Ana 18	Fanatical -2	Clan (Any) +2
Peacemaker 20	Questionable +4	Equipment A or Clan Front-Line -1
Era: 2866-3067 +2	Per Full Regiment/Cluster -1 (max -3)	Equipment D-F (or Periphery C) +2

* Includes Calderon Protectorate

burst on the right. The *Secondary Radius* gives the maximum range of secondary effects from a CBT nuclear weapon strike, again with the ground burst radius (in hexes) to the left of the slash, and the airburst radius to the right. The *Crater Depth* caused by such nuclear weapons

to adopt elements of those rules and apply them as best suited to each gaming group's campaign, as well as specific circumstances.

Base Rules (CBT/AT2)

The statistics for the most common nuclear weapons in the CBT universe are listed in the Standard Nuclear Weaponry Table. This table covers only the tactical weapons used in the CBT universe (those with a yield of 500 kilotons or less). While larger strategic weapons have appeared in CBT's history—as high as 50 megatons in yield, deployed mostly during the days of the Amaris Coup and the early Succession Wars—their use in game play is beyond the scope of these rules.

The weapons are listed in the order of their attack yields (in kilotons). Each weapon listed has a *Base Damage* rating, which defines its maximum damage in CBT points at ground zero (the hex of impact on a CBT map) and an *AT2 Capital Damage* rating, which gives its Capital-scale damage to armor (and its chance for a critical hit; see below). The *Degradation by Hex* values then define the rate at which the weapon's base damage drops off on the CBT board for each hex away from ground zero, indicating the rate of damage degradation in a ground blast on the left of the slash, or an air-

burst on a CBT map (ground strike only) is then given, indicating the number of levels of elevation an exploding weapon will dig up at ground zero (this crater depth reduces by one level for every 2 hexes from the impact hex, until it reaches the base terrain elevation). The weapon's range is given next in terms of its appropriate rules set (CBT or AT2), with CBT ranges—if any—appearing to the left of the slash and AT2 ranges to the right. Finally, the weapon's listed mass indicates (chiefly for cargo purposes) how much a given nuclear weapon weighs.

Specific details for using these weapons in game play are covered in the descriptions on pp. 134-135, but their effects in CBT and AT2 combat are the same once deployed:

Ground Zero Hex: The Ground Zero Hex is defined as the target hex where a nuclear device strikes. If the attack is a nuclear weapon in atmosphere (see p. 133), a Ground Zero Hex on a *Classic BattleTech* game board must be determined (this can be done by the gamemaster, randomly, or in some other fashion agreed upon by all players).

Any units and or buildings within the Ground Zero Hex are completely annihilated.

STANDARD NUCLEAR WEAPONRY TABLE

Weapon (Nuclear Yield)	Base Damage (Ground Zero)	AT2 Capital Dmg. (Crit)	Degradation by Hex (Ground/Air)	Secondary Radius (Ground/Air)	Crater Depth	Range (CBT*/AT2)	Mass
Davy Crockett-I (0.5 Kiloton)	100	1 (11+)	5 / 4	40 / 53	0	2 / NA	3 tons
Davy Crockett-M (0.5 Kiloton)	100	1 (11+)	5 / 4	40 / 53	0	As Launcher** / NA	1 ton
Alamo (5 Kilotons)	1,000	10 (10+)	23 / 17	86 / 115	1	20 / Medium†	5 tons
Santa Ana (50 Kilotons)	10,000	100 (9+)	109 / 82	184 / 245	3	10,000 / As Killer Whale†	50 tons
Peacemaker (500 Kilotons)	100,000	1,000 (8+)	505 / 379	396 / 528	5	20,000 / As Kraken†	100 tons

*In CBT boards (1 board = 17 hexes)

**Davy Crockett-Ms are deployed only by Long Tom or Arrow IV artillery units; use the base range as indicated by the launcher

†Range in AT2 game play (Alamo uses Detailed Weapon Range as AC/10; Santa Ana and Peacemaker as indicated capital missile)

RULES ANNEX

Crater Area: More powerful nuclear weapons, delivered in a ground burst, can create a crater in the terrain, the deepest point of which is inflicted at the Ground Zero Hex (the depth is indicated in the weapon's *Crater Depth* rating). For every two hexes away from the Ground Zero Hex, this crater depth reduces by one level, until it reaches a relative depth of 0.

All terrain, structures and units in this affected region are annihilated.

Blast Area (CBT): The Blast Area is defined as the total number of hexes on a playing map(s)—radiating outward from the Ground Zero Hex—within which a nuclear device delivers direct damage (this does not include *Secondary Effects*, see p. 133).

In a CBT game, unless annihilated at the Ground Zero Hex, within a Crater Area, or sheltered by a building, each unit in the Blast Area of a nuclear attack suffers damage as outlined below. For units in buildings, this damage affects the building first, then transfer any remaining damage to the units inside.

CBT units within a Blast Area suffer a number of points equal to the weapon's Base Damage, reduced by the number of points equal to the nuclear weapon's Damage Degradation rating times the number of hexes away from the Ground Zero Hex. (So, a unit standing 8 hexes from the Ground Zero hex of a ground-bursting Davy Crocket would suffer 60 points of damage, rather than the full 100 the weapon can generate: $100 [\text{Base Damage}] - [8 (\text{hexes away}) \times 5 (\text{Degradation by Hex})] = 100 - 40 = 60$.) This damage is delivered in 5-point clusters, determined using the attack direction that faces the Ground Zero Hex.

In a Blast Area, airborne units—such as VTOLs, airships, jumping BattleMechs and low-flying aircraft—operating within eighteen kilometers' height (3,000 levels) directly above the Blast Area also sustain full damage from the nuclear attack.

'Mech and airborne units within the Blast Area (that survive the damage) must make immediate Piloting Skill Rolls at a +6 modifier (in addition to all other applicable modifiers for massive damage and critical hits) to avoid falling or crashing. No roll is required for units without a Piloting Skill level.

Protecting Terrain: Outside of the Ground Zero Hex and the Crater Area, only intervening hills (or buildings strong enough to withstand the damage) may block the effects of a nuclear groundburst. To gain the protection of such terrain, the "hiding" unit must be di-

rectly adjacent to the hill or building, and the hill or building must be taller than the "hiding" unit's height and cannot be destroyed by the effects of the weapon's blast damage. If all these conditions are met and the "hiding" unit makes a 2D6 roll of 9+, the unit is successfully protected against the damage effects of the attack.

No terrain protects against a nuclear airburst.

Salvage: All units destroyed by a nuclear weapon attack (whether on the ground, in atmosphere or in space), whether located in the Ground-Zero Hex, a Crater Area, or damaged to the point of destruction within the Blast Area, are always considered to be unsalvageable.

Terrain Damage (CBT): Beyond the Crater Area, nuclear damage to terrain reduces all Woods and Jungle hexes by one level (from Super-heavy to Heavy to Light) for every 20 full points of damage inflicted against the hex. Woods or Jungle reduced below Light become Rough terrain, as does any non-water hex that suffers 200 points of damage or more. Water terrain within a Blast Area—but not within a Crater Area; all terrain in a Crater Area is annihilated—is reduced by one level for every 3,000 points of damage. Any "partially destroyed" water features immediately refill their lost space in the following turns based on the volume of water left to fill the area (and the gamemaster's discretion).

Any non-crater, non-water hexes within the Blast Area occupied by woods, buildings or units prior to a nuclear attack may be set aflame per the rules for *Fire* (see pp. 79-80, *BMR*); units set aflame are considered to be the target of a successful inferno missile attack, with a duration lasting until the end of the scenario, or until the unit is submerged, whichever comes first. For purposes

SECONDARY NUCLEAR EFFECTS TABLE

2D6 Roll*	Results
2-4	Unit is Destroyed (crew/pilot/troopers all killed; engines shut down; all applicable unit types suffer 1D6 critical hits**)
5-6	Unarmored infantry outside buildings are killed; armored infantry/infantry within buildings suffer 50% casualties (round up); Conventional and support vehicles suffer two critical hits, plus one automatic Crew Killed critical hit; 'Mech and fighter units suffer two critical hits and must make a Shutdown Avoid Check at 10+ (Pilots of these machines suffer four hits).**
7-10	Unarmored infantry outside buildings suffer 50% casualties (round up); armored infantry and infantry within buildings suffer 25% casualties (round up); conventional and support vehicles suffer one critical hit, plus one automatic Crew Stunned critical hit; 'Mech and fighter units suffer one critical hit and must make a Shutdown Avoid Check at 6+ (Pilots of these machines suffer two hits).**
11+	Unit sustains no damage

*Add +2 to the roll for combat vehicles, 'Mechs, battle armor and aerospace craft, as well as an additional +2 for any unit within a hardened structure.

**Critical hits are resolved randomly, the locations determined for each by rolling on whichever side of the unit faces the Ground Zero Hex.

RULES ANNEX

of this effect, consider this an attack on the terrain/building by an energy weapon. Non-Woods/non-Building hexes that qualify for this effect have a modifier of 0 for the roll.

Secondary Effects (CBT): The radioactive and electromagnetic effects of a nuclear attack disperse even farther than the blast and fire. To reflect these combined effects, all units and structures within twice the radius of the blast damage (and that are not already destroyed by the initial blast; see Standard Nuclear Weaponry Table, p. 131) must make a 2D6 roll and consult the Secondary Nuclear Effects Table on p. 132. Regardless of the outcome, all units within the effect radius will suffer electromagnetic interference (EMI) for the remainder of the scenario, including a +2 to-hit modifier for all Ranged Weapon Attacks and a -2 modifier to all Missile Hits Table rolls. No terrain protects against secondary nuclear effects, and all airborne units within the same radius are affected up to an altitude of eighteen kilometers (3,000 levels).

Multiple Attacks (CBT): Multiple nuclear weapon attacks against a target area are resolved separately, and do not stack for purposes of determining Blast Area and secondary effects. In the wake of a nuclear attack, additional effects may be imposed on the affected region, including continuous EMI as well as the effects of Toxic Atmosphere (Radiation) within the same area and all terrain "downwind" of the attack, for a number of kilometers equal to 2D6 x the weapon's kiloton yield. (See pp. 164, *Handbook: House Marik*, for detailed rules on Toxic Atmosphere effects; determine "downwind" using the *Spreading Fires* rule on p. 80, *BMR*.)

Nuclear Weapons in Space (AT2): In space, nuclear weapons must make actual contact to deliver their damage, as the effects of vacuum and the radiation shielding carried by all spacecraft sharply reduces their effectiveness. Furthermore, they must penetrate the target's armor sufficiently to make up for the loss of most of their yield in order to inflict any major damage. To reflect these effects, a successful nuclear attack against any AT2 unit in space inflicts the weapon's Capital Scale Damage value against the target. However, as with a capital missile hit, all nuclear weapons may inflict additional damage on a successful critical hit. The chances for a critical hit from each nuclear weapon are noted on the table in parentheses next to the Capital Scale Damage value; this critical chance replaces that of any similar capital missile on which the weapon may be based.

Instead of inflicting a critical hit as listed on the damage location table, a critical hit from a

nuclear weapon delivers ten times the weapon's normal Capital Scale Damage directly to the target's structural integrity (SI). However it is inflicted, damage to structural integrity by nuclear weapons is *never* halved. Additional critical hit effects resulting from damaged structural integrity are resolved normally.

Any target fortunate enough to survive the damage from a nuclear strike must make an immediate Control Roll with a +4 target modifier, but suffers no additional effects.

Nuclear Weapons in Atmosphere (AT2/CBT): In atmosphere, nuclear attacks against an aerospace unit use the same rules as those in space, but the attack receives a -2 to-hit modifier and any nuclear attack that hits its target automatically destroys it. If the attack occurs within eighteen kilometers of the planetary surface, treat the affected area on the surface directly below the

ALTERNATIVE ENVIRONMENTS TABLE

*Defending Unit is underwater and within the blast radius of...**

(Nuclear Airburst)

Divide damage to submerged targets by their current depth x 10 (based on pre-blast depth levels)*

(Nuclear Ground Burst)

Divide Damage Degradation Rate by 2**

*Nuclear Explosion is Subterranean...**

(At/Within Max. Crater Depth)†

Use standard rules for ground-burst attack, centered over ground zero.

(Over 1x to 2x Max. Crater Depth)†

Treat blast as standard ground-burst attack, using only 10% of base CBT damage at ground zero (damage degrades normally, centered over ground zero).

(Over 2x to 5x Max. Crater Depth)†

Treat area above the weapon's normal cratering area (radius of 2x crater depth, centered over ground zero) as a severe earthquake, imposing a +5 penalty on all rolls for the turn of detonation.

(Over 5x Max. Crater Depth)†

No effect.

Atmospheric Pressure‡

Vacuum

Multiply Damage Degradation Rate by 10

Trace

Multiply Damage Degradation Rate by 3

Thin

Multiply Damage Degradation Rate by 1.5

Standard

Multiply Damage Degradation Rate by 1

High

Multiply Damage Degradation Rate by 0.67

Very High

Multiply Damage Degradation Rate by 0.5

*Units underwater and units subjected to the effect of subterranean explosions at deeper than 1x the weapon's maximum crater depth do not suffer secondary effects.

**Underwater units add 1 hex of distance from ground zero count for each full 5 levels of depth. A "ground burst" is considered to be any nuclear attack that occurs at or near the water's surface.

†Crater depth for Davy Crocketts is considered 1.

‡Relative to Terran standard; round up fractions

RULES ANNEX



point of impact as the focus of an airburst attack by the same weapon; determine a Ground Zero Hex (see *Ground Zero Hex*, p. 131). Any other aerospace craft within the same low-altitude hex (or on the Radar Map, if using the *Abstract Ground Support Rules*, pp. 41-42, AT2) as the recipient of a nuclear attack must make a Control Roll with a +6 modifier (in addition to all other applicable condition modifiers). Failure indicates the unit crashes and is destroyed. Additional atmospheric effects may occur as determined by the gamemaster.

Special Conditions (CBT/AT2): As demonstrated between the space, atmospheric and surface-burst effects described above, nuclear weapons have different effects based on the environment in which they are used. While none of the weapons described here may be detonated underwater or can burrow underground, underwater units may be caught in the blast radius; likewise, combat in caverns underground may lead to sub-surface detonations that can affect other battlefield units in the vicinity. The Alternate Environments Table lists the modifiers for existing nuclear weapon effects based on such conditions as underground detonations, effects on underwater units and variable atmospheric pressures. Additional effects, such as those for alternative atmospheric compositions, may occur at the discretion of the gamemaster or with player agreement.

STANDARD NUCLEAR WEAPONS

The following rules outline the five most common types of nuclear ordnance used in the *Classic BattleTech* universe.

Davy Crockett-I

The versatile and compact Davy Crockett warhead has two different incarnations. This infantry support model—somewhat unpopular, as its range is too limited to keep the attackers out of harm's way—is a one-shot artillery weapon that includes a special launcher system and booster rockets to give the weapon respectable range. Only one may be deployed per conventional infantry platoon and automatically makes the unit a motorized platoon (reflecting the mobile launcher, which adds three tons to the base platoon weight). Platoons reduced to fewer than seven troopers may not operate the weapon. In all other respects, the Davy Crockett-I attacks as an artillery weapon, including shell-flight time and scatter rules.

The Davy Crockett-I always attacks as a ground burst.

Davy Crockett-M

Both versions of the Davy Crockett-M deliver the same damage. Essentially designed as the farther-reaching artillery version of the infantry model, the DC-M is a warhead upgrade for Long Tom and Arrow IV munitions. This version gains the same range and attack methods as its relevant weapon system (range dependent on launcher used), including shell flight times and the scatter effects of standard artillery ordnance. The modified munitions are

heavier than standard Long Tom shells or Arrow missiles, but otherwise function in the same way.

The Davy Crockett-M always attacks as a ground burst.

Alamo

The Alamo missile is a special fighter-carried space-to-space (or air-to-ground) nuclear ordnance designed for use by aerospace and conventional fighters. Though powerful and fairly lightweight, it occupies 10 bomb points on a fighter, imposing a corresponding loss of 2 Thrust Points for every Alamo carried.

The Alamo may not be fired from space into atmosphere or vice versa. As a space-to-space or air-to-air weapon, the Alamo has the range profile of an Autocannon/10 (both in standard-scale and Detailed Weapon Ranges), but it may be “fired” from an aerospace fighter at other targets in flight like a capital missile (and may be affected by Advanced Point Defense Weapons fire as appropriate). Resolve space-to-space Alamo attacks as indicated in the rules for Nuclear Weapons in Space (see p. 133), and air-to-air Alamo attacks as per Nuclear Weapons in Atmosphere (see p. 133).

Alamo attacks used in air-to-ground fire are treated as an off-board artillery attack with the base range equivalent of a Long Tom, using the equivalent off-board location corresponding to where the fighter ends its turn in the air (that is, a fighter 3 low-altitude hexes away from the target mapsheet treats the Alamo attack as artillery fire from 3 boards away). Alamos in flight move faster than artillery shells, however, and can traverse 10 boards per turn. Alamo missiles fired in this fashion may not be targeted by ground-based anti-aircraft or anti-missile systems.

At the moment of firing, the attacker designates whether the Alamo is to deliver an airburst or a ground burst.

Santa Ana

The Santa Ana is a Killer Whale ship-to-ship or ship-to-surface missile modified to carry a nuclear warhead. It may be launched per the normal capital missile rules from any Killer Whale or AR10 launcher, and follows the same profile as the Killer Whale for determining heat and range. It may be fired ship-to-ship, ship-to-surface and surface-to-orbit (from special multiple use, purpose-built silos) per standard AT2 rules, except as modified by the AT2 rules given above.

The Santa Ana may also be fired surface-to-surface to deliver a ground attack, carried out as if by a standard orbit-to-surface launcher. This attack may deliver a ground burst or an airburst at the attacker's discretion (declared upon firing). When delivering a surface attack, the Santa Ana uses artillery rules for targeting, but flies 144 boards (72 kilometers) per turn, to a maximum atmospheric range of 5,000 kilometers (10,000 boards). A Santa Ana surface silo is considered a Level 2 building with a CF of 100 and may be located in a 2-sublevel to reflect an underground silo. A missile silo destroyed before it can fire (or more than 70 points of

RULES ANNEX

damage delivered to the missile itself from units inside the silo) will render the weapon harmless.

Peacemaker

The largest of the tactical nuclear weapons, the Peacemaker is a bigger surface-launched missile that shares much in common with the Santa Ana except that it can only be launched from the surface (against spaceborne or surface targets) via a purpose-built silo, and uses the range profile of the Kraken capital missile, rather than the Killer Whale. The Peacemaker's silo may not be mounted

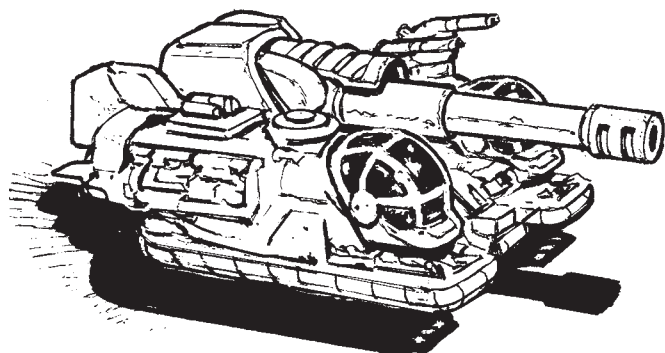
in any vessel or vehicle, and is considered a Level 3 building with a CF of 100, which may be located in a 3-sublevel to reflect an underground silo. If the silo is destroyed before it can fire, or the missile destroyed by taking more than 100 points of damage from units inside, the Peacemaker is rendered harmless.

Like the Santa Ana, Peacemakers maybe fired surface-to-surface similar to artillery, and travel 144 boards (72 kilometers) per turn. They have a maximum range of 10,000 kilometers (20,000 boards).

RULES ANNEX

NEW VEHICLES

The following section provides new battlefield units that debuted between 3068 and 3070.



SM1 TANK DESTROYER

Mass: 50 tons

Movement Type: Hover

Power Plant: 165 Standard Fusion

Cruising Speed: 86.4 kph

Flank Speed: 129.6kph

Armor: Advanced Compound Beta

Armament:

4 Series 2c Light Machine Guns

1 Type 10 Ultra Autocannon/20

Manufacturer: LAW-Barcella

Primary Factory: Barcella

Communications System: Unit 2J2 "Basher"

Targeting and Tracking System: Able-Seven Sensor Suite

Overview

When Clan Nova Cat debuted the Shoden assault vehicle in 3064, the tactics of the Clan changed with it. Slowly but steadily, the Nova Cats began to embrace the combined-arms doctrine

of Inner Sphere combat, with several vehicle crews beginning to shine among the Galaxies of the Cat Touman.

Bolstered by the success of the Shoden, Khan West authorized several new projects proposed by Nova Cat scientists to develop new combat vehicles. Nothing stood out in particular until Luthien Armor Works approached the Cats' merchant caste on Barcella in 3065. After several months of secret negotiations, LAW struck a deal with the Nova Cat merchants to help design and manufacture a cheap but deadly hovertank using Clan technology on a proven Inner Sphere design. In return, the Cats agreed to retool a defunct LAW vehicle factory on Barcella and allow the company to produce and sell the new combat vehicle, though the first five years of production would go directly to the Clan.

Capabilities

The design team's first priority was to make a vehicle platform—based loosely on the venerable Saladin—that could protect the vehicle crew from more common avenues of vehicle destruction, such as catastrophic ammunition explosions or internal fires. Using a concept first applied to underwater drilling submarines, LAW proposed a "dual bubble" design that would place two crew members each inside a bubble cockpit encompassed by almost 80 percent ferroglass. Positioned on either side of the large main gun, the total crew of four enjoys a 240-degree field of vision. More importantly, the bubbles incorporate an arrangement that functions like a BattleMech's cockpit ejection system. If a fire erupts in the body of the tank, the bubbles can "fire," launching the crew away from the ensuing explosion. Redundant controls in the two bubbles even allow this tank to continue operations (though at reduced efficiency) in the event of crew loss.

The "double bubble" cockpit made assembly easy for the LAW factory, as each half of the tank could be manufactured separately and then joined around the Ultra-series autocannon. A small remote turret containing four light-defense machine guns—operated via the cockpits' controls—would then be attached on the top.

RULES ANNEX

Despite the unusual appearance of the SM1 (dubbed the "Suicide Machine" by pilots reacting to the exposed feeling of the all-glass cockpits), prototype testing went without a hitch. After performing in a Trial of Position with a volunteer vehicle crew in front of several Galaxy commanders, the SM1 was overwhelmingly approved. LAW began cranking out the new tanks, with the initial production run ending on 5 December 3068.

Deployment

After initial reports of Sphere-wide attacks by the Word of Blake, LAW went into overdrive, tripling production in 3069. Despite disparaging remarks by Nova Cat warriors regarding the tank's unusual appearance, it has become a common sight among many Nova Cat Galaxies. Several SM1s have even been spotted in the Ryuken, apparently prizes won in Trials with their Nova Cat neighbors.

Type: **SM1 Tank Destroyer**

Technology Base: Clan

Movement Type: Hover

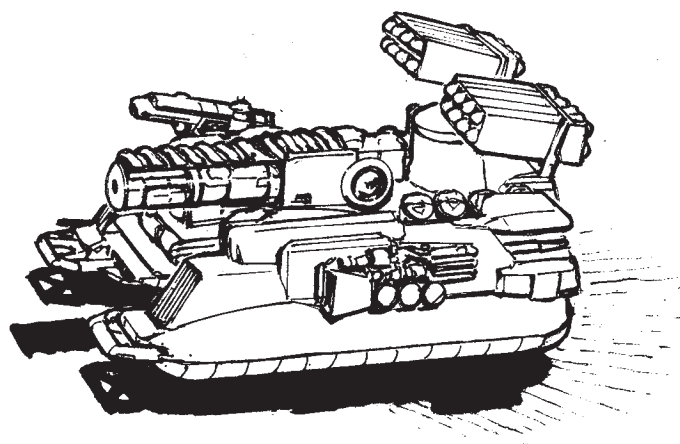
Tonnage: 50

Battle Value: 1,204

Equipment

		Mass
Internal Structure:		5
Engine:	165	10
Type	Fusion	
Cruising MP:	8	
Flank MP:	12	
Heat Sinks:	10	0
Control Equipment:		2.5
Lift Equipment:		5
Turret:		.5
Armor Factor:	144	7.5
	<i>Armor Value</i>	
Front	43	
R/L Side	29/29	
Rear	19	
Turret	24	

Weapons and Ammo	Location	Tonnage
Ultra AC 20	Front	12
Ammo (Ultra) 30	Body	6
4 Light Machine Guns	Turret	1
Ammo (LMG) 100	Body	.5

**CONDOR HOVERTANK (UPGRADED)**

Mass: 50 tons

Movement Type: Hover

Power Plant: Core Tek 215 XL

Cruising Speed: 97.2 kph

Flank Speed: 151.2 kph

Armor: Starslab/9.5 Ferro-Fibrous Mk II

Armament:

- 2 SureFire Mini-Guns
- 1 Valiant Arbalest LRM 15-pack
- 1 Mydron Excel 5SG LB-X AC

Manufacturer: Quikscell

Primary Factory: Richvale

Communications System: TharHes KR-A P/Comm

Targeting and Tracking System: TharHes Mars 1

Overview

The Red Devil Industries manufacturing plant on Pandora was lost when the Jade Falcons overran that world in 3064. However, just before the Clan assault, the Quikscell Company (another Pandora-based manufacturer) acquired the rights to several of Red Devil's products, among them the Condor hovertank. Quikscell had already begun relocating, and had moved one of its manufacturing lines to Richvale (at some cost to the Lyrans taxpayer). With the FedCom Civil War finally over, Quikscell aggressively targeted local militias (who had been stripped of equipment during or after the war) and regular forces desperate enough to buy almost anything, even products with Quikscell's reputation.

Capabilities

Quikscell's engineers faced the challenge of matching the hype coming out of the marketing department. Taking the Condor design, the engineers had the luxury of choosing from a smorgasbord of advanced technology that before the FedCom Civil War had been available in limited quantities only to the most favored manufacturers. Replacing the old 165 Jones ICE with a powerful

RULES ANNEX

215-rated XL engine, the new Condor could boast even greater speed and agility. Replacing the lasers with a turret-mounted LRM-15 launcher gave it the long-range striking power needed on the modern battlefield, and the new LB-X autocannon (with magazine space for a variety of ammunition types) promised to be an effective weapon against infantry and vehicles. The experiences of the FedCom Civil War prompted the addition of an extra machine gun, as conventional infantry (often better equipped and trained than ever) were beginning to pose far more of a threat than they had during the Succession Wars. When the design team finished, the upgraded Condor (sporting ferro-fibrous armor) bore little resemblance to the Red Devil Industries design of a decade earlier.

Deployment

Even the most optimistic projections fell short of the demand generated by an aggressive marketing campaign. With commands like the Fourth Skye Rangers and Sixth Lyran Guards leading the way, orders began to outstrip the capacity of the Richvale production line.

While hurrying to commission a second production line, Quikscell executive Burton Richards hit upon the idea of packaging the unassembled components and selling the Condor in kit form (at a small discount) to the growing list of impatient customers. The concept proved remarkably popular, though the resulting vehicles had problems with reliability in direct proportion to the competence of the tech crews given the task of assembling these "flat-pack" tanks. On more than one occasion, worried customers found themselves with an apparently completed Condor and a pile of unidentifiable components for which they could see no obvious use.

Following the surprise attacks by the Word of Blake after the dissolution of the Second Star League, demand for the Condor has continued to soar. Duke Robert Kelswa-Steiner has personally purchased two companies of this vehicle to help outfit the newly formed Second and Third Skye Guard.

Type: **Condor**

Technology Base: Inner Sphere

Movement Type: Hover

Tonnage: 50

Battle Value: 714

Equipment

Internal Structure:

Engine:

215 XL

Type

Fusion

Cruising MP:

9

Flank MP:

14

Heat Sinks:

10

Control Equipment:

Lift Equipment:

Power Amplifier:

Turret:

Armor Factor:

108

Armor

Value

Front

32

R/L Side

21/21

Rear

14

Turret

20

Weapons and Ammo

LB 5-X AC

Ammo (LB-X) 40

2 Machine Guns

Ammo (MG) 100

LRM 15

Ammo (LRM) 16

Location

Front

Body

Front

Body

Turret

Body

Mass

5

10

0

2.5

5

0

1

6

Tonnage

8

2

1

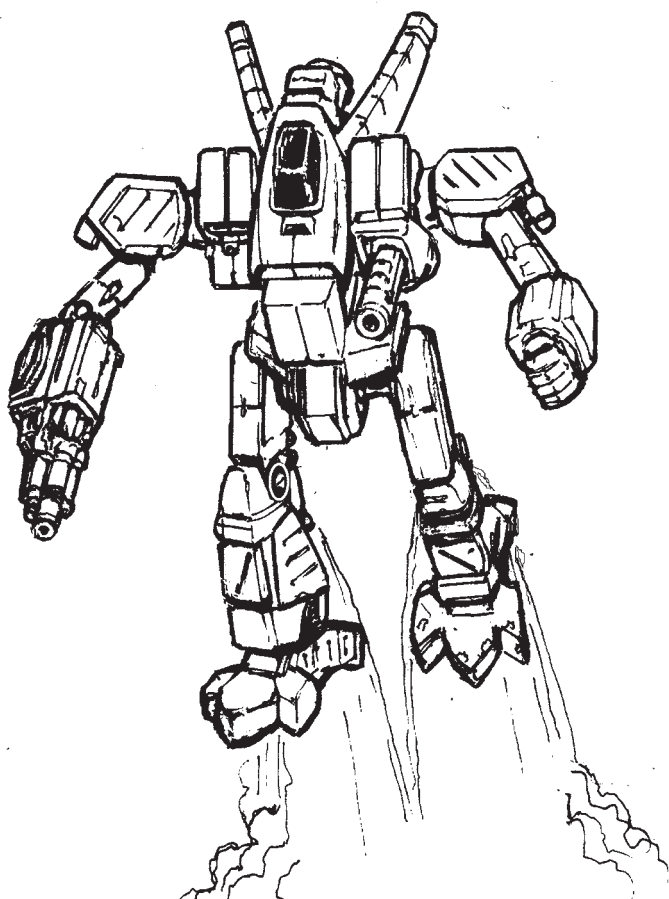
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RULES ANNEX

**OCELOT****Mass:** 35 tons**Chassis:** CurtissFox Ocelot**Power Plant:** 210 General Systems XL**Cruising Speed:** 65 kph**Maximum Speed:** 97 kph**Jump Jets:** Leaper Model L6**Jump Capacity:** 180 meters**Armor:** Forging FF01 Ferro-Fibrous**Armament:**

2 Series 2d ER Medium Lasers

1 Model X Heavy Large Laser

1 Irecian "Squealer" Light Active Probe

Manufacturer: Irece Alpha**Primary Factory:** Irece**Communications System:** Raldon R1**Targeting and Tracking System:** Dalban HiRez II**Overview**

When Clan Nova Cat was Abjured from Clan space, Khan Santin West knew his Clan needed a symbol of their rebirth. Having recently gained as *isorla* a Smoke Jaguar scientist team during the Cats'

frantic flight from Clan space, Khan West saw his opportunity in a vision. He quickly assigned a few Nova Cat scientists to the Jaguar group and charged them to develop a BattleMech that could be manufactured in quantity and quickly put on the front lines.

Capabilities

The project began with several failures, as the new design featured a light BattleMech centered on one heavy weapons system, much like the Lyran-produced *Hollander*. Clan-made ER PPCs were in short supply at the time, with much of the Nova Cats' stockpile going toward repairing their shattered touman after the brutal Abjuration, followed by the Combine-Ghost Bear War. In 3065, a chance encounter with a Diamond Shark trade fleet at Itabaiana jump-started the project. Winning a stockpile of Model X heavy lasers in a short and furious bidding war with Shark merchants, the Nova Cats found the weapon they needed (while incidentally laying the groundwork for the Sharks' eventual annexation of Itabaiana).

Taking a cue from Clan Wolf-in-Exile's *Pack Hunter* design, the Nova Cat scientists developed a light 'Mech chassis that could be manufactured with the Nova Cats' sparse resources in the Irece Prefecture. After initially attempting to duplicate that 'Mech's structural design, the development team found that the shoulder-mounted heavy laser was overbalanced. The focusing requirements of the laser needed more stability, so the designers placed it in the torso where special shock mounts could absorb the jarring impact of the 'Mech as it sped over the landscape. In addition, the awkward weight forced them to develop a sturdy "snub wing" design for the jump pack, keeping the new 'Mech balanced in flight so that warriors could fire the heavy laser with minimal loss of accuracy.

Deployment

In early 3067, the development team, which still included all of the original Jaguar scientists, displayed a functioning prototype for saKhan Devalis at the new Curtiss Fox plant on Irece. Not particularly impressed with the initial demonstration, the saKhan took the prototype out onto the live-fire range, much to the designers' horror. After taking down three 'Mechs in quick succession—a *Pack Hunter*, a *Kit Fox*, and an *Adder*—the saKhan returned to the dumbstruck scientists. When asked if he found the design acceptable, Devalis nodded and responded, with a cryptic smile, "Agile as a jaguar, swift as a panther, deadly as a Nova Cat. Though our warriors are superior in soul, it is good to have the weapon of the Jaguar. I welcome the *Ocelot* to the Clan so that we may merge the warrior spirit with the claws of battle."

Variants

Only one other variant has so far appeared, a prototype test bed equipped with one less heat sink, a half-ton less armor and without the light probe but sporting the more common extended-range PPC system.

RULES ANNEX

Type: **Ocelot**

Technology Base: Clan

Tonnage: 35

Battle Value: 1,422

Equipment

Internal Structure:

Engine:

210 XL

Walking MP:

6

Running MP:

9

Jumping MP:

6

Heat Sinks:

15 [30]

Gyro:

Cockpit:

Armor Factor:

119

Internal
StructureArmor
Value

Head

3

9

Center Torso

11

16

Center Torso (rear)

6

6

R/L Torso

8

12

R/L Torso (rear)

4

4

R/L Arm

6

12

R/L Leg

8

16

Weapons and Ammo

Location

Critical

Tonnage

Heavy Large Laser

LT

3

4

2 ER Medium Lasers

RA

2

2

Light Active Probe

H

1

.5

Jump Jets

LT

3

1.5

Jump Jets

RT

3

1.5

NEW DROPSHIPS: "POCKET WARSHIPS"

The following DropShip designs, which debuted in the early years of the Jihad, represent two of the first so-called "pocket WarShips." Similar in concept to the *Overlord-A3*, these vessels can oppose full-scale WarShips at a fraction of the cost—though this same mission role, regarded by many as suicidal at best, leaves the widespread deployment of such vessels in doubt.

EXCALIBUR-CLASS "POCKET WARSHIP" UPGRADE

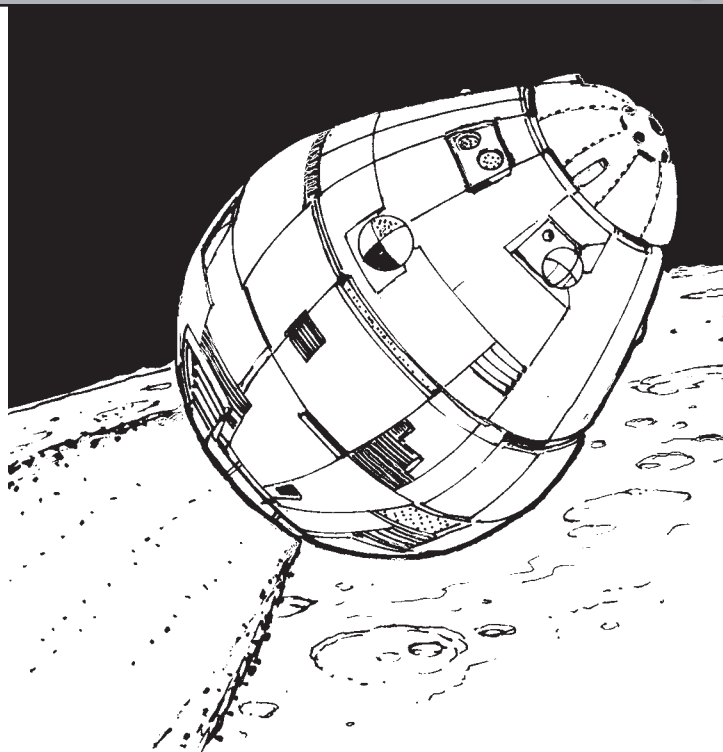
The unique genesis of the *Excalibur* "Pocket WarShip" is a testament to the trifecta power of nobility, money and boardroom connections, combined with the apparent blindness of the largest military bureaucracy since the first Star League.

While details remain few and not wholly confirmed, this project apparently originated with Interconnectedness Unlimited, an interstellar conglomerate currently struggling to reclaim its interstellar recognition after years of steady downturns and the loss of an ambitious Class Six Stadium on Solaris VII. Regardless of their diminished stature—or the growing firestorm of accusations of

potential Blakist dealings surrounding their doomed Solaris VII endeavor—the company, and the Steffebus family backing it, apparently garnered enough support to reach a deal with Duke Aleksandr Philip McCorkendale of Federated-Boeing Interstellar to refit several upgraded *Excalibur*-class DropShips on IU's D-bills. By law, such military upgrades fall under the auspices of the AFFS' Quartermaster Department, which means Field Marshal Melvin Israel Aleixandre likely signed off on the project. As rumors still swirl about "unauthorized depots" built by the DotQ before and during the FedCom Civil War, this is certainly possible.

However, considering the revenue spent on the AFFS' WarShip fleet, combined with the *Overlord-A3* and *Conquistador* assault DropShips already well in the planning stages at the time (the *Conquistador* by none-other-than Federated-Boeing) the reasons for the *Excalibur* refit remain unclear. Nevertheless, the ship is certainly a fully functioning test bed for the potential of such "Pocket WarShips."

In the refit, the *Excalibur's* five cavernous troop bays were virtually gutted, and the vessel—now designated an assault DropShip—became a flying magazine. A formidable array of eight versatile AR10s and two heavy launchers capable of hurling the new Kraken ship-killers were fed from the all-but-hollow core. Carrying more than six thousand tons of capital missiles, the *Excalibur* can briefly rival the firepower of many light WarShips, while the technological upgrade of the ship's existing weaponry, and the added hangar space for a squadron of aerospace fighters beneath the primary magazines and the main drive add to its



RULES ANNEX

menace. Equipped with a flag deck (normally found on cruisers or battleships), the assault *Excalibur* appears intended to serve as a flagship for special assault squadrons. Such squadrons, coincidentally enough, formed during the first ships' debut in Operation Bulldog, and it was in this role that the refits first served. "Teething" problems with the assault *Excaliburs'* fire control systems kept them from making any major contributions to the campaign, which—as much as Victor's year-long disappearance from the Inner Sphere, small army and all—kept the new class out of the spotlight.

The design's greatest weaknesses, however, stemmed from the haste in which the refits were undertaken. Retaining the original engine, structure and armor, the DropShip is far more fragile than the *Overlord-A3*, *Nekohono'o* or *Conquistador* classes. In a bid to offset this disadvantage, engineers mounted an array of anti-missile systems and screen launchers to form an impressive point defense system.

Only seven *Excalibur* refits were produced before the project was cancelled—though whether this was due to IU's financial troubles or other, deeper agendas is unclear. The *Gorgon* was lost during Operation Bulldog, and the *Bellerophon* and *Thunderchild* were paid off, becoming the property of mercenary crews who had served in special Star League-sponsored assault squadrons against the Smoke Jaguars. The *Guardian* (erroneously depicted in recent holoflicks as carrying a naval PPC) was destroyed over Kathil in the opening stages of the FedCom Civil War when it rammed the FCS *Robert Davion*. More recently, the *Stanley Castle* was scrapped after suffering heavy damage during Operation Sovereign Justice. Only the *Tyrannosaurus Rex* and *March Harrier* remain in service with the AFFS, both in the Draconis March.

Faced with a surprisingly powerful Word of Blake WarShip fleet, and the success of the dedicated assault DropShips such as the *Overlord-A3* and *Conquistador*, the AFFS reluctantly returned to the oddball "pocket WarShip" concept in 3068. The orbital yards over Galax were in the midst of hastily refitting ten more *Excaliburs* when they fell to Word of Blake forces in 3069. It is believed that the Blakists captured at least six of these partially completed vessels, and scattered reports suggest that they have since completed refitting the other four in the two years since.

Excalibur-Class "Pocket WarShip"**Type:** Military Spheroid**Use:** Pocket WarShip**Tech:** Star League**Introduced:** 3059**Mass:** 16,000 tons**Battle Value:** 24,056**Dimensions****Length:** 113 meters**Width:** 113 meters**Height:** 124.9 meters**Fuel:** 300 tons (9,000)**Tons/Burn-day:** 1.84**Safe Thrust:** 3**Maximum Thrust:** 5**Heat Sinks:** 445**Structural Integrity:** 14**Armor****Nose:** 200**Sides:** 180**Aft:** 150**Cargo**

Bay 1: Cargo (420 tons) 1 Door

Bay 2: Fighters (6) 2 Door

Escape Pods: 25**Life Boats:** 4**Crew:** 9 officers, 21 enlisted/non-rated, 20 gunners, 28 marines, 12 bay personnel

Ammunition: 32 rounds gauss ammunition (4 tons), 72 rounds LRM 10 ammunition (6 tons), 432 rounds AMS ammunition (36 tons), 60 rounds screen ammunition (60 tons), 20 Kraken-T missiles (2,000 tons), 32 Killer Whale missiles (1,600 tons), 32 White Shark missiles (1,280 tons), and 48 Barracuda missiles (1,440 tons).

Notes: Equipped with 47 tons of standard armor.



RULES ANNEX

Weapons:

Arc (Heat) Type

Nose (113 Heat)

	Short	Medium	Long	Extreme	Class
2 Kraken-T (20 missiles)	20	20	20	20	Capital Missile
1 Gauss Rifle (32 rounds)	2 (15)	2 (15)	2 (15)	—	Autocannon
1 LRM 10+Artemis (24 rounds)	1 (8)	1 (8)	1 (8)	—	LRM
1 ER Medium Laser	1 (5)	1 (5)	—	—	Laser
3 AMS (72 rounds)	1 (9)†	—	—	—	AMS

FL/FR (86 Heat)

2 AR/10 (8 KW, 8 WS, 12 B)	*	*	*	*	Capital Missile
1 ER PPC	1 (10)	1 (10)	1 (10)	—	PPC
2 LRM 10+Artemis (24 rounds)	2 (16)	2 (16)	2 (16)	—	LRM
2 ER Medium Laser	1 (10)	1 (10)	—	—	Laser
3 AMS (72 rounds)	1 (9)†	—	—	—	AMS
1 Screen Launcher (20 screens)	—	—	—	—	Screen

AL/AR (65 Heat)

2 AR/10 (8 KW, 8 WS, 12 B)	*	*	*	*	Capital Missile
1 ER Large Laser, 2 ER Medium Lasers	2 (18)	2 (18)	1(8)	—	Laser
3 AMS (72 rounds)	1 (9)†	—	—	—	AMS

Aft (30 Heat)

1 ER Large Laser, 1 ER Medium Laser	1 (13)	1 (13)	1 (8)	—	Laser
3 AMS (72 rounds)	1 (9)†	—	—	—	AMS
1 Screen Launcher (20 screens)	—	—	—	—	Screen

†Only against missiles.

*By missile type (heat factored as for Killer Whale)

RULES ANNEX

MULE-CLASS "POCKET WARSHIP" ("Q-SHIP")

Deception has likely been a component of warfare since humankind first began practicing war. A particularly famous form of deception is named for the Trojan Horse of legend. A naval adaptation of this ruse is known as the Q-ship, an armed vessel disguised as a merchant ship or a merchant vessel armed with heavy weaponry. Often, such vessels hide their weaponry to prevent detection until the Q-ship is ready to engage its target. Historically, Q-ships have been used to raid enemy merchant shipping, or to provide escort for friendly merchant shipping, but on occasion they have engaged and defeated opposing WarShips.

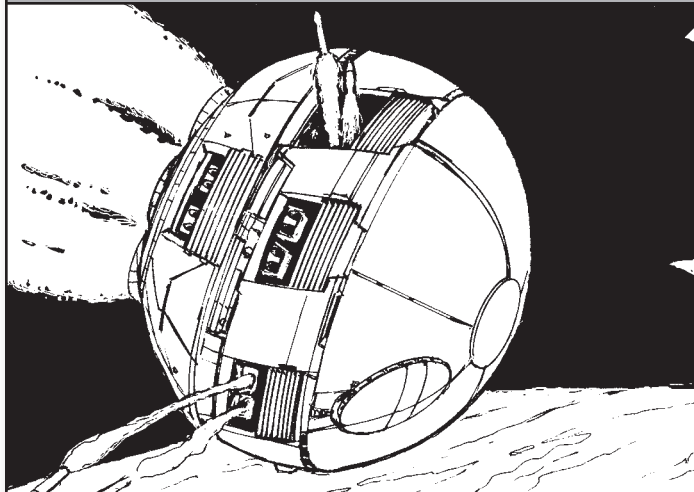
The Word of Blake navy contains a variety of craft that can be designated as Q-Ships. One of the most nefarious of these may be their modified *Mule*-class DropShips. Eight AR10 launchers are installed in the upper cargo bays, with each cargo door hiding two. The lower cargo bay contains most of the missile magazines, and also provides berths and quarters for a squadron of fighters

and their support staff. The squadron uses one of the lower cargo doors, properly modified for fighter launch and recovery, while the other door provides access to the vessel's remaining cargo hold.

The vessel's armor is more than doubled in mass, particularly reinforcing the nose and doors. It provides protection on a par with that of other combat DropShips. This increase in armor is difficult to detect at range, and with the vessel's AR10 launchers hidden behind its doors, the modified *Mule* is nearly indistinguishable from normal vessels.

Based on several recovered *Mule* Q-Ships developed by the original Star League Navy to help protect its shipping lines from predation by pirates, the Word of Blake replaced the existing brace of White Shark and Barracuda launchers with more efficient AR10 launchers, with decidedly less ammunition available. To confuse the enemy, and perhaps to cause him to over-estimate the vessel, the Blakists seem to have installed empty launcher housings next to the AR10's. Numerous visible missile tubes on *Mule* Q-ships have never been observed firing ordnance. Considering the suc-

RULES ANNEX



cess of the vessel since its initial deployment over Altair in 3068, the Word of Blake has begun a crash program to adapt more *Mule*-class DropShips to Q-Ship configuration. So far, those vessels appear to have armor identical to normal *Mule* DropShips, likely because the Word of Blake is rushing additional vessels into service.

The *Mule* Q-ships so far have had devastating effects, inflicting tremendous damage on worlds such as Altair, Asta and Yorri. They have also caused economic disruption across the Inner Sphere, forcing authorities to take expensive and time-consuming measures to attempt to screen all *Mules*. This situation has led to discussion of whether other such Q-Ships might appear in the future, causing further strain. It is difficult to gauge whether the Word of Blake prioritizes this economic disruption over the immediate ability to deploy capital missiles and WMDs, but certainly they are converting as many *Mules* as they can.

Mule-Class "Pocket WarShip" (Q-Ship)**Type:** Military Spheroid**Use:** Pocket WarShip (Q-Ship)**Tech:** Star League**Introduced:** 3068**Mass:** 11,200 tons**Battle Value:** 13,961**Dimensions****Length:** 158 meters**Width:** 158 meters**Height:** 100.4 meters**Armor****Nose:** 176**Sides:** 154**Aft:** 132**Fuel:** 319 tons (9,570)**Tons/Burn-day:** 4.22**Safe Thrust:** 3**Maximum Thrust:** 5**Heat Sinks:** 160 (320)**Structural Integrity:** 10**Cargo**

Bay 1: Cargo (354 tons) 1 Door

Bay 2: Fighters (6) 2 Door

Escape Pods: 2**Life Boats:** 2**Crew:** 3 officers, 4 enlisted/non-rated, 11 gunners, 12 bay personnel**Ammunition:** 40 Killer Whale missiles (2,000 tons), 40 White Shark missiles (1,600 tons), 40 Barracuda missiles (1,200 tons), 40 rounds Autocannon/5 ammunition (2 tons), 30 rounds SRM-6 ammunition (2 tons)**Notes:** Equipped with 36 tons of standard armor.

RULES ANNEX

Weapons:**Arc (Heat) Type****Nose (6 Heat)**

1 Autocannon/5 (40 rounds)

1 Medium Laser

2 Small Lasers

FL/FR (90 Heat)

4 AR/10

(20 KW, 20 WS, 20 B)

1 SRM 6 (15 rounds)

2 Medium Lasers

AL/AR (11 Heat)

1 Large Laser, 1 Medium Laser

Aft (11 Heat)

1 Large Laser, 1 Medium Laser

Capital Attack Values (Standard)**Short****Medium****Long****Extreme****Class**

1 (5)

1 (5)

—

—

Autocannon

1 (5)

—

—

—

Laser

1 (6)

—

—

—

Point Defense

*

*

*

*

Capital Missile

1 (8)

—

—

—

SRM

1 (10)

—

—

—

Laser

1 (13)

1 (8)

—

—

Laser

1 (13)

1 (8)

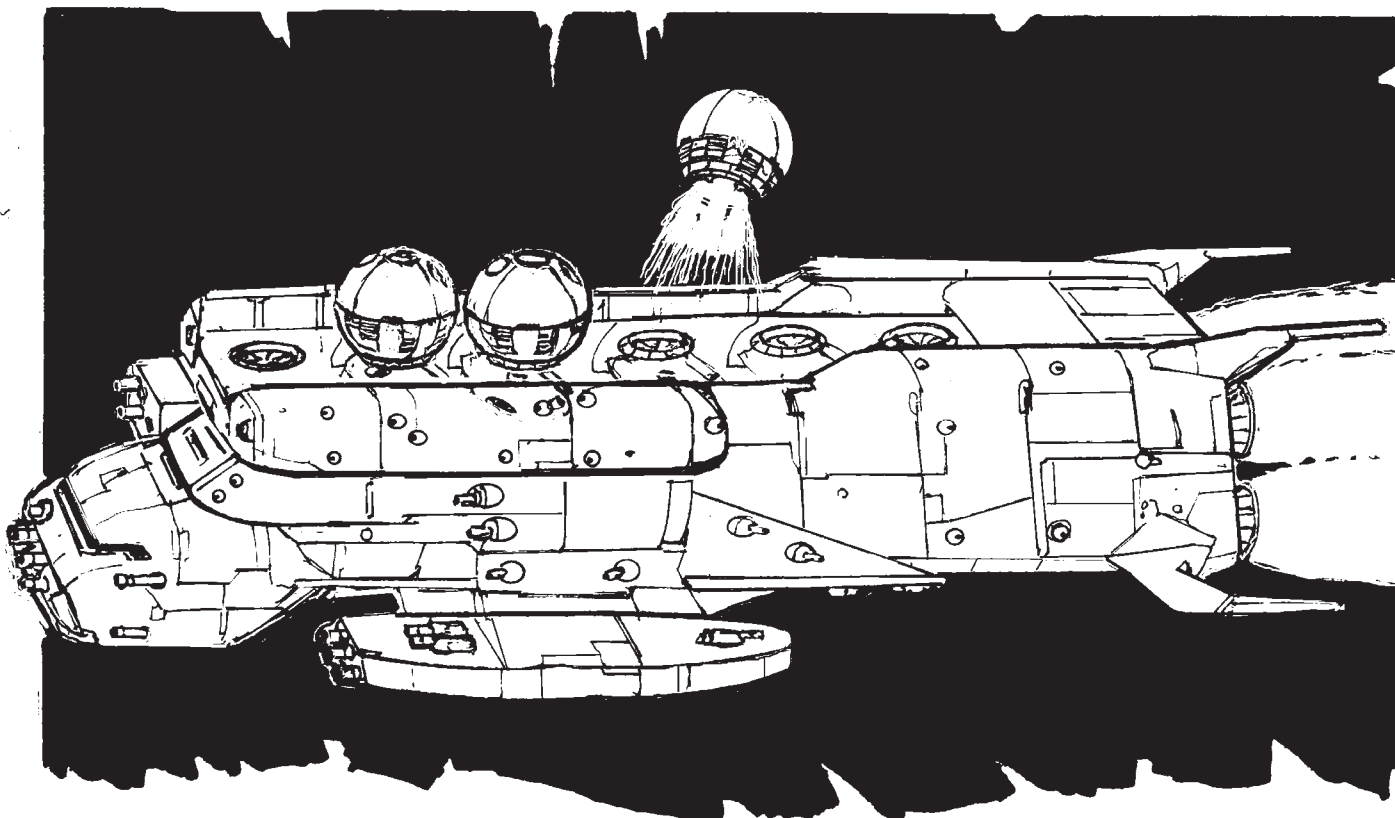
—

—

Laser

* By missile type (heat factored as for Killer Whale)

RULES ANNEX



RULES ANNEX

THARKAD-CLASS BATTLECRUISER (LCS INVINCIBLE)

Designed in 2685 as the first of a new generation of WarShips for the LCAF navy, the first *Tharkad*-class battlecruiser, the LCS *Tharkad*, slipped its moors at the Bolson-Tamar Shipyards in 2690. Seen by many as the pride of Lyran military might, the massive vessel boasted incredible firepower, armor and maneuverability for its day. More than twenty vessels of its class were built over the next century, before a Kurita raiding force shattered the yards in the opening moves of the First Succession War. With the exception of one—the LCS *Invincible*—all of these ships were lost in various engagements along the Combine, Terran Hegemony and Free Worlds League borders.

As Lyran WarShip power waned with the ravages of the Succession Wars, qualified crews grew scarce in proportion, and the few remaining capital ships soon found themselves anchored around key systems, with the *Invincible* herself (by this time in

fairly poor condition) moored above Tharkad by 2850. When the Draconis Combine laid siege to Hesperus II, however, a desperate Commonwealth leadership called upon the aging ship and a shorthanded crew of equally venerable naval officers to undertake one last battle for their nation's defense.

The *Invincible*'s timely arrival over Hesperus II in 2853 turned the tide of what to this day remains the most epic chapter in Lyran military history, but the victorious battlecruiser was lost on her return flight to Tharkad, presumably destroyed by a jump drive failure. In the centuries since, numerous theories about the lost ship surfaced, with many romantics hopelessly convinced—even in the face of ridicule by more “realistic” experts—that the *Invincible* simply remained adrift in deep space, waiting to be found.

Only on the fateful morning of 5 December 3067 was the fate of the LCS *Invincible* revealed, when the ship reappeared in the skies above Tharkad City. Refurbished and cloaked in the colors of the newly defunct Second Star League, she came to unleash the rage of her new masters, the Word of Blake.

RULES ANNEX

**Tharkad-Class Battlecruiser (LCS Invincible)****Tech:** Star League**Introduced:** 2690**Mass:** 900,000 tons**Length:** 975 meters**Sail Diameter:** 1,490 meters**Fuel:** 3,952 tons (9,880)**Tons/Burn-day:** 9.77**Safe Thrust:** 3**Maximum Thrust:** 5**Sail Integrity:** 5**KF Drive Integrity:** 18**Heat Sinks:** 7,000**Structural Integrity:** 80**Battle Value:** 205,482**Armor****Nose:** 145**Fore -Sides:** 140**Aft-Sides:** 140**Aft:** 130**Cargo**

Bay 1: Fighters (36)

6 Doors

Bay 2: Small Craft (8)

2 Doors

Bay 3: Cargo (44,915 tons)

1 Door

DropShip Capacity: 6**Grav Decks:** 2 (95-meter diameter)**Escape Pods:** 30**Life Boats:** 35**Crew:** 62 officers, 213 enlisted/non-rated, 87 gunners, 112 bay personnel**Ammunition:** 80 rounds NAC/35 ammunition (80 tons), 92 rounds NAC/30 ammunition (74 tons), 138 rounds NAC/25 ammunition (83 tons), 90 rounds NAC/20 ammunition (36 tons), 80 rounds Heavy N-Gauss ammunition (40 tons), 60 Killer Whale missiles (3,000 tons), 360 rounds LRM-20 ammunition (60 tons), 360 rounds LRM-10 ammunition (30 tons).**Notes:** Equipped with lithium-fusion battery systems and 983.5 tons of ferro-carbide armor.**Weapons:****Arc (Heat) Type****Nose (992 Heat)**

3 NL55

Short

17

Medium

17

Long

17

Extreme

17

Class

Capital Laser

3 Medium NPPC

27

27

27

27

Capital PPC

2 NAC/25 (46 rounds)

50

50

50

—

Capital AC

6 Killer Whale (60 missiles)

24

24

24

24

Capital Missile

3 Large Laser, 6 Medium Laser

5 (54)

2 (24)

—

—

Laser

FL/FR (611 Heat)

3 Medium NPPC

27

27

27

27

Capital PPC

2 NAC/25 (46 rounds)

50

50

50

—

Capital AC

2 Heavy N-Gauss (40 rounds)

60

60

60

60

Capital Gauss

LBS/RBS (1,559 Heat)

4 NL55

22

22

22

22

Capital Laser

3 Heavy NPPC

45

45

45

45

Capital PPC

2 NAC/35 (40 rounds)

70

70

—

—

Capital AC

2 NAC/30 (46 rounds)

60

60

60

—

Capital AC

4 LRM 20 (60 rounds),

6 LRM 10s (120 rounds)

8 (84)

8 (84)

8 (84)

—

LRM

4 Large Laser, 8 Medium Laser

7 (72)

3 (32)

—

—

Laser

AL/AR (713 Heat)

2 NL35

7

7

7

—

Capital Laser

3 Medium NPPC

27

27

27

27

Capital PPC

2 NAC/20 (30 rounds)

40

40

40

—

Capital AC

5 LRM 20 (120 rounds),

3 LRM 10 (60 rounds)

8 (78)

8 (78)

8 (78)

—

LRM

3 Large Laser, 6 Medium Laser

5 (54)

2 (24)

—

—

Laser

Aft (850 Heat)

4 NL45

18

18

18

18

Capital Laser

2 Heavy NPPC

30

30

30

30

Capital PPC

2 NAC/20 (30 rounds)

40

40

40

—

Capital AC

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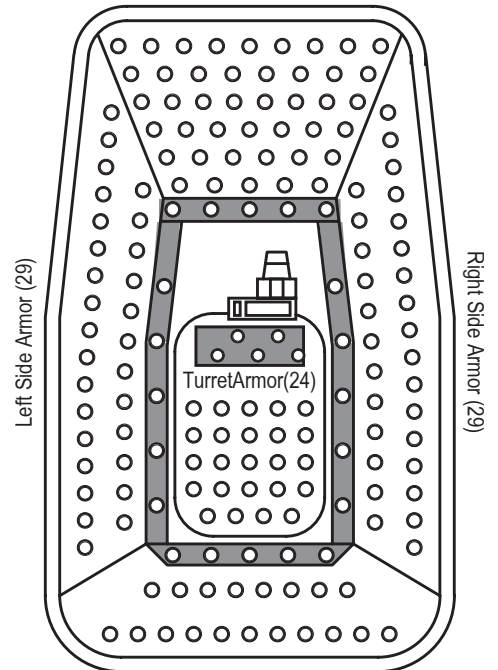
HOVERCRAFT RECORD SHEET

Type: SM1 Tank Destroyer			Weapons Inventory		
Config: Hovercraft		Tons: 50	# Type	Loc	Dmg Min S M L
Technology Base:		Cruising MP:	1 Ultra AC/20	F	20 - 4 8 12
Clan		Flank MP:	4 Light Machine Gun	T	1 - 2 4 6
3068 Level 2		8 12			
Crew:					
Gunnery Skill:		Driving Skill:			
Cost, C-Bills: 3,095,500					
BV: 1,204		WV: 519 / 519			
Ammo					
Ammo Type	Rounds				
Ultra AC/20	30				
Light Machine Gun	100				
Critical Damage					
Airskirt Damaged	☐	Engine Hit	☐		
Lift Fan Destroyed	☐	Turret Locked	☐		

Body Inventory

165 Fusion Engine
4 Crew Members
1 CASE System

Total Armor Pts = 144
(Ferro-Fibrous)
Front Armor (43)



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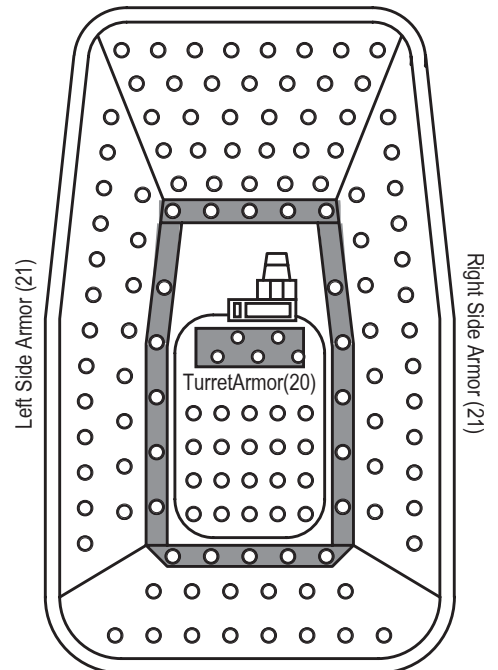
HOVERCRAFT RECORD SHEET

Type: Condor Hovertank (Upgraded)			Weapons Inventory		
Config: Hovercraft		Tons: 50	# Type	Loc	Dmg Min S M L
Technology Base:		Cruising MP:	1 LB 5-X AC	F	5 3 7 14 21
Inner Sphere		Flank MP:	2 Machine Gun	F	2 - 1 2 3
3066 Level 2		9 14	1 LRM 15	T	1/hit 6 7 14 21
Crew:					
Gunnery Skill:		Driving Skill:			
Cost, C-Bills: 7,360,333					
BV: 714		WV: 376 / 376			
Ammo					
Ammo Type	Rounds				
LB 5-X AC	40				
Machine Gun	100				
LRM 15	16				
Critical Damage					
Airskirt Damaged	☐	Engine Hit	☐		
Lift Fan Destroyed	☐	Turret Locked	☐		

Body Inventory

215 Core Tek XL Fusion Engine
4 Crew Members

Total Armor Pts = 108
(Ferro-Fibrous)
Front Armor (32)



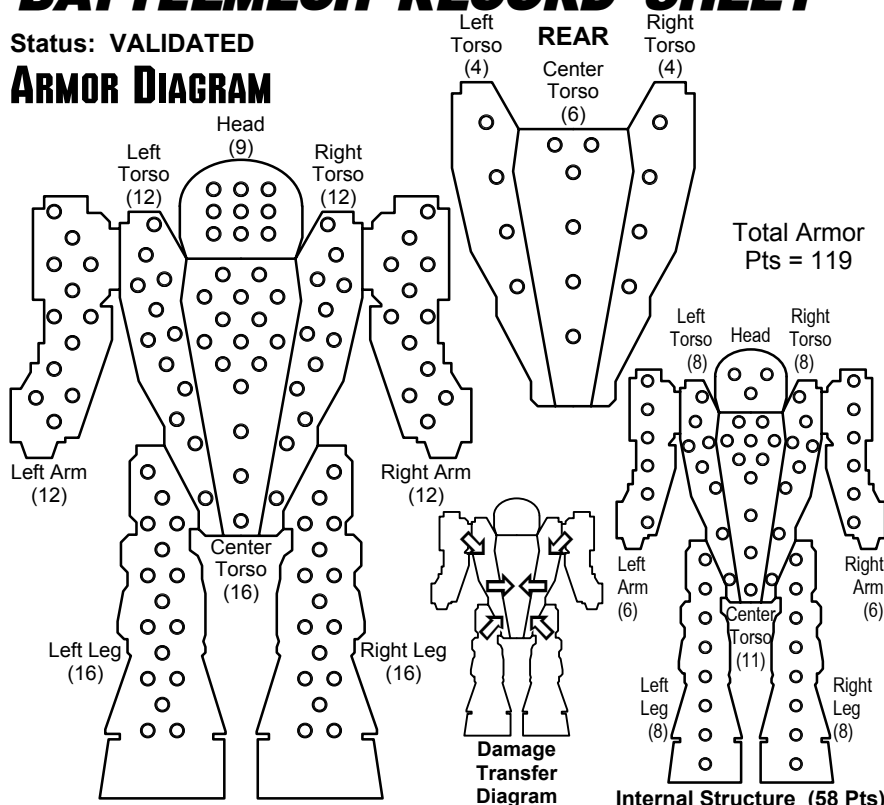
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BATTLEMECH RECORD SHEET

Status: **VALIDATED**

ARMOR DIAGRAM



Internal Structure (58 Pts)

Left Arm

1. Shoulder
2. Upper Arm Actuator
3. Lower Arm Actuator
4. Hand Actuator
5. Ferro-Fibrous
6. Ferro-Fibrous

1. Ferro-Fibrous
2. Roll Again
3. Roll Again
4. Roll Again
5. Roll Again
6. Roll Again

Left Torso

1. XL Engine
2. XL Engine
3. Double Heat Sink
4. Double Heat Sink
5. Double Heat Sink
6. Double Heat Sink

1. Jump Jet
2. Jump Jet
3. Jump Jet
4. Heavy Large Laser
5. Heavy Large Laser
6. Heavy Large Laser

Left Leg

1. Hip
2. Upper Leg Actuator
3. Lower Leg Actuator
4. Foot Actuator
5. Ferro-Fibrous
6. Ferro-Fibrous

CRITICAL HIT TABLE

Head

1. Life Support
2. Sensors
3. Cockpit
4. Light Active Probe
5. Sensors
6. Life Support

Center Torso

1. XL Engine
2. XL Engine
3. XL Engine
4. Gyro
5. Gyro
6. Gyro

1. Gyro
2. XL Engine
3. XL Engine
4. XL Engine
5. Roll Again
6. Roll Again

Engine Hits ○ ○ ○ ○
Gyro Hits ○ ○
Sensor Hits ○ ○
Life Support ○

Battle Value: **1,422**
Weapon Value: **1,141 / 1,141**
Cost, C-Bills: **5,854,410**

Right Arm

1. Shoulder
2. Upper Arm Actuator
3. Lower Arm Actuator
4. Hand Actuator
5. Double Heat Sink
6. Double Heat Sink

1. Double Heat Sink
2. Double Heat Sink
3. Double Heat Sink
4. Double Heat Sink
5. ER Medium Laser
6. ER Medium Laser

Right Torso

1. XL Engine
2. XL Engine
3. Double Heat Sink
4. Double Heat Sink
5. Double Heat Sink
6. Double Heat Sink

1. Jump Jet
2. Jump Jet
3. Jump Jet
4. Roll Again
5. Roll Again
6. Roll Again

Right Leg

1. Hip
2. Upper Leg Actuator
3. Lower Leg Actuator
4. Foot Actuator
5. Ferro-Fibrous
6. Ferro-Fibrous

'MECH DATA

Type: **Ocelot**

Mass: **35 tons**

Movement Points: Tech, Config. & Level:

Walking: **6** Clan

Running: **9** Biped 'Mech

Jumping: **6** Level 2 / 3067

Weapons Inventory: (hexes)

Qty	Type	Loc	Ht	Dmg	Min	Sht	Med	Lng
2	ER Medium Laser	RA	5	7	-	5	10	15
1	Heavy Large Laser	LT	18	16	-	5	10	15
1	Light Active Probe	HD	0	-	-	-	-	3

Total Heat Sinks: **15 Double (30)**

oooooooooooo ooooo

Auto Eject: ☐ Operational ☐ Disabled

Weapon Heat: **(28)**

WARRIOR DATA

Name: _____

Gunnery Skill: _____ Piloting Skill: _____

Hits Taken	1	2	3	4	5	6
Consciousness #	3	5	7	10	11	Dead

HEAT SCALE

30	Shutdown
29	
28	Ammo Explosion, avoid on 8+
27	
26	Shutdown, avoid on 10+
25	-5 Movement Points
24	+4 Modifier to Fire
23	Ammo Explosion, avoid on 6+
22	Shutdown, avoid on 8+
21	
20	-4 Movement Points
19	Ammo Explosion, avoid on 4+
18	Shutdown, avoid on 6+
17	+3 Modifier to Fire
16	
15	-3 Movement Points
14	Shutdown, avoid on 4+
13	+2 Modifier to Fire
12	
11	
10	-2 Movement Points
9	
8	+1 Modifier to Fire
7	
6	
5	-1 Movement Point
4	
3	
2	
1	
0	

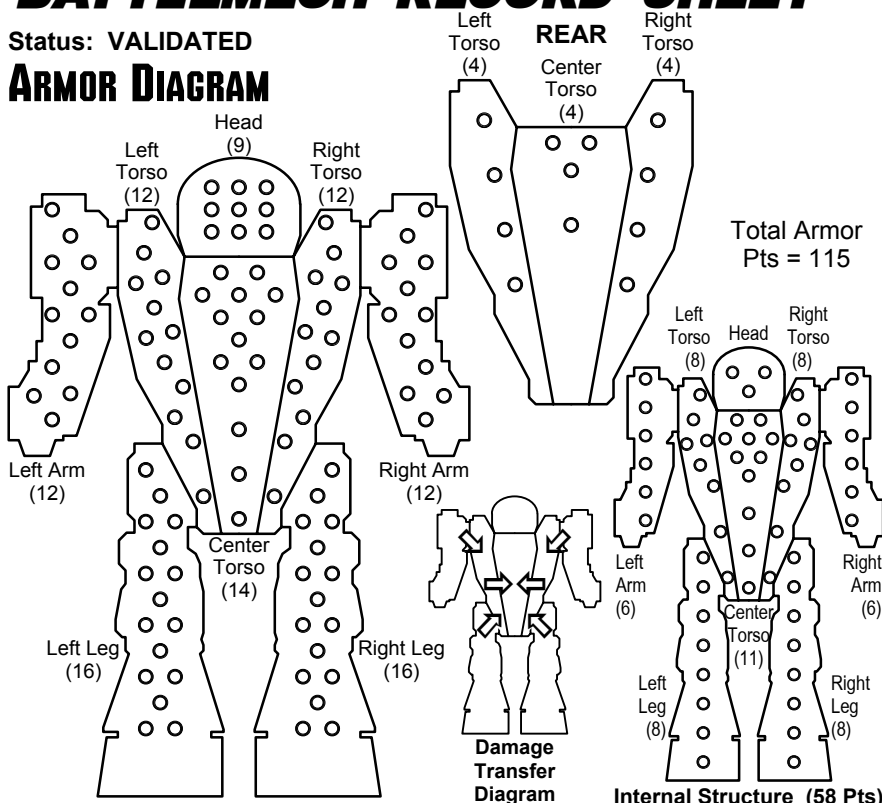
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BATTLEMECH RECORD SHEET

Status: **VALIDATED**

ARMOR DIAGRAM



Internal Structure (58 Pts)

Left Arm

1. Shoulder
2. Upper Arm Actuator
3. Lower Arm Actuator
4. Hand Actuator
5. Ferro-Fibrous
6. Ferro-Fibrous

1. Ferro-Fibrous
2. Roll Again
3. Roll Again
4. Roll Again
5. Roll Again
6. Roll Again

Left Torso

1. XL Engine
2. XL Engine
3. Double Heat Sink
4. Double Heat Sink
5. Jump Jet
6. Jump Jet

1. Jump Jet
2. ER PPC
3. ER PPC
4. Roll Again
5. Roll Again
6. Roll Again

Left Leg

1. Hip
2. Upper Leg Actuator
3. Lower Leg Actuator
4. Foot Actuator
5. Ferro-Fibrous
6. Ferro-Fibrous

CRITICAL HIT TABLE

Head

1. Life Support
2. Sensors
3. Cockpit
4. Roll Again
5. Sensors
6. Life Support

Center Torso

1. XL Engine
2. XL Engine
3. XL Engine
4. Gyro
5. Gyro
6. Gyro

1. Gyro
2. XL Engine
3. XL Engine
4. XL Engine
5. Roll Again
6. Roll Again

Engine Hits ○ ○ ○ ○
Gyro Hits ○ ○
Sensor Hits ○ ○
Life Support ○

Battle Value: **1,784**
Weapon Value: **1,351 / 1,351**
Cost, C-Bills: **5,697,810**

Right Arm

1. Shoulder
2. Upper Arm Actuator
3. Lower Arm Actuator
4. Hand Actuator
5. ER Medium Laser
6. ER Medium Laser

1. Double Heat Sink
2. Double Heat Sink
3. Double Heat Sink
4. Double Heat Sink
5. Double Heat Sink
6. Double Heat Sink

Right Torso

1. XL Engine
2. XL Engine
3. Double Heat Sink
4. Double Heat Sink
5. Double Heat Sink
6. Double Heat Sink

1. Jump Jet
2. Jump Jet
3. Jump Jet
4. Roll Again
5. Roll Again
6. Roll Again

Right Leg

1. Hip
2. Upper Leg Actuator
3. Lower Leg Actuator
4. Foot Actuator
5. Ferro-Fibrous
6. Ferro-Fibrous

'MECH DATA

Type: **Ocelot 2**

Mass: **35 tons**

Movement Points: Tech, Config. & Level:

Walking: **6** Clan

Running: **9** Biped 'Mech

Jumping: **6** Level 2 / 3067

Weapons Inventory: (hexes)

Qty	Type	Loc	Ht	Dmg	Min	Sht	Med	Lng
2	ER Medium Laser	RA	5	7	-	5	10	15
1	ER PPC	LT	15	15	-	7	14	23

Total Heat Sinks: **14 Double (28)**

oooooooooooo oooo

Auto Eject: ☐ Operational ☐ Disabled

Weapon Heat: **(25)**

WARRIOR DATA

Name: _____

Gunnery Skill: _____ Piloting Skill: _____

Hits Taken	1	2	3	4	5	6
Consciousness #	3	5	7	10	11	Dead

HEAT SCALE

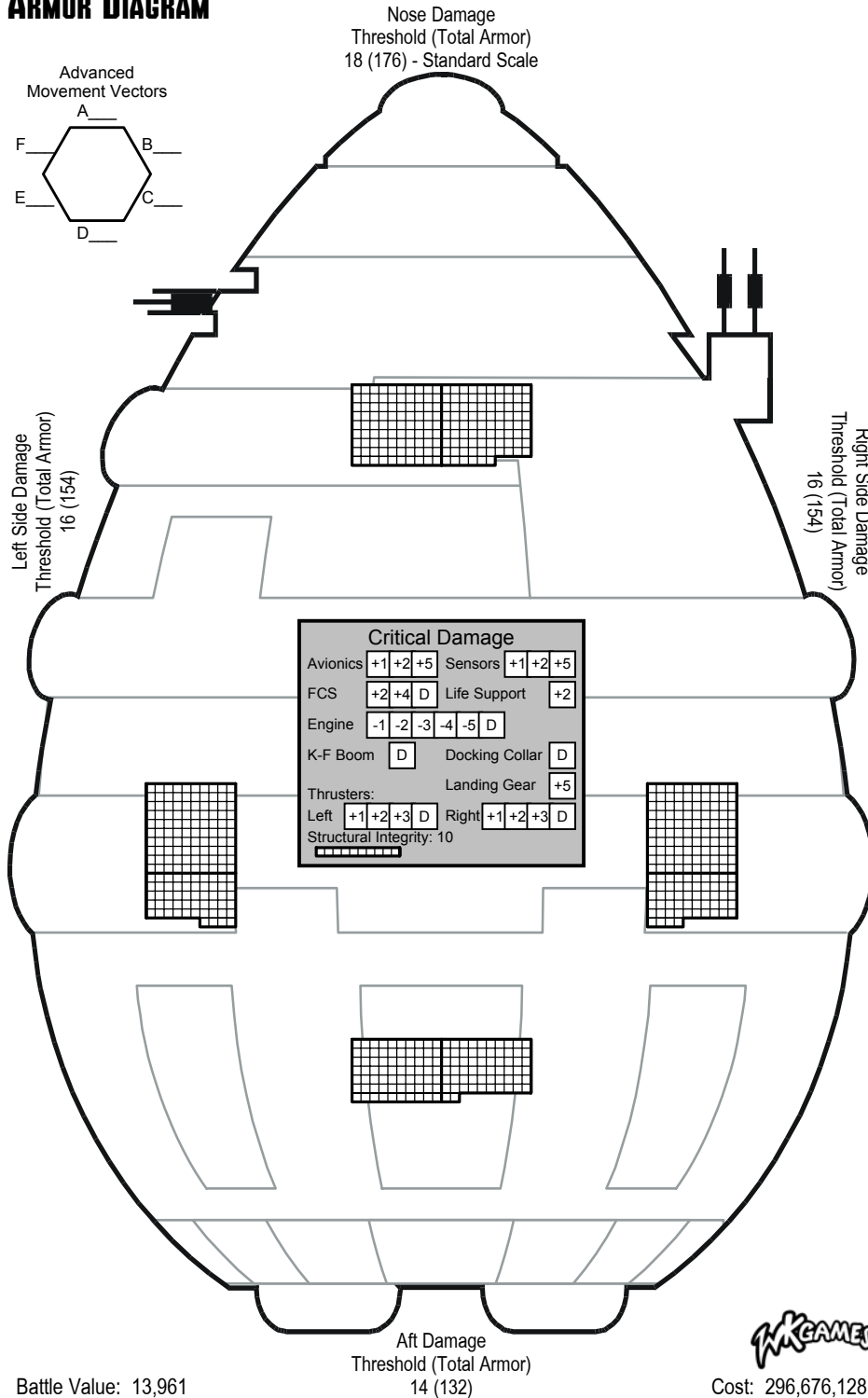
30	Shutdown
29	
28	Ammo Explosion, avoid on 8+
27	
26	Shutdown, avoid on 10+
25	-5 Movement Points
24	+4 Modifier to Fire
23	Ammo Explosion, avoid on 6+
22	Shutdown, avoid on 8+
21	
20	-4 Movement Points
19	Ammo Explosion, avoid on 4+
18	Shutdown, avoid on 6+
17	+3 Modifier to Fire
16	
15	-3 Movement Points
14	Shutdown, avoid on 4+
13	+2 Modifier to Fire
12	
11	
10	-2 Movement Points
9	
8	+1 Modifier to Fire
7	
6	
5	-1 Movement Point
4	
3	
2	
1	
0	

WZKAMES

AEROTECH 2™

SPHEROID DROPSHIP RECORD SHEET

ARMOR DIAGRAM



Battle Value: 13,961

Cost: 296,676,128

Velocity Record

Turn #	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
Thrust																				
Velocity																				
Effective Velocity																				
Altitude Level																				
Fuel Pts	9,570																			

VESSEL DATA

Name: **Mule (Pocket WarShip)**
 Type: **Spheroid DropShip**
 Mass: **11,200 tons**
 Thrust: Safe Thrust: **3** Max Thrust: **5**
 Tech: **Inner Sphere / Level 2 / 3068**
 Fighters/Small Craft: 6 / 0 Launch Rate: 4 / turn
 Life Boats/Escapes Pods: 2 / 2

Weapons & Equipment Inventory:

Capital weapon ranges, hexes: (0-12) (13-24) (25-40) (41-50)

Capital Class Bay	Loc	Heat	SRV	MRV	LRV	ERV
4 AR10(20KW,20WS,20B)	FL/FR	80	*	*	*	*

Standard weapon ranges, hexes: (0-6) (7-12) (13-20) (21-25)

Standard Class Bay	Loc	Heat	SRV	MRV	LRV	ERV
1 Autocannon/5	Nose	1	1(5)	1(5)	--	--
1 Medium Laser	Nose	3	1(5)	--	--	--
2 Small Laser	Nose	2	1(6)	Point Defense		
1 SRM 6	FL/FR	4	1(8)	--	--	--
2 Medium Laser	FL/FR	6	1(10)	--	--	--
1 Large Laser	AL/AR	11	1(13)	1(8)	--	--
1 Medium Laser						
1 Large Laser	Aft	11	1(13)	1(8)	--	--
1 Medium Laser						

Cargo: Bay 1: Cargo (409 Tons, 1 door)
 Bay 2: Fighters (6) (2 doors)

Ammo: SRM 6 (30) AC/5 (40)
AR10 Missiles: 40 Killer Whale, *AV=4
 40 White Shark, *AV=3 40 Barracuda, *AV=2

Total Heat Sinks: 160 (320)

Heat Generation per Arc: (219 Total)

Nose: 6 Fore Left/Right: 90 x 2
 Aft Left/Right: 11 x 2 Aft: 11

Crew Data

Gunnery Skill: _____ Piloting Skill: _____

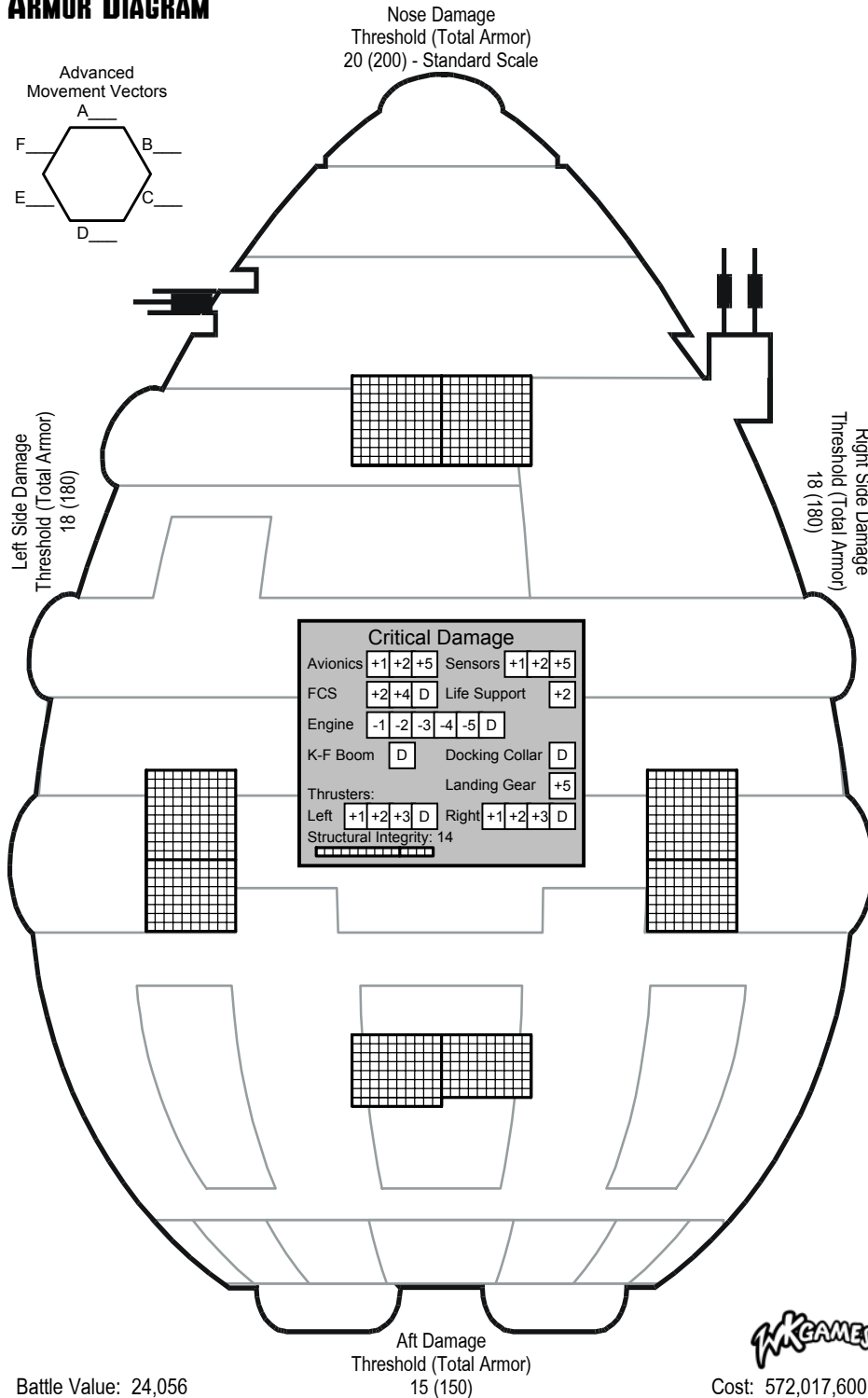
Hits Taken	1	2	3	4	5	6
Modifier	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5	Incap

Crew: 17 Passengers: 0 Other: 12

AEROTECH 2™

SPHEROID DROPSHIP RECORD SHEET

ARMOR DIAGRAM



Battle Value: 24,056

Cost: 572,017,600

Velocity Record

Turn #	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
Thrust																				
Velocity																				
Effective Velocity																				
Altitude Level																				
Fuel Pts	9,000																			

VESSEL DATA

Name: **Excalibur (Pocket WarShip)**
 Type: **Spheroid DropShip**
 Mass: **16,000 tons**
 Thrust: Safe Thrust: **3** Max Thrust: **5**
 Tech: **Inner Sphere / Level 2 / 3059**
 Fighters/Small Craft: 6 / 0 Launch Rate: 4 / turn
 Life Boats/Escape Pods: 4 / 25

Weapons & Equipment Inventory:

Capital weapon ranges, hexes: (0-12) (13-24) (25-40) (41-50)

Capital Class Bay	Loc	Heat	SRV	MRV	LRV	ERV
2 Kraken-T	Nose	100	20	20	20	20
2 AR10(8KW,8WS,12B)	FL/FR	40	*	*	*	*
1 Screen Launcher	FL/FR	10	--	--	--	--
2 AR10(8KW,8WS,12B)	AL/AR	40	*	*	*	*
1 Screen Launcher	Aft	10	--	--	--	--

Standard weapon ranges, hexes: (0-6) (7-12) (13-20) (21-25)

Standard Class Bay	Loc	Heat	SRV	MRV	LRV	ERV
1 Gauss Rifle	Nose	1	2(15)	2(15)	2(15)	--
1 LRM 10+Artemis IV	Nose	4	1(8)	1(8)	1(8)	--
1 ER Medium Laser	Nose	5	1(5)	1(5)	--	--
3 AMS	Nose	3	--	Point Defense		
1 ER PPC	FL/FR	15	1(10)	1(10)	1(10)	--
2 LRM 10+Artemis IV	FL/FR	8	2(16)	2(16)	2(16)	--
2 ER Medium Laser	FL/FR	10	1(10)	1(10)	--	--
3 AMS	FL/FR	3	--	Point Defense		
1 ER Large Laser	AL/AR	22	2(18)	2(18)	1(8)	--
2 ER Medium Laser						
3 AMS	AL/AR	3	--	Point Defense		
1 ER Large Laser	Aft	17	1(13)	1(13)	1(8)	--
1 ER Medium Laser						
3 AMS	Aft	3	--	Point Defense		

Cargo: Bay 1: Cargo (420 Tons, 1 door)
 Bay 2: Fighters (6) (2 doors)

Ammo: Screen (60) AMS (432)
 LRM 10 (72) Gauss (32) Kraken-T (20)
AR10 Missiles: 32 Killer Whale, *AV=4
 32 White Shark, *AV=3 48 Barracuda, *AV=2

Total Heat Sinks: 445 Single

Heat Generation per Arc: (445 Total)

Nose: 113 Fore Left/Right: 86 x 2
 Aft Left/Right: 65 x 2 Aft: 30

Crew Data

Gunnery Skill: Piloting Skill:

Hits Taken	1	2	3	4	5	6
Modifier	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5	Incap

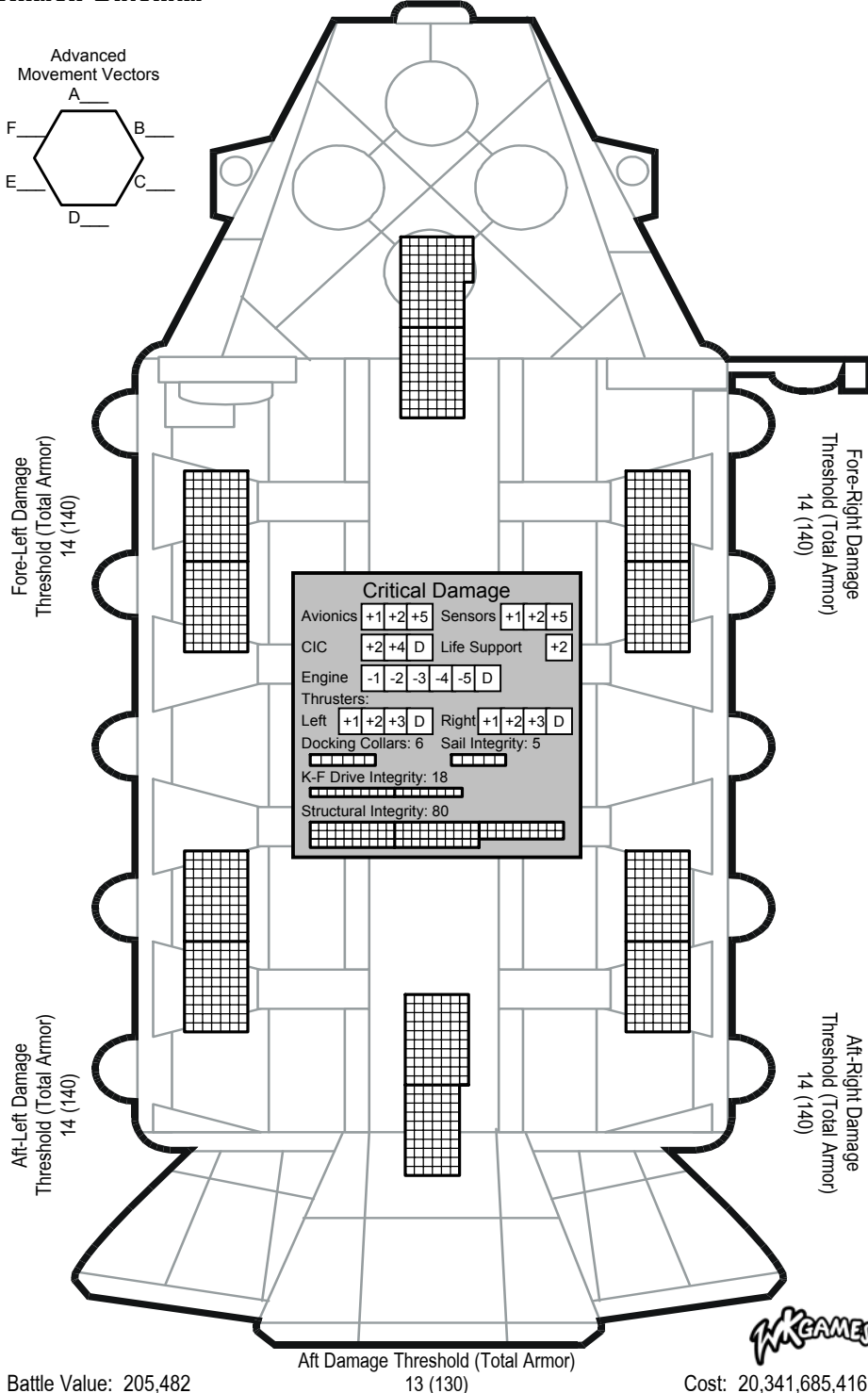
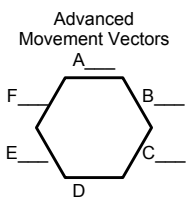
Crew: 50 Passengers: 0 Other: 12
 Marines: 28 Battle Armor: 0

AEROTECH 2™

WARSHIP RECORD SHEET

Nose Damage Threshold (Total Armor)
15 (145) - Capital Scale

ARMOR DIAGRAM



Battle Value: 205,482

13 (130)

Cost: 20,341,685,416

Velocity Record

Turn #	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
Thrust																				
Velocity																				
Effective Velocity																				
Altitude Level																				
Fuel Pts	9,880																			

VESSEL DATA

Name: **Tharkad (Battlecruiser)**
 Type: **WarShip**
 Mass: **900,000 tons**
 Thrust: Safe Thrust: **3** Max Thrust: **5**
 Tech: **Inner Sphere / Level 2 / 2690**
 Fighters/Small Craft: 36 / 8 Launch Rate: 16 / turn
 Life Boats/Escapes Pods: 35 / 30 DropShips: 6

Weapons & Equipment Inventory:

Capital weapon ranges, hexes: (0-12) (13-24) (25-40) (41-50)

Capital Class Bay	Loc	Heat	SRV	MRV	LRV	ERV
3 NL55	Nose	255	17	17	17	17
3 Medium NPPC	Nose	405	27	27	27	27
2 NAC/25	Nose	170	50	50	50	--
6 Killer Whale	Nose	120	24	24	24	24
3 Medium NPPC	FL/FR	405	27	27	27	27
2 NAC/25	FL/FR	170	50	50	50	--
2 Heavy N-Gauss	FL/FR	36	60	60	60	60
4 NL55	L/RBS	340	22	22	22	22
3 Heavy NPPC	L/RBS	675	45	45	45	45
2 NAC/35	L/RBS	240	70	70	--	--
2 NAC/30	L/RBS	200	60	60	60	--
2 NL35	AL/AR	104	7	7	7	--
3 Medium NPPC	AL/AR	405	27	27	27	27
2 NAC/20	AL/AR	120	40	40	40	--
4 NL45	Aft	280	18	18	18	18
2 Heavy NPPC	Aft	450	30	30	30	30
2 NAC/20	Aft	120	40	40	40	--

Standard weapon ranges, hexes: (0-6) (7-12) (13-20) (21-25)

Standard Class Bay	Loc	Heat	SRV	MRV	LRV	ERV
3 Large Laser	Nose	42	5(54)	2(24)	--	--
6 Medium Laser						
4 LRM 20	L/RBS	48	8(84)	8(84)	8(84)	--
6 LRM 10						
4 Large Laser	L/RBS	56	7(72)	3(32)	--	--
8 Medium Laser						
5 LRM 20	AL/AR	42	8(78)	8(78)	8(78)	--
3 LRM 10						
3 Large Laser	AL/AR	42	5(54)	2(24)	--	--
6 Medium Laser						
1 Lithium Fusion Battery						

Grav Decks: Grav Decks #1 - 2: (95-meter diameter)

Cargo: Bay 1: Fighters (36) (6 doors)
 Bay 2: Small Craft (8) (2 doors)
 Bay 3: Cargo (44,915 Tons, 1 door)

Ammo: NAC/20 (90) LRM 10 (360)
 LRM 20 (360) NAC/30 (92) NAC/35 (80)
 Hvy N-Gauss (80) Killer Whale (60) NAC/25 (138)

Total Heat Sinks: 7,000 Single
Heat Generation per Arc: (7,608 Total)

Nose: 992 Fore Left/Right: 611 x 2
 Left/Right BroadSides: 1,559 x 2
 Aft Left/Right: 713 x 2 Aft: 850

Crew Data

Gunnery Skill: _____ Piloting Skill: _____
 Hits Taken
 Modifier:

1	2	3	4	5	6
+1	+2	+3	+4	+5	Incap

 Crew: 362 Passengers: 0 Other: 112

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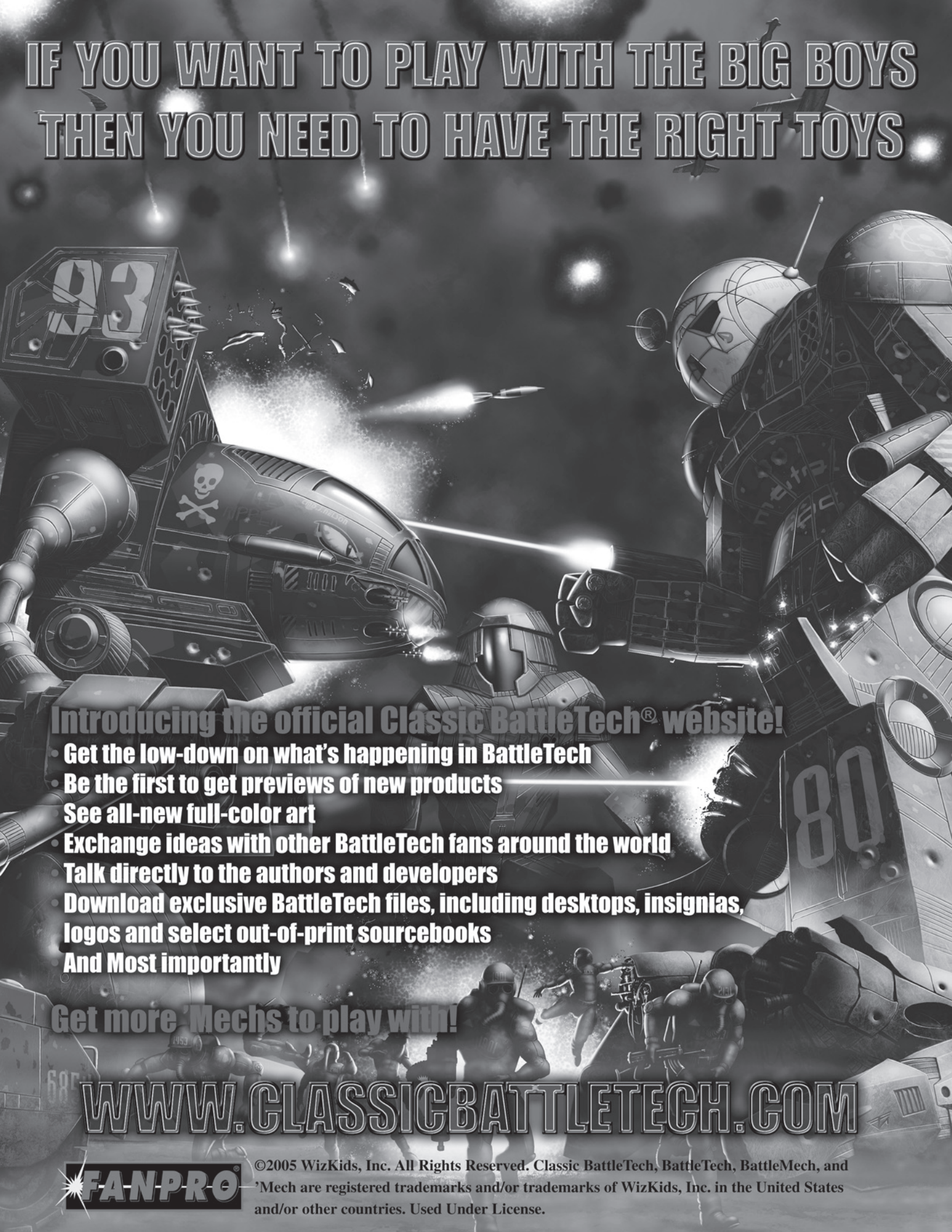
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