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SHATTERED FORTRESS™



REPUBLIC IN FLAMES

In 3146, the Republic of the Sphere hangs by a tenuous thread. The last fragments of Devlin Stone's dream to shepherd humankind toward a more prosperous future hide behind the impenetrable defenses of Fortress Republic. As the interstellar communications blackout rages, the ambitious Great Houses vie for military dominance, and the bloodthirsty Clans strive to find a weakness in the Fortress's armor on their path to conquering Terra and claiming the coveted title of iClan. When the Wall comes down, will the Inner Sphere plunge even further into the abyss of interstellar war, or will this herald the dawning of a new age?

Shattered Fortress chronicles the twilight of *BattleTech's* Dark Age, as nations are thrown into turmoil and predators circle the broken remnants of the Republic of the Sphere. This volume provides a year-by-year look at pivotal turning points in Inner Sphere, offers a peek behind the curtain of Fortress Republic, and reveals the fateful decisions that will ultimately decide the future of the Inner Sphere.



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CREDITS	3	3149: THE DAM BREAKS	62
BRING THE DAWN	4	The Curtain Rises	62
3146: CRACKS IN THE FOUNDATION	15	Blowing the Ram's Horns	62
A Long Way from Home	15	Divine Retribution	64
Taking the Scenic Route	15	Promises Kept	66
Raiding the Confederation	16	Dieron	66
An Invitation	16	Fear and Confusion	66
Insatiable Appetite	17	The Dragon and the Tiger	67
Higher Aspirations	17	Shades of Kapteyn	67
The Capellan Invasion	17	Wrestling the Dragon	68
Backyard Raids	18	Binding the Dragon's Tongue	68
The League Ascendant	19	Reuniting with the Remnant	69
At the Lyrans' Side Door	19	The Vanishing Remnant	69
Tragedy and Triumph	20	Extinguishing the Flame	70
Sowing the Seeds of Chaos	21	Cementing the Pact	72
The Marlette Deception	22	TIAMAT, Wave One	72
Throwing Down the Gauntlet	24	TIAMAT, Wave Two	73
A Test of Loyalty	24	The Republic Rampage	75
Antisocial General	25	The Heart of the Draconis March	76
Send in the Hounds	25	3150: THE PREDATORS STRIKE	79
Nightfall	28	Walking on Eggshells	79
The Dragon Strikes	28	The Blueprints of Invasion	79
Goshen Rendezvous	28	The Silent Front	80
The Dragon Constricts	28	The Harried Dragon	80
3147: THE CALM BEFORE THE STORM	31	Securing the Draconis March	80
Searching for the Grail	31	The Sleeping Bear	82
Forming the Round Table	31	Wolves on the Hunt	84
Operation PERCEVAL, Round One	32	The Assault of Skye	84
Operation PERCEVAL, Round Two	33	Chasing Down the Herd	85
The Dragon's Response	33	The Marian Problem	87
Delayed Vengeance	34	Marian Blitzkrieg	87
Tightening the Belt	35	Canopian Response	88
The Gibraltar Setback	38	League Response	89
The Three-Headed Dog	39	The Path to Illyria	89
Chimera	39	War on All Sides	90
Orthus	40	Dissidents and Breakaway States	90
Hydra	40	The Falcons Gather	91
Crossing the River Styx	41	The Race to Terra	91
Elsewhere in the Inner Sphere	42	The Jaws Close	91
Challenging the Archon	42	The Falcon Storm	92
The Silence of the Clans	44	Operation CLARITY: The Battle of Northwind	92
The Concordat's Future	45	Can You Hear Me Now?	93
3148: THE COMING SHADOW	47	The Capellan Threat	93
Excising the Cancer	47	Unexpected Help	94
Chemotherapy	47	The Shadow Arrives	95
The Falcons Advance	49	Dropped Calls	96
For the Duration of the Crisis	52	Fallout	97
State of Emergency	52	TIMELINE OF EVENTS: 3146–3150	99
A Campaign of Vengeance	53	NEW UNIT PROFILES	104
A Hard Bargain	54	Dawn Guards [Federated Suns]	104
Trouble in Paradise	54	Hikage [Draconis Combine]	104
Unfit to Lead	55	Fides Defenders [Republic]	105
Costly Sacrifices	55	The Grey Watch [Republic/Merc]	105
Cessation of Hostilities	58	FORTRESS REPUBLIC TECHNOLOGY	106
The Dragon's Shadow	59	HPG Blackout	106
New Steel	59	The Wall	106
Tsujigiri	60		

SHATTERED FORTRESS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TOUCHPOINT TRACKS	108
Touchpoint: Arc-Royal	108
Touchpoint: New Avalon	109
Touchpoint: Marik	110
Touchpoint: New Syrtis	111
Touchpoint: Buena	112
Touchpoint: Remagen	114
Touchpoint: Castor	115
Touchpoint: Robinson	116
Touchpoint: Skye	117
Touchpoint: Northwind	118
RECORD SHEET	120

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It has been a long road to get here, but the wait is finally over. As the primary author and developer on this book, I'd like to give a special shout-out to all of the folks who helped me get this long-awaited book to publication.

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Dedication

To the fans who've been awaiting this next chapter in the continuing, war-torn saga that is *BattleTech*: This book is for you. Thank you for sticking with us! You're gonna love what's coming next...

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BRING THE DAWN

K1-class shuttle Sanguine
Terra Orbit
Fortress Republic
6 May 3146

Outside the thick transpex port the blue-white orb of Terra spun on its axis, but Julian Davion didn't see it. His gaze looked into the past by several weeks. He saw a ghost's face. King Arthur's face. He saw it every time he closed his eyes. He saw it when he let his eyes unfocus. He heard the voice and the words.

"It'll be worth your time to come," the ghost had said.

The ghost that wore Devlin Stone's face.

There was a chime behind him. It startled him out of his reverie, but before Julian had fully turned the hatch slid open. A trim woman with a smooth brown hair and a stern expression stepped into the compartment. "Prince Davion," she said. She let the hatch close behind her and stood straight, her hands clasped in front of her.

"I am not yet First Prince," Julian said. Again.

The woman—she wore major's insignia—simply stared at him. Again.

It was an act that had been replayed the entire trip from Nanking. She called him prince; he denied it. Both of them knew he'd be acclaimed First Prince of the Federated Suns as soon as he got home. She preferred not to wait for formalities.

Julian needed the formalities. The universe had become too strange to discard the comfort of formality and tradition. The Wolves laired in what used to be the Free Worlds League and the Republic of the Sphere. The Jade Falcons had swallowed much of the Lyran Commonwealth. Callandre Kell... Julian bit back a grimace. Calamity Kell was calamitous, but in ways which were simply unbelievable. And Caleb Davion was dead... Julian blinked.

"We'll begin our descent in a few minutes," the major said. "You'll want to be strapped in. I'm told there will be a convoy waiting for you."

"To take me to the Exarch."

"To take you to Stone," the major said. "I'm not informed whether Levin will be present."

Julian had given up trying to figure it out. It didn't matter what Stone called himself. He'd be in charge. If Julian remembered back to the things Harrison Davion used to force him to learn, he even understood. Letting Levin keep the Exarch's portfolio gave Stone political distance should he need it. It gave the Republic's government distance from Stone, should the Republic need it. It was a smart political move, because whatever rules and laws said, no one in the Inner Sphere would believe Jonah Levin would override Devlin Stone.

Julian stood up. Sanguine was in a powered orbit, so he had the illusion of gravity. The major—her nametape read WEALTHOW—stepped back to give him room. He pulled his suit jacket from the back of his chair. His stateroom—a specially-constructed VIP

compartment—was close to the boarding dock. "You don't wish to remain here during landing?" Her face was blank, but over the weeks of their transit Julian had learned to look at her eyes to get a read of her emotions. He saw the smile there.

"I'm not a child," Julian told her. "I can stand two gravities of decel if I have to." He stepped past her into the companionway. "Besides. I don't have a lot of time. The sooner Stone has his say, the sooner I get can back to what matters."

Major Wealthow followed him down the companionway. "This is important, Prince Davion."

Julian didn't stop. "If I'm the First Prince," he told her, "then it had damn well better be important."

More important than hiding in a hole for a decade, he didn't say out loud.



Despite his earlier rush, Julian wanted to linger a moment in the cool Geneva air before he entered the side entrance to the Hall of Government. Whatever else happened, this would likely be the last time he'd get to arrive anywhere without fanfare. Without being noticed, protected, watched. Without facing the second-to-second scrutiny he'd watched Harrison Davion endure for years. *I used to be thankful I didn't have to tolerate that.*

Used to be.

A few moments later he was in a small office with two men. One of the men was Devlin Stone. He looked like he'd walked out of the HV documentaries. The other man was younger, and seemingly broken—pallid, with visible scar tissue on his temples. He stood behind Stone's desk, off to the side. The vizier's position. In all the holovids Julian had watched growing up, that role had been filled by David Lear, but David Lear was dead.

The office was spartan, decorated in shades of gray. The walls were bare except for flatscreens. The desk was large, and Julian saw the telltale projectors that would display holos above its surface. There was nothing on the desk, though the smudges where Stone had typed on a virtual keyboard projected on the tabletop were visible. The room was warm with the humidity of too much exhalation in too small a place and the burnt-rubber smell of warm electronics. It was not at all the room Julian would have expected to meet the most powerful man in the Republic of the Sphere inside.

Which was, he was certain, the entire point.

"Thank you for coming," Stone said. There was no other preamble.

Thank you for coming. Julian just stared at him. He didn't speak. He was processing. The words were polite enough, but the tone was all wrong. It was the tone of a man using words he knew others expected, but that he himself was exasperated with. Julian knew he had used that same tone any number of times, but never to someone who'd done him a favor.

BRING THE DAWN

"What am I doing here?" Julian asked.

He'd seen Harrison Davion use the tactic any number of times: ignore protocol, ignore formality, just get to the business. The First Prince of the Federated Suns admitted to few peers; when dealing with one, Harrison had often acted like it. *Time was the only irreplaceable resource*, he used to say. And besides. It was formality of a sort. Or rather a gambit. Julian Davion was first a soldier. He understood gambits.

"I've brought you here to save the Republic," Stone said. If he was unnerved by the direct manner it didn't show. Julian hadn't expected him to. They were both smart men.

"Then I'm leaving," Julian said. He still hadn't sat. "I have my own responsibilities."

Stone grinned. "I knew your cousin, you know."

"So did I."

"He was a man who didn't dismiss things out of hand."

"Of course he did." Julian glanced at the other man, but got no response. "He never gave two seconds' thought to a lot of things. The designated hitter. The theory of Liao sanity. Mayonnaise on hamburgers." He looked down at the small chair in front of the desk but didn't sit down.

Stone's grin widened. "He wouldn't have walked away from an offer of help from the Republic."

"How does my putting effort into saving your Republic help me?"

"Sit, and we'll talk about it."

Julian looked down again. "I'll stand, thank you."

"It's going to be a long conversation."

"Only if you don't come to the point."

Stone's grin vanished. "You could show a little respect," he said.

It was Julian's turn to grin. "Could I?" He reached down and flung the small chair to the side. It banged against the far wall and clattered to its side. "You don't get to lecture me, Stone. I didn't run away from my responsibilities. I didn't build a damned Fortress and abandon nine-tenths of my people. I didn't—" Julian stopped.

No one spoke.

"You done?" Stone asked. He seemed far more calm than Julian would have been, were their positions reversed. Julian met his stare evenly, though. He hadn't planned that outburst, but it proved its purpose: continuing his theme of not being intimidated by Stone. *That* had been his plan since he stepped off of *Sanguine* at the Geneva spaceport.

What surprised him was that he actually *wasn't* intimidated. He straightened up and crossed his arms. "Who is this?" he asked, jutting his chin at the other man, who hadn't moved a muscle.

"Tucker Harwell."

"The ComStar guy."

"Yeah. The ComStar guy. He's with me now."

"It's an honor to meet you, Prince Davion," Harwell said. He didn't move away from the wall or offer his hand, just ducked his chin. Julian returned the gesture but bit back his grin. *Apparently we're all unintimidated.*

He looked back at Stone. "You said the Republic needed my help. That's obvious—there is no Republic anymore. Just what you've hidden back behind your Fortress." He looked at the corners of the room behind Stone, making the symbolic gesture. "I don't see how the rump is going to help me. Unless you can put your Fortress around New Avalon." Julian needed to move the conversation along. He was in danger of losing the initiative.

"Here, on Terra," Stone said, "your cousin and Damien Redburn agreed to a mutual defense pact." He glanced at Harwell, then returned his stare to Julian. "I wonder if you intend to honor it?"

"I already have," Julian said. "I spoke to Damien Redburn six months ago on Callison. He offered me all the support one expects from an ally and I pledged the same." He wanted to ask if Redburn knew Stone was back. The former exarch certainly hadn't shown a hint of it then. But Julian held his tongue. That was a conversation for another time.

"Damien..." Stone licked his lips. "Damien isn't the Republic. I am the Republic." Harwell shifted his feet at the bald statement but didn't argue. "Will you stand with us?"

Julian met his stare without reaction. He'd perfected the thousand-yard stare at the academy. After a moment he pursed his lips. "Alliances are based on mutual need," he said. "What is it you need from me?"

Stone stood. He was still a tall man, and he filled the room with his presence. People had said Julian did the same thing with his broad shoulders and open features; he was nothing next to Devlin Stone. "Daoshen Liao," he said. "Come with me."



Julian had heard about the cavernous 'Mech bays hidden beneath Geneva, but this was the first time he'd actually set foot in them. Rank upon serried rank of BattleMechs stood before them, with heavy combat vehicles mixed in. To the sides were racks of battle armor hung up for maintenance. Julian knew many of the warfighting vehicles by sight, but there were a number he didn't recognize. And then he saw what stood in the back.

"So the stories are true," he whispered. A behemoth stood half-obscured, a three-legged 'Mech that looked big enough to kick a DropShip to pieces.

Beside him, Stone followed his gaze. Harwell trailed along behind them, close enough to hear and interject but far enough back to give them the illusion of privacy. Julian recognized it easily; he'd done the same thing for Harrison Davion any number of times.

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BRING THE DAWN

"The stories are true. That's an Ares."

"An Ares."

"I can give you one," Stone said. "Be careful with it. The logistics are a nightmare."

Julian looked at the other man. "How do you know I won't just take it home and take it apart so I can figure out how to make my own?"

"Maybe you will." Stone crossed his arms, cupping his elbows in his hands. "I don't have time to worry about that." He inhaled sharply, as if savoring the burnt-lubricant scent of the bay. "These are all for you."

"For me."

"To take with you. I've got troops for them, drawn from our reserve regiments, with some frontline officers for seasoning." Stone stepped a few paces ahead and turned back to face Julian, with his back to the 'Mechs and tanks. "I know Redburn gave you troops—Davion troops—to help. I want you to take these, and use them to smash up the Confederation on your way into the Suns."

Julian blinked. "You want me to lead Republic troops into the Confederation."

"They're all volunteers," Stone said.

"Me."

"I don't want you to announce them as Republic troops."

Julian blinked again. "I don't understand."

"They're yours. All the troopers come from old Davion worlds or families. All of them can pass for Suns citizens. They'll fight for you, and for the Suns, until the Wall comes down."

Julian understood then. "You want me to distract Daoshen Liao." He saw the strategy immediately; he was too good a soldier not to. The Capellan Confederation had been a thorn in the side of everyone who shared a border with it for as long as anyone could remember. Its ruler—Chancellor Daoshen Liao—was canny and cruel and had already won acclaim with his people for reclaiming Republic worlds and sacking New Syrtis. Julian was already attacking his way through the Confederation to try and draw pressure off of the Capellan March. But Stone wanted more.

"Yes," the former Exarch said.

He wanted Julian—and by extension the Federated Suns, who had already suffered the loss of Robinson to House Kurita and New Syrtis to House Liao—to take more of the brunt. He wanted Julian to lead a force of Republic troops disguised as Davions. He wanted to draw more of Daoshen's attention onto Julian, and away from the Republic.

"You want him to think the Wall is down."

"He already thinks that."

"He what?"

"News of your passage wasn't as secret as we'd hoped. Maskirovka agents commandeered a merchant JumpShip at Nanking just after you left. They jumped into the Fortress."

"How?"

"Your pilot, we think." Stone glanced at Harwell. "We'll know for sure in a few hours."

"Where did the Mask agents jump to?"

"Nowhere," Harwell said, speaking for the first time since they entered the 'Mech bay. "You had a window. They did not. They hit the Fortress and bounced."

Julian stared at Harwell, but the young man met his gaze evenly. "Liao will know these troops aren't mine."

"If the Mask is at all competent and can muster the mental capacity to embrace the concept of inference, absolutely," Harwell said. "There can only be two possible scenarios." He pointed to his left, toward a powerful-looking assault 'Mech. "Either you have secret factories that can make a 'Mech like the *Malice* there, or else you're getting equipment from us behind the Wall." Harwell smiled. "Either hypothesis will make Daoshen less certain of his plans. Which is exactly *our* plans."

Julian looked up at the 'Mech—a *Malice*, Harwell had called it. He could see the genesis of the plan. The 'Mech wore Republic livery over a flat gray base coat. He could work with that. He could leave the Republic markings, only have them repainted when they needed repaired. Anyone checking IDs from skirmish to skirmish would see more than they expected to.

"And in return?" he asked, careful to keep his voice pensive. He'd been on the other side of the conversation before. He watched carefully, waiting for Stone or Harwell to betray some small note of satisfaction. He'd all but admitted he was agreeing to the plan. They were dickering now about the price.

"When the Wall comes down—"

"When—not if?"

"When," Stone said, stressing the word, "I'll send Republic forces to lift the siege of Robinson and cut the Combine's line of support."

"When will that be?"

"When the time's right."

Julian bit his lip. "Who decides when the time is right?"

"I do."

"The Dragon is destroying the Federated Suns." Julian glanced from Stone, to Harwell, to the ranked 'Mechs, to the wall behind all of them. "The Liaos are digging ever deeper. I'm more jumps than I want to think about from my capital. My people are *dying*. When will the time be *right*?"

Stone said nothing.

He didn't have to.

Even if only for the 'Mechs and tanks—for the help *today*—Julian had to say yes. Another regiment was another regiment.

"You have transport for them?"

Stone smiled. "And a staff—you'll meet them later today."

Julian heard a footstep behind him. When he turned he saw Major Wealthow standing there. "And here's your CO," Stone said. "I'm letting her out of the Lament for this. You should hear Colonel Hopewell scream."

Julian inclined his head to her, and got the same in return. "A major for a regiment?" He turned back to Stone. The former Exarch looked at him for a long two seconds, eyebrow raised as if waiting for the punchline, then shrugged.

"Wealthow."

"Sir," the major said from behind Julian.

"You're a colonel."

"Thank you, sir."

Stone looked at Julian. "Anything else? We're busy men."

SHATTERED FORTRESS

Acamar
Capellan Confederation
7 June 3146

Julian drew the throttle back and lifted his feet off the BattleMech's foot pedals, letting the seventy-ton *Mangonel* slow to a stop. He was still getting used to the 'Mech's gait—it was completely different from the modified *Templar III* Stone had given him. The *Templar III* was too much a Davion 'Mech, though. With the rest of the Dawn Guards still painted in Republic colors, he needed to blend in. That meant no *Templar III* painted in Davion Guard colors.

Hence the *Mangonel*, at least for the moment. He grinned and rubbed the control sticks. It had been a difficult choice; he'd almost taken the *Malice*, one of Stone's other gifts. But the Clan-built *Mangonel* was more his speed these days. More direct. More powerful. Faster.

Everything he needed to be if he was going to save the Federated Suns. There'd be other days for the *Malice*. And for the *Templar III*.

Colonel Wealthow's *Lament* stalked up next to Julian's *Mangonel*. Her voice whispered from his neurohelmet speakers. From the wattage indicator, her transmitter was turned down so low no one would receive anything more a hundred meters away or so. "We're about to launch the first raid," she said.

"Very well." Julian looked at the strategic map on his secondary console. A string of red lights were pulsing: raid targets. The green clusters of icons around them were beginning to move. He looked to the left of that screen to his tactical display. Nothing showed within a kilometer of his 'Mech except Wealthow's command lance and the security element attached to him. He looked at her 'Mech. *Laments* weren't exactly new and weren't exactly rare, but Julian hadn't seen or heard of too many outside the RAF.

"Tell me why," he said.

"Why what?"

"Why Daoshen Liao? Why is Stone so afraid of Daoshen Liao?"

"I'm not privy to his private thoughts."

"You must have been briefed."

"You were there for my briefings."

Julian sighed. He'd been trying to get more information out of Wealthow—out of any of the newly named Dawn Guards—since they'd departed Terra. None of them would say more than the story Stone had given them. He put the question out of his mind and looked back at his screen. The first raid was going off. He was too much a MechWarrior and too much a Davion not to enjoy watching a bunch of Liao allies get taken in the short hairs.



Ensign David Fiorello couldn't believe he had paid for this. He remembered clearly paying the recruiter his promotion fee. He remembered taking his ensign's diamond out of the leatherette box and holding it to the light, thinking it was an awful lot of money to spend on a commission. His mother had been proud, of course. She'd never stopped cursing the day she'd borne a son instead of a daughter.

Today he wanted a refund.

He jerked his *Gün* to the right, trying to get to cover behind a rock outcropping. The *Shockwave* chasing him disappeared off his scope for a moment when he lost line of sight, but the computer threw up a caret. David drew several quick, shuddering breaths and tried to gather his wits.

It didn't make sense. He knew it didn't make sense, and he didn't care. There hadn't been Republic troops anywhere near Acamar in years. But that *Shockwave* couldn't conceal its origins beneath a bad coat of primer. The Rep logo showed clearly on his thermal—the base paint carried heat differently than the overcoat.

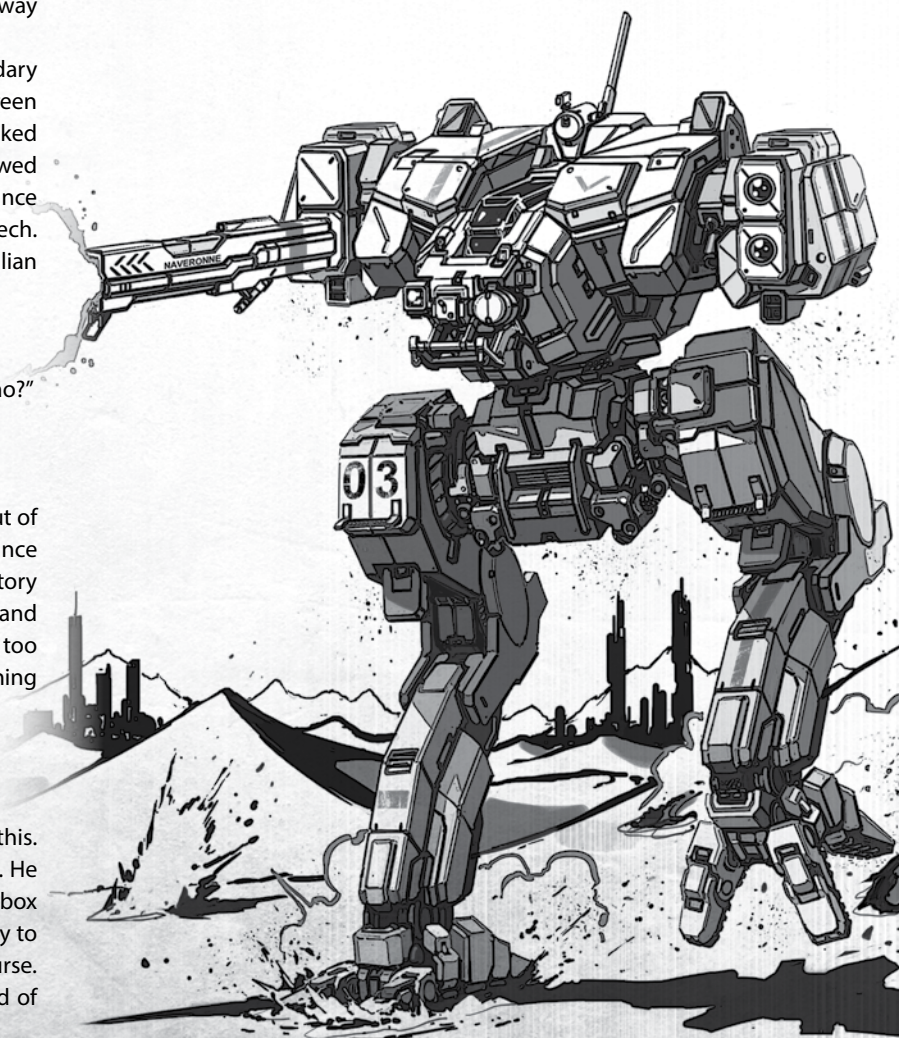
Republic troops. Outside the Fortress.

He had to report this.

David laughed.

Who was going to believe him?

Autocannon fire tore into the rocks around him. The *Shockwave* was getting closer. He wasn't going to be alive to tell anyone if he didn't figure something out. He was in a Capellan-built OmniMech that hardly anyone took seriously, and while he could deal significant damage to an opponent with his heavy PPC, it was his only weapon. Absent a miraculous hit, he wasn't getting out of this.



BRING THE DAWN

All that was left was getting the word out. The Reps were jamming all the tactical frequencies, but if he could get high enough... *there*. A kilometer away the rolling hills broke on a peak. If he got his transmitter up that high and just blasted the information out, chances were that even one of the civilian comsats would pick it up. It might take an analyst from the Ebon Magistrate to sort it out, but the data would be there.

"I should have stayed on Fanardir," he whispered.

Then he slammed his throttle forward.

As soon as the *Gùn* broke cover the *Shockwave* fired another barrage of missiles and autocannon fire, but David ignored it. It would hit or it wouldn't, and he wouldn't be near enough cover for at least half a klick before he could turn and fire. If he even wanted to. *Turning around and shooting will slow me down*, he told himself. *And I'm already going to lose.*

The *Gùn's* throttle was already locked forward at its gate, but David pushed against it even so.



"It's a raid," Colonel Elise Centrella-Tompkins said, for the fourteenth or so time.

"I don't care if it's the Clans come back again," Governor Herzog shouted, "you will defend Acamar citizens from aggression or I will watch as the Chancellor's justice has you flogged across three star systems!"

The colonel bit her lip while she tried to control her temper. "First, I will say again: few, if any, Acamar citizens are being attacked. The raiders have been confining themselves to military targets. My Canopians are suffering in job lots for your people, Governor." When the husky man opened his mouth, Centrella-Tompkins held out her finger in warning. "Second, they are already making preparations to leave."

The colonel's face was lifelike on the holo, which let Centrella-Tompkins enjoy his confused look. "What?"

"They haven't occupied any of the sites they've struck," she said. "We will likely see more skirmishes, but they're not staying. It's a raid. It's damaging and disruptive and you can be damn sure I'll be asking how they got down through the orbital net without so much as a warning, but it could be a lot worse."

"But—"

"But nothing, Governor. My apologies, but I have to go. It's possible we'll be able to catch one before they go, and the Chancellor will want to know who it is."

"Surely it is Davions."

"I'm sure of nothing," Centrella-Tompkins said. "The Davions are the obvious choice—but I'm getting reports of its being Republic troops."

Herzog's face paled. "Republic troops? Impossible!"

"Nevertheless..." she blinked. "I must go, Governor." She didn't wait for the man to respond before she flicked the comm connection off. The blank holotank stared back at her for a moment. She blinked again and pushed herself back, climbing out of the chair and turning back to the ops room.

"Another raid," a major called from the across the room. "Class One stores at Dieppe. The garrison escaped, but the stores are burning." On the large flatscreen on the wall another red icon burned to life. The colonel eyed the string of red strikes and blew air out through her lips.

"IDs?"

"Same as before. Nothing conclusive, but it looks like Reps."

"Nothing new from the recon lances?" When it had become clear there was a pattern to the raids, the Canopians deployed recon lances to probe for the raiders' flanks, in case the pattern of their attacks was a decoy. The major anticipated her next question. "And no—we haven't take any of them down for study yet, either."

The colonel sighed.

Who the hell is this? Her first reaction to the report of Republic troops had been the same as Governor Herzog's. Impossible. The Republic had been locked behind its Wall for a decade. If it had suddenly breached that Wall, or even brought it down, she had to believe the fanfare would have made it as far as Acamar, at least. She'd have *known*.

And if it is the Republic ... Centrella-Tompkins stood. She didn't want to finish that thought.



The shadow cast by the *Duat-class DropShip Lucifer's Sword* was a pool of black, but bright lights washed through it from the open 'Mech bays. Julian Davion sat in his *Mangonel's* cockpit and read the précis reports that slithered up his HUD as the Dawn's raiding parties returned. Colonel Wealthow's *Lament* was already aboard. Julian reached for the comm button, but paused when a roaring sound shook the 'Mech's very frame. Light flared and flashed as one of the *Sword's* cruise missile batteries ripped off a new round. The missile booster flashed but the horizon was too near with the lowlands to the east to see the booster drop off before the cruise motor took over.

"Thirty minutes to boost, Prince Davion," Colonel Wealthow's voice said.

"Anything I should know about that missile?" If one of Julian's raiding parties was engaged heavily enough to need that support, they might have to send a flying column out to relieve it. He might get to fight in the *Mangonel* after all. He twisted his hands on its controls.

"Area denial," the colonel said. "Using it to close a pass behind the last company."

Julian chewed his lip. "All accounted for?"

"Yes, sir."

He turned the *Mangonel*. "Distracting enough, you think?"

"For what?"

"For Stone."

There was a pause. "We've set back the First Canopian's operations by months," Wealthow said. "They'll have to rebuild before they can do more than sit in garrison. And we've done it without allowing them to know who we are. I'd say that will be distracting."

SHATTERED FORTRESS

"And the evidence?"

"Placed, sir."

Julian grunted. They'd prepared one of his old First Davion 'Mechs, a *Centurion*, with evidence tying it forensically to both the Suns and the Republic. Inserting it into the salvage pile at the first raid site had been tricky, but the Dawn's special ops company had been up to the task. The Maskirovka would think the *Centurion* had been rebuilt on Terra.

Which, from a certain point of view, it had been.

He still wasn't convinced this was the right plan. The lord only knew if Stone could be trusted to keep his word, but Julian knew that if the Dragon moved on New Avalon he'd need their help to get it back. Too much had been lost already—squandered on Palmyra or destroyed by the Liaos. He needed every chance he could get to help the Suns survive. This plan had brought him another regiment of 'Mechs and soldiers, and he needed every regiment he could get. Wealthow had followed his orders without question. So far as he could tell, the Dawn Guards were a loyal regiment.

So far as he could tell.

It was early days yet.

He turned the *Mangonel* toward the 'Mech bay as the cruise missile launcher ripped loose another round. The shadow it painted around the *Mangonel* was diamond-sharp and fleeting.

Julian prayed it wasn't an omen.

Zi-jin Cheng
Sian
Capellan Confederation
22 August 3146

Sang-jiang-jun Isabelle Fisk had heard stories of the Liao family's rages her entire career. She had heard of the purges Romano Liao led in the 3030s and 3040s. She had heard of the capricious bouts of ruthlessness Sun-Tzu Liao displayed. So as she stood in the throne room before Chancellor Daoshen Liao, giving him bad news, she remembered the expression on the faces of those sharing those stories as they told them. That mix of admiration and fear—admiration, that anyone could be so ruthless, and fear, because they were afraid someday they'd be that ruthlessness' target.

"Say that again," Daoshen said quietly.

"*Chong Che* has failed," Fisk said, clearly. She was afraid, but it didn't affect her voice. She was an officer of the Confederation; fear was part of the job. "The flotilla is in Nanking. It is destroyed."

"Nanking."

"Yes, Celestial Wisdom."

"Not the Fortress."

"No."

Daoshen stared at the gold-enameled nails resting in his lap. "Your opinion?"

"The data support only one conclusion," Fisk said. "The Fortress remains."

"Then explain Julian Davion."

"I cannot."

Daoshen regarded her for a moment, then blew out air. "You have reviewed the reports from Acamar and Ningpo." At her nod, he looked down at his lap again. "Do you agree that the new regiment fighting with Davion there is a Republic regiment?"

"All the evidence agrees, yes."

"That is not what I asked." The edge was clear in Daoshen's voice. "I asked if you agree."

"And I answered, Chancellor," Fisk said. She had her own ways of coping with the fear. The foremost among those was to be clear and direct and know that if the chancellor were to order her death, she would face it with a clear conscience. "I believe the evidence of my eyes. The equipment possessed by the regiment with Julian Davion came from behind the Wall. Spectrographic analysis confirms it. The troops fight in the ways the Republic trains its soldiers to fight—we captured enough materials when Liao returned to us to know Republic tactical doctrine." She paused and took a cleansing breath. "The evidence supports no other conclusion."

"And yet *Chong Che* is destroyed at Nanking."

Fisk inclined her head in agreement.

After a moment Daoshen stood and made his way down the throne's steps. He beckoned Fisk to accompany him and walked slowly toward the entryway. "We must be cautious," Daoshen said. "You are right—the data do not lie. But if we cannot attack into the Fortress to take the pressure off, we must be vigilant and ready to respond to Stone's eventual attack."

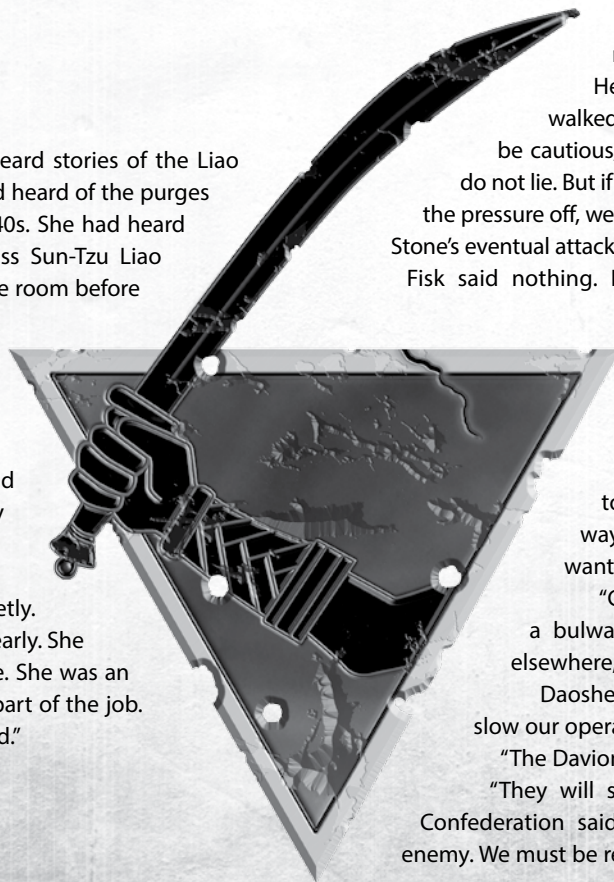
Fisk said nothing. Her mind was awash with maps and strategies. Had *Chong Che* worked—had its two regiments been successful in opening a salient inside the Fortress—it would have given the Confederation the initiative and made the Republic react to Capellan moves, rather than the other way around. Any strategist worth her salt wanted the enemy reacting to her moves.

"Gathering the forces necessary for a bulwark will require us to cease operations elsewhere," Fisk said.

Daoshen fluttered a hand. "Of course. We will slow our operations in the Federated Suns."

"The Davions are on their heels," Fisk cautioned.

"They will stay there," the supreme leader of the Confederation said. "The Republic is a more dangerous enemy. We must be ready when they strike."



INTRODUCTION

Date: 24 January 3151
To: *Sang-jiang-jun* Isabelle Fisk, CCAF Strategic Military Director
From: Alexander Bryzgalov, Maskirovka Directorate
Classified Status: EYES ONLY

Sang-jiang-jun Fisk,

Our agents intercepted the attached report from Republic channels. Given the recipients and subject matter, the Directorate has taken great pains to verify this report's provenance, and we have confirmed that it is indeed genuine.

Be aware that the account of Operation CLARITY that closes out this document was drafted by Republic intelligence and thus is skewed to paint our Capellan patriots as villains; as a result, the report should be subject to intense scrutiny. It is strongly recommended that the information regarding CLARITY be amended or redacted as necessary before being presented to the Celestial Wisdom himself, and I encourage you to contrast it with the official CCAF after-action reports detailing the operation. The stark discrepancies between these two accounts reveals just how far our enemies are willing to go to destroy us even in our moment of imminent triumph.

Beyond this insight into the outcome of Operation CLARITY, the vital intelligence contained in the remainder of this report will provide us with the advantage we need to forge ahead and champion the cause of our glorious nation. It is my belief that the Supreme Wisdom, may he live forever, will make great use of this intelligence in the battles to come.

If knowledge is power, then this knowledge shall make us powerful indeed.

Your Humble Servant,

Alexander Bryzgalov
Director of the Maskirovka

Date: 6 January 3151
To: Jonah Levin
CC: Devlin Stone, Tucker Harwell
From: Paladin Janella Lakewood

Jonah,

The attached reports compile and condense all of the salient intelligence items our agents have gathered from across the Inner Sphere over the past five years. It is the fervent hope of the Department of Military Intelligence that by analyzing these documents, we might find a previously unseen and exploitable flaw in our enemies' tactics that will permit us to strike when the moment is right.

However, if no weaknesses can be found, then rest assured that we have done all that we can. The hatches have been battened, the sails have been secured, and now all that remains is to await the storm and pray that we can weather it.

We stand at the crossroads of humanity's future. I pray that when the end comes, we will stand up and be victorious or go out with our heads held high. Only history can judge us, and we must acquit ourselves well.

All I can say is, whoever breaks down our door is in for a rude surprise.

In Honorable Service to the Republic of the Sphere,

Paladin Janella Lakewood

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Welcome to *Shattered Fortress*, a sourcebook chronicling the final, desperate efforts of the Republic of the Sphere to hold onto Devlin Stone's dream for humanity, despite the looming dangers of Clan conquest and Successor State ambition. This sourcebook provides a wealth of information regarding the tumultuous events of the years 3146 to 3150, which changed the course of history for the entire Inner Sphere. The information contained in this book can be used to create and play *Alpha Strike* and *Total Warfare* games and in *A Time of War* roleplaying campaigns.

The main chapters of this book comprise a year-by-year overview, each highlighting major events within the Inner Sphere and offering in-universe perspective on the most noteworthy incidents, including the rise and fall of splinter nations, the loss of national leaders, and the ascension of local and Sphere-wide threats.

Following the yearly reviews are *New Unit Profiles*, a closer look at military formations that came to prominence during the events of this time period. Each profile includes the history of each unit, details their special abilities, and provides rules for bringing them to life on *Alpha Strike* or *Total Warfare* battlefields.

The *Fortress Republic Technology* section offers an in-universe look at theories behind the defensive technologies that composed the Fortress Republic protocols.

The ten *Chaos Campaign*-compatible scenarios in the *Touchpoint Tracks* section give players and gamemasters the chance to fight in various pivotal battles that occurred during this dark period in the Inner Sphere's history.

Finally, a record sheet for Julian Davion's custom *Templar III*, "Arthur," is included at the end of this book.

In rules text throughout this book, the following sources are referenced: *Total Warfare* (TW), *Tactical Operations* (TO), *Alpha Strike* (AS), *Alpha Strike Companion* (ASC), *Combat Manual: Mercenaries* (CM: M), *Campaign Operations* (CO), *Field Manual: 3145* (FM: 3145), and *Technical Readout: 3145* (TRO: 3145).

INNER SPHERE - 3145



Inner Sphere Powers

- 1) Republic of the Sphere
- 2) Clan Jade Falcon
- 3) Clan Hell's Horses
- 4) Rasalhague Dominion
- 5) Wolf Empire
- 6) Raven Alliance
- 7) Filtvelt Coalition
- 8) Tortuga Dominions
- 9) Calderon Protectorate
- 10) Taurian Concordat
- 11) Fronc Reaches
- 12) Magistracy of Canopus
- 13) Marian Hegemony
- 14) Lothian League
- 15) Rim Collection
- 16) Rim Territories
- 17) Chainelane Isles
- 18) The Barrens
- 19) The Remnant
- 20) Galatean League

Draconis Combine

Pesht Military District

- 1) Albiero Prefecture
- 2) Bjarred Prefecture
- 3) Qandahar Prefecture
- 4) Ningxia Prefecture
- 5) Kagoshima Prefecture
- 6) Irece Prefecture

New Samarkand Military District

- 7) Oshika Prefecture
- 8) New Samarkand Prefecture
- 9) Matsuida Prefecture
- 10) Barlow's End Prefecture
- 11) Kaznejev Prefecture
- 12) Tancredi Prefecture

Benjamin Military District

- 13) Buckminster Prefecture
- 14) Xinyang Prefecture
- 15) Benjamin Prefecture
- 16) Proserpina Prefecture
- 17) Irurzun Prefecture

Dieron Military District

- 18) Algedi Prefecture
- 19) Dieron Prefecture
- 20) Al Na'ir Prefecture
- 21) Ashio Prefecture

Federated Suns

Draconis March

- 1) Robinson Operational Area
- 2) Tancredi IV Operational Area

Capellan March

- 3) Kathil Operational Area
- 4) Sirdar Operational Area

Crucis March

- 5) Markesan Operational Area
- 6) Chirikof Operational Area

Periphery March

- 7) Minette Operational Area
- 8) June Operational Area
- 9) Anjin Muerto Operational Area
- 10) Woodbine Operational Area

Free Worlds League

- 1) Oriente Protectorate
- 2) Duchy of Tamarind-Abbey
- 3) Rim Commonality
- 4) Clan Protectorate
- 5) Covenant Worlds
- 6) Augustine Alliance

Former Free Worlds League

- 7) Duchy of Andurien
- 8) Regulan Fiefs

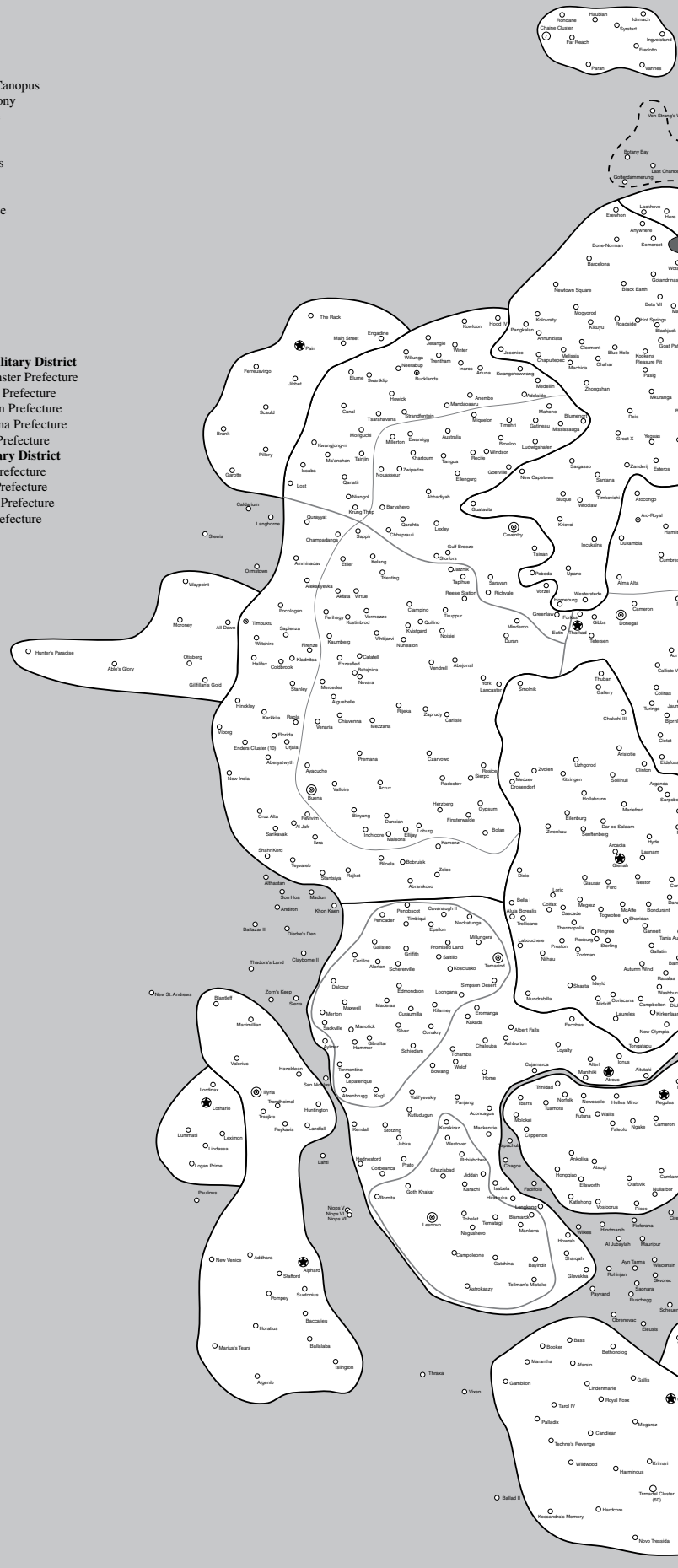
Lyrax Commonwealth

Provinces

- 1) Donegal Province
- 2) Arc-Royal Theater
- 3) Coventry Province
- 4) Bucklands Theater
- 5) Buena Province
- 6) Timbuktu Theater

Capellan Confederation

- 1) Tikonov Commonality
- 2) Chesterton Commonality
- 3) Sarna Commonality
- 4) Capellan Commonality
- 5) Stan Commonality
- 6) St Ives Commonality
- 7) Victoria Commonality



LEGEND

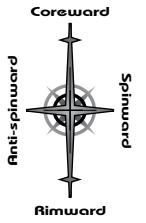
30 LIGHT YEARS

120 LIGHT YEARS OR 36.8 PARSECS

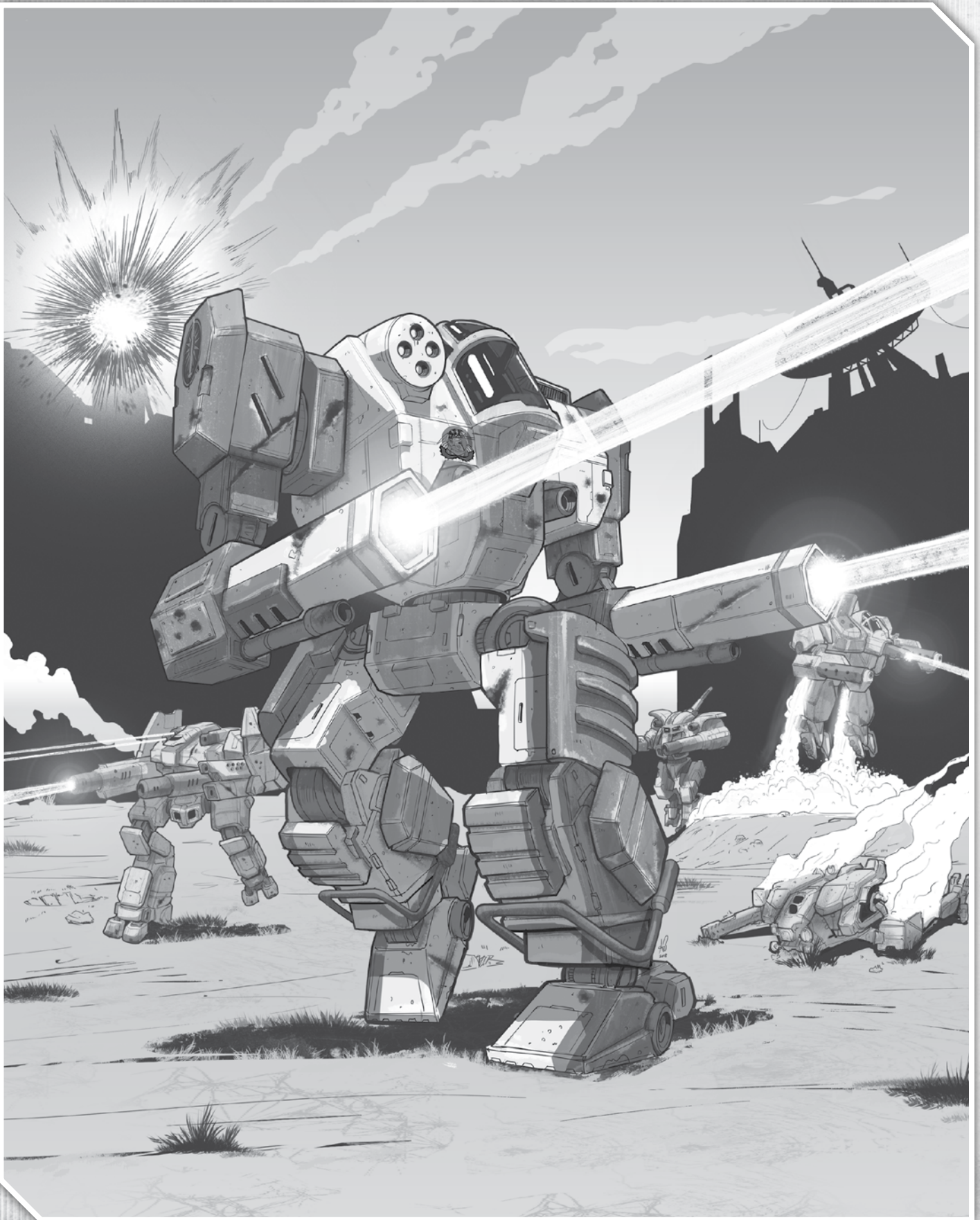
⊙ Region capital ⊙ District capital ⬤ National capital

MAXIMUM JUMP: APPROXIMATELY 30 LIGHT YEARS

Map compiled by COMSTAR.
From information provided by the COMSTAR EXPLORER CORPS
and the STAR LEAGUE ARCHIVES on Terra.



SHATTERED FORTRESS



3146: CRACKS IN THE FOUNDATION

Between 3132 and 3145, the Inner Sphere descended into chaos, shattering the fragile peace Devlin Stone engineered in the wake of the Word of Blake's Jihad. In thirteen short years, the Republic of the Sphere transformed from a shining paragon of international collaboration into a crippled shadow of its former self. That conflagration of war gave rise to the rebirth of a shattered nation; the deaths of an Archon, a First Prince, and a whole branch of the Kurita line; sweeping changes in the Clans' philosophies and leadership; and the collapse of ComStar, the interstellar communications giant, leading to the devaluation of the C-bill during the continued HPG Blackout. Every nation scrambled to tear the Republic apart the moment that cracks appeared in its façade. It is our hope that by analyzing the events following the reanimation of former Exarch Devlin Stone, we will be able to move forward with clear consciences and hope to best utilize the power we wield.

3146 began with an Inner Sphere in flames, and the year's events would only throw more fuel on the fire. The previous months saw Capellan Confederation troops occupy New Syrtis for the first time in recorded history. The First Prince of the Federated Suns had been killed in a surprise assault on Palmyra, and the Draconis Combine was poised to strike at the throat of House Davion for the first time since the First Succession War. The Lyran Commonwealth had nearly lost another Archon and one of its most important military industries, and the young Free Worlds League was targeted by its rimward neighbors. Two Clans lay poised to snatch up Terra and become the ilClan, and only the impenetrable wall of Fortress Republic stood in their way.

A LONG WAY FROM HOME

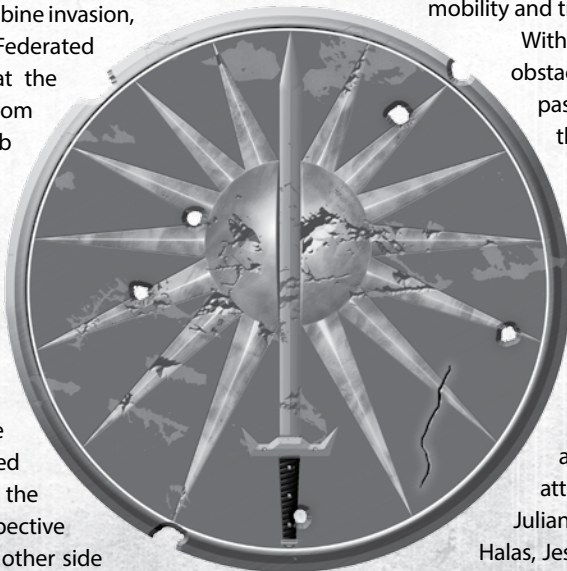
Aside from the ongoing Draconis Combine invasion, the biggest problem confronting the Federated Suns at the beginning of 3146 was that the nation's head of state remained far from home. Exiled from Suns space during Caleb Davion's reign, the as-yet-uncrowned First Prince Julian Davion spent more than half a decade fighting in the crumbling Republic. After Fortress Republic was raised, Julian and his First Davion Guards attempted to arrest the hemorrhaging of Republic worlds and defend them from the circling vultures. When Clans Wolf and Jade Falcon threatened the capital of the Lyran Commonwealth in 3143, Julian rushed to Tharkad's defense. Caleb's death during the fighting on Palmyra in 3144 left the prospective First Prince of the Federated Suns on the other side of the Inner Sphere, with hostile Clans, ancient enemies, and the impassable wall of Fortress Republic blocking his path back home. In addition, invasions by the Capellan Confederation Armed Forces and the Draconis Combine Mustered Soldiery into the Capellan and Draconis Marches left the leaderless nation in a precarious position. Though Prince's Champion Erik Sandoval-

Groell was appointed regent in Julian's absence, the First Prince was determined to return home and restore order before it was too late.

TAKING THE SCENIC ROUTE

Throughout 3145, Julian and the First Davion Guards progressed with caution through Lyran Commonwealth space. Since the new First Prince was effectively hedged in behind enemy lines, the Federated Suns' MIIO and DMI attempted to suppress news about Caleb Davion's death in order to prevent the Suns' enemies from using the knowledge to further cripple the nation. Once reports of Caleb's death propagated beyond the Suns' borders, Julian's whereabouts during his exodus from the Lyran Commonwealth became a closely guarded secret, one that frustrated Chancellor Daoshen Liao's Maskirovka to no end. Julian did not resurface again until late 3145, when Maskirovka agents finally caught wind of him meeting with former Exarch Damien Redburn's Republic Remnant on Callison. Since the Federated Suns—and Julian in particular—had long been a friend and ally to the Republic, Redburn refitted the First Davion Guards with all the supplies he could spare. Many RAF troops of Federated Suns pedigree opted to join Julian's crusade to return home and repulse the Confederation and Combine invasions. Several small mercenary bands, many of whom the Federated Suns had employed at one time, also chose to follow Julian home. His most notable coup was recruiting Clan Sea Fox's Gamma Aimag from Tiburon Khanate in exchange for three Federated Suns worlds—to be named and ceded at a later date—and other financial considerations. His arrangement with Gamma Aimag was economic rather than military, but the Sea Foxes provided the growing task force with the mobility and transportation capabilities Julian lacked.

With Fortress Republic creating an unnavigable obstacle, Julian's Task Force Navarre had to either pass through the Draconis Combine or travel through the Free Worlds League and the Capellan Confederation to reach Suns space. Since the Federated Suns was openly at war with the Draconis Combine, he opted to take the longer and safer rimward route around the Republic instead. Julian planned to traverse the League's systems as quietly as possible, but SAFE agents stumbled onto his intrusion. Naval forces supporting the Second Covenant Guards accosted Navarre at Talitha—but instead of attacking, an envoy from Jessica Marik offered Julian a proposition. Unlike her father Thomas Halas, Jessica bore House Davion no personal ill will and would allow his task force to pass through League space unscathed in return for acquiescing to a marker that she or her descendants could cash in at a time of their choosing. Although loath to be in House Marik's debt, Julian agreed and continued into Capellan space with the knowledge that House Davion's perpetual enemy would never offer him such a concession.



SHATTERED FORTRESS

THE FIRST PRINCE: ALLY OR OPPORTUNIST?

[begin transcript]

Tucker Harwell: Let me get this straight. So we're sitting here behind this impenetrable Fortress, and you send out not one but *three* verigraphed invitations, saying, "Feel free to just waltz on in"? What is that going to accomplish?

Devlin Stone: We need Julian Davion. He's integral to our plans, and I had no way of knowing exactly which world he would surface on first.

Harwell: And what if your invitation got intercepted? What if someone other than Julian Davion comes through the Fortress wall? What if several someones came through? Can we afford that kind of security breach?

Stone: I don't think we'll have to worry about that. I put measures in place to ensure only Julian comes through.

Harwell: *Right.* I forgot for a moment that I was addressing the omniscient Devlin Stone.

Stone: Don't patronize me, Tucker. Even if someone else did manage to get through, it'd be acceptable collateral damage if my invitation method ensures Julian arrives safely.

Harwell: Okay, but why Julian Davion? Why not reach out to one of the other Great Houses as well? Why not invite one of the Clanner Khans while we're at it? Can we afford to play favorites right now?

Stone: The Republic and the Federated Suns share a long history. Damien Redburn and Harrison Davion forged an accord allying our nations in the event of a crisis. Harrison's cousin is more than capable of upholding the Suns' half of the bargain.

Harwell: [scoffs] And *then* what? The whole AFFS comes to dig us out of this pit while they continue to fight wars on two other fronts?

Stone: [chuckles] Wasn't exactly what I had in mind.

Harwell: What then is your big, master plan?

Stone: None of your concern at the moment.

Harwell: Bullshit. I asked you *why* you did the things you did, and you swore on David Lear's grave that you would tell me everything I needed to know, did you not?

Stone: I did, and you don't *need to know* every aspect of my plans, at least not yet.

Harwell: [sighs] I hope you know you're taking an awful risk letting someone see the other side of this one-way mirror. I mean, what if First Prince Julian Davion isn't quite the valiant knight you expect him to be? What if he betrays us and finds a way to drop the Fortress before we are ready?

Stone: If that happens, Tucker, then we may truly be alone in this universe.

[end transcript]

—*The Stone Conversations, Transcript #B125-F, 2*
Jan 3146

RAIDING THE CONFEDERATION

At the end of 3145, Navarre struck the Menkalinan system, a Tikonov Commonality world along the Free Worlds League border. Instead of attempting to jump through the Confederation unnoticed and risk being stranded in an uninhabited system, Julian made no pretense of subterfuge. He intended the attack to accomplish two objectives—first, to pull the Confederation's attention from the Capellan March front, and second, to replenish supplies. Out on his own and a long way from home, Julian had no support apparatus or logistics chain. Two of Navarre's mercenary companies and a First Davion detachment emptied supply dumps, raided local munitions manufacturers, and destroyed several factories to deny them to the local Capellan reserve troops. The raiders cut through Menkalinan's Home Guard units, but under Julian's orders his troops did not go out of their way to exterminate the defenders. Civilian population centers were likewise left untouched.

The most significant outcome of the Menkalinan offensive was the CCAF capture of the First Davion's Lieutenant Morton Briggs. Briggs's *Griffin* fell to a Home Guard ambush, and he was presumed dead. The Home Guard interrogated Briggs about the invaders' plans until Candace Genesee, a Republic DMI agent on-planet, extricated Briggs from the Confederation's clutches. Briggs apprised Genesee of Julian's intended targets and goals in the Confederation, and she immediately sent a report through the DMI's network. Word of Julian's quest made its way through the Fortress Wall and into the hands of Devlin Stone. Stone then tasked DMI agents with locating Julian Davion at any cost.

In January 3146, Navarre struck New Canton in the same way as Menkalinan. To keep the CCAF guessing, Julian deployed different troops in the raid. The Navarre forces steamrolled over the Home Guard detachment and took needed supplies, again avoiding civilian areas. Intercepted Maskirovka reports ensured that the CCAF remained ignorant of Julian's next target.

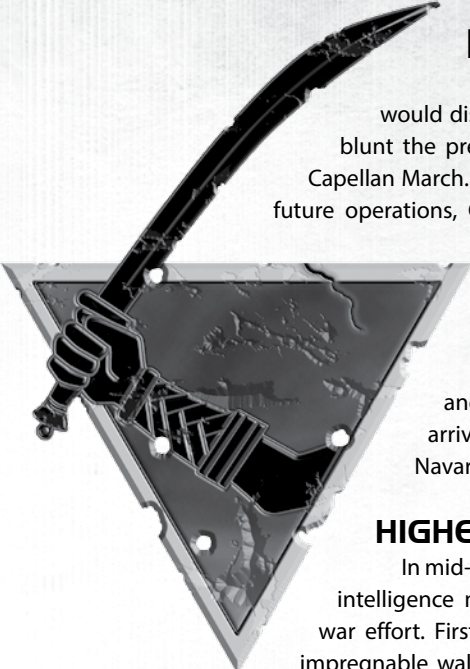
Before the next raid, Julian renegotiated his contract with the Gamma Aimag. Deep in the heart of Capellan space, the task force needed all the help it could get, and additional troops would let Julian hit faster and leave the scene before Capellan reinforcements could arrive. Under their original, limited contract the Sea Foxes lent only transportation assets and would not militarily engage any targets. The forging of a new contract allowed the Sea Foxes to be included in the invasion forces, but enabled them to designate their own targets, conduct autonomous operations, and retain all salvage gained during their battles. Julian's executive officer, Colonel Siobhan Sortek, initially disapproved of the move, as she did not trust the "nomad Clan mercenaries," but Julian's argument in favor of the extra guns changed her mind.

AN INVITATION

A month after the New Canton raid, the majority of Task Force Navarre and Gamma Aimag made landfall on Nanking. Before the raid commenced, a Republic intelligence agent linked up with Julian's troops and presented him with a prerecorded message from Devlin Stone himself. "The Republic needs your help," Stone implored. "And from the look of things, you need the Republic's help as well." The message included very detailed instructions meant to be followed to the letter, including precise jump coordinates and a strict timetable.

Julian delegated command of the task force to Colonel Sortek. Instructing Navarre to progress toward its intended rendezvous with Erik Sandoval on Goshen, Julian took a small honor guard of First Davion Guards to Nanking's zenith jump point. While the rest of the task force raided the world, Julian waited until the precise time appointed by Stone's invitation and jumped out of the system. Within two minutes of the jump, the *Majestic Bounty*, a merchant JumpShip commandeered by Maskirovka agents who had learned of Stone's message, immediately jumped toward Terra Firma, Julian's suspected destination inside Fortress Republic's border. *Bounty* was never seen again.

INSATIABLE APPETITE



Task Force Navarre had hoped its raids would distract the CCAF away from the front lines and blunt the pressure of the Confederation's invasion of the Capellan March. Instead of pulling CCAF troops earmarked for future operations, Chancellor Daoshen Liao and the Strategios committed interior troops to fend off the raids. The Liao Conservatory Cadre and the Magistracy's Second Canopian Lancers traveled from Liao and Styk in hopes of bolstering the faltering Nanking Home Guard and catching the invaders red-handed. Both units arrived to find that they were too late: Task Force Navarre and its Sea Fox fleet had already moved on.

HIGHER ASPIRATIONS

In mid-March 3146, Maskirovka agents reported three intelligence matters vital to the Capellan Confederation's war effort. First, Julian Davion had been invited within the impregnable walls of Fortress Republic. Second, Devlin Stone was still alive. Third, Julian was no longer with Task Force Navarre, which continued to elude CCAF forces in the Tikonov Commonality. Daoshen intended to exploit these developments to the fullest. The First Prince was nowhere to be found, and Capellan agents freely disseminated knowledge of Julian's alleged death throughout the Capellan March in hopes that the news would further drag down the morale of the Armed Forces of the Federated Suns and the march's populace.

Many AFFS troops and civilians believed the rumors that the First Prince had been killed in action during a trek through the Confederation. Other hearsay claimed that Julian had permanently vanished into Fortress Republic. Morale in the AFFS, which was still reeling from the Confederation's seizure of the Capellan March capital of New Syrtis in 3145, flagged even further. CCAF troop-assessment raids into the march further reinforced Daoshen's belief that the time was ripe for the next phase of conquest.

In just eleven years, Daoshen Liao had already accomplished more than his father Sun-Tzu had ever dreamed. Operation GREAT FLOOD in 3134 had restored many Capellan worlds lost to the Federated Commonwealth during the Fourth Succession War; Chesterton, which the pre-Confederation Tikonov Grand Union had lost to House Davion in 2357, was conquered in 3144; and the 3145 push of CELESTIAL REWARD brought the Capellan conquest of New Syrtis. Despite all of these successes, Daoshen strove for greater heights. Rather than delay his timetable to deal with Navarre, he gave the go-ahead for the next phase of his plans.

THE CAPELLAN INVASION

On 25 March 3146, the CCAF launched attacks into the coreward half of the Capellan March. The Third St. Ives Sentinels and the Third Capellan Chargers descended upon Cammal, while the Seventh Capellan Chargers and a small fleet of Pocket WarShips jumped to Monhegan.

Cammal's defenders, the Fifth Avalon Hussars LCT, assumed this was yet another raid, as the CCAF had been hopping back and forth across the border to test AFFS defenses since the capture of New Syrtis. The Chargers maintained the ruse by using the same modus operandi employed in previous raids, which drew the Fifth into a false sense of security. Once the Fifth Hussars surrounded and trapped the Chargers on the Marlowe Heathers, the rest of the Chargers and the Third Sentinels performed a combat drop on the Fifth's location and sent the LCT into a rout. By mid-April, the Fifth abandoned the planet to warn AFFS High Command that the Capellans were indeed coming once again.

CAPELLAN MYSTERY

Exarch,

Our agents on New Canton successfully sanctioned the Maskirovka investigation team that Chancellor Liao dispatched in the wake of Julian Davion's raid-in-force. The Strategios representative's final analysis largely agrees with our own projections. The message will never be transmitted to the Chancellor, but its full text follows.

Orders to rendezvous with Davion and deliver your offer were relayed to Agent 137-816-129 at Nanking, Agent 433-956-121 at Aldebaran, and Agent 375-278-011 at Zurich.

[Signed]

Agent 705-386-407

27 January 3146

(Appended message follows.)

Chancellor,

The following report summarizes the situation on New Canton.

Findings:

New Canton was raided in heavy force.

The enemy task force was of neither Free Worlds nor Republic origin.

Image captures show the enemies are either the same as, or associated with, those who raided Menkalinan two weeks ago.

The enemy task force comprises a variety of combat commands. Most are known affiliates of Julian Davion, former Prince's Champion and likely First Prince of the Federated Suns.

Weapon storehouses and ammo stockpiles were stripped completely bare. Those not raided were destroyed completely.

Civilian infrastructure was largely spared from enemy attention. One notable exception was the Chancellor's Requiem, a statue commemorating the Chancellor's divine intervention during the Crusades; the bronze statue was shattered, with the pieces melted to slag where they landed. Other symbols of the Chancellor's benevolence were also targeted with extreme prejudice.

Interrogation of surviving militia troops indicates that the enemy had overwhelming aerospace superiority that was held in reserve. This corroborates information from survivors of the Menkalinan raid.

(CONTINUED ON P. 18)

SHATTERED FORTRESS

CAPELLAN MYSTERY (CONTINUED)

Suppositions and Conclusions:

Enemy intel is up-to-date: both Menkalinan and New Canton were defended only by Home Guard reserves. These troops offered little to slow the enemy's strength. Presuming a continued advance into the Tikonov Commonality, the next targeted world will be Zurich, Aldebaran, or Nanking. The line of progress through the Confederation to the Federated Suns will likely lead through the Chesterton Commonality.

Enemy force has two primary goals: resupply at CCAF expense and distract ongoing invasion of the Capellan March. Secondary goals obviously include sowing chaos in Confederation space to sully the Chancellor's name, and possibly inserting covert agents to establish guerrilla forces to destabilize planetary governments at a later time.

The Republic does not seem to be associated with the enemy task force, at least not yet. Indications are that the Wall remains in place.

Recommendations:

Increase alert status of Home Guard on Zurich, Aldebaran, and Nanking immediately.

Increase alert status of Home Guard on Genoa, Ningpo, Pleione, and Poznan in case enemy leapfrogs expected follow-up targets.

Mobilize Holdfast Guard and Liao Conservatory Cadre for quick response reprisal strike to one of these worlds.

Redeploy Second, Third, and Fourth Tikonov Guards to neighboring worlds in the projected paths to the Federated Suns (see attached map and suggested redeployment).

[Signed]

Sao-shao Rudiger Daniels

Tikonov Commonality Strategios

CC: Tikonov Commonality Strategios, Chesterton Commonality Strategios, Sarna Commonality Strategios

On Monhegan, the Seventh Capellan Chargers quickly routed the planetary militia and took the planetary governor hostage. To ensure no word of the Seventh's arrival left the system, the CCAF fleet placed all civilian JumpShips on lockdown and threatened to fire upon any vessel that fired up its K-F drive. The Strategios hoped to convince the AFFS that the first wave of their renewed invasion was merely another series of raids, a deception which would allow the CCAF enough momentum to reach its intended target: the industrial world of Kathil.

The second wave commenced during the last week of April. The Seventh Chargers hit Andro, the Third Chargers struck Gallitzin, and the Third Sentinels landed on Lee. Planetary militia caved on Andro and Gallitzin, but the First Brockton Training Battalion on Lee proved the second wave's most difficult hurdle. The Third St. Ives Sentinels hesitated to fire upon the training unit at first, but this changed after a gutsy move by one of the First Brockton 'Mech companies managed to isolate and kill *Sao-shao* Jordanna Sung. The Third poured its retribution into the training battalion; less than a company of cadets and instructors survived the attack. By the end of the second wave, the AFFS had discovered the impending attack on Kathil and scrambled any available forces to reinforce the Eighth Avalon Hussars before it was too late.

BACKYARD RAIDS

The Capellan attack on Kathil never occurred. On 5 May, while the CCAF regiments awaited orders to pounce on Kathil, devastating raids hit several worlds in the Tikonov and Chesterton Commonalities. Task Force Navarre was identified attacking New Aragon and Halloran V, and Gamma Aimag launched its own campaigns on Pleione and Poznan.

To stop the continued theft, sabotage, and destruction of vital supplies, a Second McCarron's Armored Cavalry battalion jumped to Halloran V. The Second MAC ran down a small mercenary company, but the rest of the Navarre troops eluded destruction or capture. On New Aragon, the Third Tikonov Guards arrived in time to prevent the First Davion Guards from conducting an attack on a crucial logistics depot serving the Chesterton Commonality. As the Navarre raids had purposefully avoided any civilian entanglements whenever possible, the Third was ordered to exploit this weakness by using the planet's own people against the raiders. The Third incited riots in the city of Argo and goaded the First Davion through the city streets. Rather than disobey Julian Davion's express orders to leave civilians unharmed, the First pushed through the Third and pulled back to their DropShips.

On Pleione and Poznan, the Sea Foxes issued formal *batchalls* for Gamma Aimag's targets on both worlds. The Poznan Home Guard, having never dealt directly with Clan warriors before, held off replying until the Sea Foxes had made landfall, which forced them to respond. For expediency, the Sea Foxes divided each of their intended on-planet targets into individual Trials of Possession fought simultaneously. The Sea Foxes won all but one trial, a low-bid battle for an inconsequential supply depot. On Pleione, the Home Guard's garrison commander answered the Sea Foxes' challenge with threats. Rather than wasting time negotiating with uncooperatives, the Sea Foxes swarmed across the planet and hit their targets, ignoring the Home Guard except when necessary.

Because of the disastrous losses the Davion task force inflicted on the CCAF's rearguard supply lines, Daoshen had little choice but to table the Kathil invasion and focus on containing the damage wrought by Navarre before it spiraled out of control. He also kept close watch on every report from Tikonov Commonality systems that bordered Fortress Republic. Under the Chancellor's direct orders, the CCAF regiments stationed along the Republic border remained ever vigilant, waiting for the RAF attack Daoshen believed was inevitable.



THE LEAGUE ASCENDANT

Six years after its rebirth, the Free Worlds League remained at odds with two of its former provinces. Between 3139 and 3146, the Regular Fiefs and the Duchy of Andurien conducted continuous low-level raiding against the young Free Worlds League, but the League's armistice with Clan Wolf permitted the Free Worlds League Military to devote its full attention to defense.

In February 3145, the game changed: the Magistracy Armed Forces joined in the raids against the League. Although the reborn League had not undertaken many raids against the Magistracy of Canopus, one of Captain-General Jessica Marik's daughters had inadvertently insulted Duke Ari Humphreys of the Duchy of Andurien. Humphreys's unexpected marriage to Magestrix Ilsa Liao-Centrella in 3137 aligned the former League province and the Periphery realm, which made Jessica Marik's Free Worlds League a common enemy to both states. By the beginning of 3146, Andurien and Canopus had adequately probed the FWLM's defenses and felt confident enough to launch a joint strike against the League; they only needed the right moment. Humphreys set plans in motion to engineer that perfect moment, and the two allies waited to see what fruit these seeds would bear.

AT THE LYRANS' SIDE DOOR

The Free Worlds League and the Lyran Commonwealth shared a bitter rivalry that stretched back to the Age of War. For centuries, the two interstellar powers traded territory back and forth across their long borders. The sudden arrival of Clan Wolf along the League-Commonwealth border and the formation of the Wolf Empire in 3142 placed a large buffer between the two Successor States, leaving only a small shared border. The détente between the League and the Wolf Empire prompted the FWLM to repay the beleaguered Commonwealth for Operation HAMMERFALL and take advantage of this short border. Duke Fontaine Marik of the Duchy of Tamarind-Abbey not only wished to humiliate the Lyran Commonwealth Armed Forces for the extended Lyran occupation of Tamarind, the duchy's capital, but he also wished to put more distance between Tamarind and the Lyrans' front lines.

In February 3146, FWLM troops from the Gibraltar Military District mobilized into the Commonwealth's Timbuktu Theater. The First Tamarind Regulars and two battalions of the Eighth Free Worlds Guards assaulted the Eighth Lyran Regulars on Zdice and Abramkovo. Outnumbered and unprepared for such an assault, the Lyran Regulars suffered moderate casualties on both planets before abandoning their posts and retreating coreward. By mid-March, the Eighth Free Worlds Guards proceeded to Kamenz, where the planetary militia surrendered after its senior command staff was killed in an artillery strike.

PIRACY HAS REACHED "UNACCEPTABLE LEVELS"

(17 April 3146)

Filtvelt [FDP] – According to Humbold Okeke, the recent raids on Broken Wheel and Skepptana are an indication that the time for action has come. Mr. Okeke spoke at the Filtvelt Academy today, and is quoted in part below.

"These attacks occur at unacceptable levels. Yet the Gardiner government is content with its policy of inaction. I am here to tell you that the 'Gardiner Mandate' isn't just a failure, but a dangerous one. While the First and Fourth Filtvelt Citizens Militia scramble about to deal with no less than four pirate bands each, the Thumpers continue their pointless deployment abroad. The Prime Minister apparently values this source of income as much as his recent tax increases, but he fails to see that foreign investment cares far more about security and our prior status as a tax haven than seeing the Coalition gaining acclaim as a source of mercenaries.

"No, clearly, we need to pull back the Thumpers and get them working on one of the core reasons of the Coalition's founding by my grandfather. We need to engage in anti-piracy campaigns, we need to chase them to their nests, and we need to eradicate them wherever they fester!

"Some will say that such a campaign is impossible without another alliance with the Brotherhood of Randis or the Taurians, but I am here to tell you, we have the means. We have public petitions from Colonel Giles to let one of his battalions go forth. I say, let him! It's been only a century since Preston and his Argyle Lancers put many a hive to the torch, and we ourselves knew peace from his scourge but decades ago due to our Letters of Marque. I am here to tell you, we have what it takes, we only lack the leadership!"

The estranged grandson of former Prime Minister Berko Okeke has only recently returned to Filtvelt, and has actively engaged in a public campaign of opposition to Prime Minister Gardiner.

Colonel Kinzer of the First FCM has criticized Humbold Okeke, accusing him of sowing panic.

"The truth is that the situation is largely under control, despite the braying of some public figures. I guess some still believe people vote with their fears, no? What I don't appreciate is that this Okeke kid is spreading classified information. There's reasons we didn't release that Broken Wheel was hit by four different bands. Good reasons. You see the noise it's getting in the press. Anyway, I've been authorized to release that the attack was executed by groups calling themselves Hal's Dirty Dirks, the Morven Moonshiners, the Greater Gorges and, I kid you not, the Kill-em Deads. Real literary genius. I'm also authorized to confirm that, yes, two of those bands had been bivouacked on the southern continent for several months prior to the strike, but no, none of those pirate bands are former Feddy deserters, despite the rumored presence of a *Vulpes* BattleMech. That's all I've got, but if you want more rumors, give Humbold a call."

SHATTERED FORTRESS

In April, the First Tamarind Regulars launched an assault on Bolan. The garrisoning Second Bolan Guards were in the middle of conducting a training exercise when the First made planetfall. Coupled with reports of FWLM activity along the border, this fortuitous circumstance put the Bolan Guards in the perfect situation to repel the League invasion force. After two weeks, the Guards had the Tamarind Regulars on the run. General Claudio Brett, commander of the Regulars, was about to order a full withdrawal when he received word that Fontaine Marik had rerouted a battalion of the Eighth Free Worlds Guards from Nockatunga to bolster Brett's troops. With the additional muscle, the FWLM troops experienced a stark reversal of fortune and sent the Bolan Guards into retreat. By the beginning of May, Bolan—once a Commonwealth provincial capital—was in League hands for the first time since the First Succession War, and Tamarind would remain safe from Lyran reprisals. Duke Marik then consolidated the FWLM's gains, shuffled the Gibraltar Military District's troops to provide the region better coverage, and waited for the inevitable LCAF counterattack that would protest the League's invasion.

No such attack ever occurred. For the next several months, the Timbuktu Theater and the rimward Buena Military Province remained eerily quiet despite the presence of LCAF regiments in the vicinity. For an invasion to go unanswered indicated that Archon Trillian Steiner and the LCAF High Command had more to worry about than the loss of a few minor systems.

TRAGEDY AND TRIUMPH

The Free Worlds League rode high on its victory over the Commonwealth, and the situation within the nation remained relatively stable until 4 August, when tragedy struck the Marik family. Philip Hughes, husband of Captain-General Jessica Halas-Hughes Marik, was killed in a hunting accident in the wilds of New Delos. According to eyewitness accounts, Philip wandered too close to a cliff face in the middle of a forest, lost his footing on loose rocks, and plummeted to his death. Autopsy reports corroborated the story, but the Marik family and the Oriente Protectorate's populace saw a more sinister plot at work. Some claimed Andurien agents had a hand in Philip's death; others saw Regular fingerprints on the situation. Neither conspiracy theory could be proven with adequate evidence.

Regardless of the cause of Philip Hughes' death, the tragedy led to two immediate and far-reaching consequences. Distraught with grief, Jessica Marik went into a period of mourning and vanished from the public eye, temporarily leaving her daughter, Warden-General Nikol Marik, as the public face of the Free Worlds League. Philip's death also provided the distraction the nation's enemies needed to strike hard at the victorious League with Operation TRIUMVIR.

On 16 August, Regular Strategic Military Command troops launched a two-pronged attack on the Free Worlds League. Within a week, Magistracy Armed Forces units made landfall on systems in the Rim Commonality.

Operation TRIUMVIR

Unbeknownst to SAFE agents at the time, Regular Captain-General Lester Cameron-Jones had been in talks with Duke Ari Humphreys and Magestrix Ilsa Centrella-Liao to form an alliance of

convenience, and all three nations' leaders agreed to attack their common enemy with near-simultaneous assaults. A plot to kill Philip Hughes may have arisen from these talks, but to date neither SAFE nor the Republic's DMI has conclusively proven whether any member of this triad was responsible for the incident that signaled the TRIUMVIR invasion.

The Regular attacks specifically targeted systems in the Oriente Protectorate, Regulus's most bitter rival before the League's rebirth. Purposely bypassing independent League worlds, the RSMC attack on 16 August initially targeted four Oriente Protectorate worlds. The coreward thrust consisted of attacks on Sophie's World and Kyeinnisan; the rimward prong struck Joques and Dalton. While the First and Fourth Regular Hussars tied up the First Orloff Grenadiers on Sophie's World and Kyeinnisan, the Fourteenth Regular Hussars jumped to Emris IV and crushed the planetary militia and the StarCorps Industries security company. In six days the Regulars had full control of the StarCorps factory complex.

On the Rim Commonality front, the First Canopian Brigade attacked Tellman's Mistake, and the Magistracy Cavaliers struck Glevakha. The MAF quickly subdued planetary defenses and occupied both planets before digging in to await a counterattack. Within ten days, the Third and Fifth Rim Commonality Guards came to aid the occupied worlds. The Third, more suited to light raiding attacks than assault, repeatedly probed the Cavaliers' lines in search of an opening, but constant air strikes from the Cavaliers' aerospace fighters kept the Third at bay. The Fifth Guards' battle for Tellman's Mistake began on a promising note, but within six days the hunter became the hunted. Rather than lie in wait, the First Canopian conducted an offensive campaign against the Fifth's positions and sent the FWLM troops into retreat. As the Fifth withdrew to a better position, the First's faster elements separated and picked off individual stragglers like wolves chasing down wounded members of a fleeing herd. The fight for both planets devolved into a stalemate.

As the Warden-General and the League Central Coordination and Command (LCCC) attempted to move troops to counter the RSMC and MAF threats, the Andurien Defense Force launched its own assaults on 28 August. The Fifth Andurien Rangers faced the mercenary unit Vandelay's Valkyries at Kwamashu, while the First and Second Andurien Rangers hit El Giza and Mosiro, respectively. On Kwamashu, Second Battalion of Vandelay's Valkyries delayed the Fifth with its lightning strikes and maneuverability on difficult terrain, but the mercs were outnumbered from the outset. By the second week of September, the Valkyries retreated to link up with their sister battalion on Antipolo. El Giza and Mosiro fell when the Second Oriente Hussars withdrew from both planets, and the ADF waited to see how its MAF allies would fare before committing further troops to a second invasion wave.

Contingency Plans

After the loss of ten systems, the FWLM's earlier gains from the Lyran Commonwealth no longer seemed significant. The LCCC shifted troops to counter the three-way threat, but Jessica Marik's self-imposed isolation led to logistic and strategic debates that prevented the response from occurring as quickly as Nikol Marik

3146: CRACKS IN THE FOUNDATION

wished. The Warden-General had to exert her authority over the LCCC to enact some unconventional responses to the crisis.

By early October, the first of her two contingency plans went into effect. A FWLM envoy approached the Fourth Marik Protectors on Elektrogli and offered the independent regiment a very generous contract to fight on the League's behalf. After mulling over the terms, Colonel Watkins landed the Fourth on Joques and punished the Seventh Regular Hussars with continuous air strikes and artillery, eventually forcing them to retreat.

Nikol's second plan involved raids-in-force on assets in the Regulans' rear areas. On Wallis, the First Oriente Hussars bruised the noses of the Thirty-first Regular Hussars then wreaked havoc on Ronin, Inc.'s BattleMech plant, which caused several lines of production to shut down in order to effect repairs. A similar raid on Clipperton by the Second Rim Commonality Guards created major disruptions at the shipyards of Irian Naval Systems; the Guards' naval assets also absconded with several completed *Invader* JumpShips. These raids forced Cameron-Jones to pull some RSMC support from the Oriente campaign. The Nineteenth Regular Hussars abandoned Dalton upon the Third Oriente Hussars' arrival. Unable to dislodge the First Orloff Grenadiers, the First and Fourth Regular Hussars also withdrew to Regularan space.

The Fourteenth Regular Hussars remained the sole holdout in the League's territory. Cameron-Jones sought to hold onto Emris IV for as long as possible, as the damage to the factories on Wallis made Emris IV's industry even more vital to Regulus's long-term goals. With no other troops in the vicinity capable of mounting an offensive, Nikol Marik dispatched the Steel Wolves to the planet. The Fourteenth was unprepared for such an attack; several companies cracked under the pressure and fled to safety. The Steel Wolves hounded the Regularan troops without mercy, and less than a battalion of the Fourteenth retreated off-world. Cameron-Jones was furious over losing his toehold in the Oriente Protectorate, but he had few recourses available.

By year's end, both Vandelay's Valkyries battalions had returned to Kwamashu and forced the Fifth Andurien Rangers into a retreat. On the Rim Commonality front, FWLM reinforcements linked up with the Third and Fifth Rim Commonality Guards and sent the MAF regiments crawling back home. Satisfied with taking El Giza and Mosiro from the Free Worlds, Duke Humphreys sued for peace. Regulus and the Magistracy followed suit. Cameron-Jones laid TRIUMVIR's failure at the feet of Humphreys, claiming the ADF had not drawn enough of the FWLM's attention. This marked the beginning of soured relations between Regulus and Andurien; several years would pass before either party entered into diplomatic overtures with each other.

The Free Worlds League, however, rejoiced in its victory. Within seven years, League space had transformed from a collection of broken states into an interstellar power to be reckoned with. Throughout the League, the people celebrated the nation's return to prominence—everyone except Jessica Marik. Despite the success of the nation she helped build, she sequestered herself from everyday life. Even the closest members of her staff often went weeks without seeing her.

SOWING THE SEEDS OF CHAOS

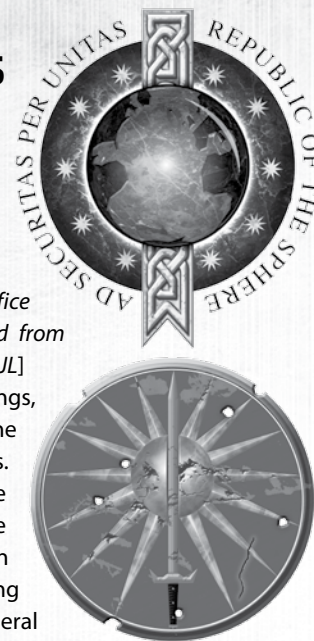
In May 3146, Julian Davion and his entourage arrived on Terra and were immediately escorted to secret offices at the Hall of Government in Geneva, where Exarch Devlin Stone was waiting for them.

[Jonah Levin abdicated the office of Exarch after Stone was awakened from cryogenic suspension in April 3145. —JL]

Over the course of several meetings, the two discussed the future of the Republic and the Federated Suns. During the initial session, Stone reminded Julian of a pact made between former Exarch Damien Redburn and Harrison Davion during Paladin Victor Steiner-Davion's funeral in 3135. Although the verbal agreement was never formalized in writing, Redburn and Harrison had assented to a mutual defense pact allying the two nations in the event of an outside threat. Safe behind the walls of Fortress Republic while Stone was in hibernation, the RAF was unable to assist the Federated Suns against the recent Capellan Confederation and Draconis Combine incursions.

Stone honored the alliance between the two realms by agreeing to dispatch an RAF task force to assist the Federated Suns in alleviating the DCMS threat hanging over New Avalon. The task force would be sent when Stone dropped the Fortress Wall, but no sooner, as removing the Wall for such an operation risked leaving the entire Republic exposed. In return for the aid, Stone requested that Julian use all the forces at his disposal to continue harrying and distracting the Capellan Confederation during his return trek to Federated Suns space; any territory the Suns lost to the Combine in the interim would be restored when the Wall fell and the RAF emerged. To give Julian the edge he needed to frustrate the Confederation and return home, Stone supplied him with a regiment of troops and supplies, including a *Templar III* Stone offered Julian as a personal gift. Most of the new materiel was fresh from Terra's assembly lines and still bore Republic parade colors and livery, and some of the BattleMechs and armor were new models heretofore unseen outside Fortress Republic. Stone also showed Julian the latest intel from the Suns-Combine front, which suggested New Avalon would be the Draconis Combine's next target.

Although the Combine represented the more immediate threat to the Federated Suns, according to Stone's intelligence the Capellan military was strong enough to endanger both the Republic and the Suns. The news about New Avalon's precarious position caused Julian great anguish, but he knew Stone's strategy was sound, and he wouldn't receive another opportunity to inflict a significant amount of damage to the CCAF's rear areas and staging grounds without putting his troops at great risk. Against his better judgment, Julian departed for Confederation space as soon as he could mobilize his new troops. The rendezvous with Erik Sandoval would have to wait.



THE MARLETTE DECEPTION

While awaiting the return of the First Prince, Erik Sandoval conferred with the MIIO to capitalize on the effectiveness of Task Force Navarre's raids in the Confederation. Their goal was to denude the Tikonov and Chesterton Commonalities of as many troops as possible and force the CCAF to spread itself too thin to cover its borders. Confederation troops lay within a jump of Kathil, and despite the halt of the Capellan March invasion, Sandoval feared it would only be a matter of time before the Chancellor executed a campaign to claim the industrial world.

Baiting the Hook

The first phase of the operation involved MIIO counterintelligence agents leaking misinformation to suspected Maskirovka spies. The false intelligence indicated the AFFS was amassing a large munitions and materiel reserve on the Crucis March world of Marlette. According to Maskirovka analysis, the AFFS intended to use this secret base to stage eventual assaults against the Confederation's coreward regions. This base was slated to complete construction by the year's end, and the alleged intel showed that only the Marlette Crucis March Militia guarded parts of the base that were already finished and stocked with supplies.

As the best lies contain a kernel of truth, the Department of the Quartermaster did indeed maintain a logistics depot on the planet, but the depot was not as extensive as the Capellans were led to believe. The false intel merely trumped up the depot's importance. Maskirovka follow-up on the intelligence led the Strategios to believe assaulting Marlette was vital to ensuring the future success of the Kathil campaign.

A Backyard Romp

On 7 June, Julian Davion's honor guard and his new troops, dubbed Task Force Panoply, reappeared in Confederation space at Acamar. Rather than commit his First Davion company to the raid, Julian opted to put his untried, Republic-supplied regiment through its paces. The newly christened Dawn Guards—nicknamed "Stone's Covenant"—struck the First Canopian Lancers' observation posts, cantonments, and 'Mech hangars, leaving a trail of destruction in their wake as the Lancers futilely attempted to turn them back. The Lancers commander, Colonel Centrella-Tompkins, reported to her CCAF liaison that the raiders were of Republic origin, and the news did not sit well with the Chancellor or the Strategios.

Just before the Dawn Guards were set to depart for another interior target in the Confederation, an MIIO agent apprised Julian of Erik Sandoval's deception campaign regarding the Marlette depot. From there, Julian devised a plan of attack, and the agent passed his timetable to both Task Force Navarre and the Crucis March forces.

From Acamar, Task Force Panoply jumped rimward to Ningpo and destroyed several minor Home Guard munitions depots. Ningpo's militia suffered heavy casualties but refused to surrender against what it believed to be a joint Republic/Federated Suns raiding force. Having accomplished its objectives, Panoply attempted to return to its DropShips, but operating under strict

orders, the remaining Home Guard maneuvered to interdict the withdrawing strike force. After repeated calls from Panoply to stand down, the Home Guard held its ground and unloaded all of its ordnance into the incoming 'Mech company. The barrage claimed the life of the Guards' XO Lieutenant Colonel Neill Grant, which gave Panoply little choice but to run down the Home Guard troops where they stood.

Threading the Needle

The attack on Acamar left a bitter taste in Daoshen's mouth. He believed the raid indicated the long-anticipated RAF invasion was fast approaching. According to analysis of intelligence from the front, the raid was a precursor to the Republic finally spilling out of Fortress Republic and attacking Daoshen's realm en masse. Based on the available evidence, the Strategios agreed that a breach in the Wall must exist somewhere along the Capellan border.

The raid on Ningpo further confirmed the Chancellor's fears. These alleged Republic troops were not looting military stockpiles like Task Force Navarre had done earlier in the year; instead, they were outright destroying CCAF supplies and running over vastly inferior forces with impunity, which meant these merciless Republic troops were already well supplied and had no need to pillage the Confederation's stores. In addition, the appearance of both the unknown RAF regiment and the presence of First Prince Julian Davion and a handful of his First Davion Guards indicated that the Federated Suns was working in concert with the Republic and Julian had indeed emerged from within the Fortress. This knowledge deeply troubled Daoshen: if the Republic and the Suns were acting together, he needed to take drastic action to stop the RAF troops from swarming the Tikonov Commonality.

A thorough analysis of all available data regarding Julian's departure from Capellan space at Nanking and his reappearance at Acamar revealed how Julian had passed through the Fortress. There appeared to be a single gap in the Wall from the Nanking approach, and Julian had exploited this same gap on his return journey. Daoshen organized a task force to conduct a reconnaissance mission into the Republic. On 21 June, the Third Liao Guards and the Seventh Capellan Defense Force converged at Nanking. After their JumpShips charged their lithium-fusion batteries in case they needed to make an emergency jump back to Capellan space, Task Force Chong Che duplicated the conditions of Julian's departure and jumped toward the Republic.

Two hours later, Nanking naval traffic controllers received automatic distress signals encoded with Chong Che's signature. The task force's scattered JumpShip fleet was located in seemingly random positions at both of the system's jump points. Each vessel was found twisted and broken into an unrecognizable condition. All hands and troops were lost.

Daoshen was both furious and nervous. As best he and the Strategios could tell, a full-scale RAF invasion of the Confederation was imminent, and he had lost two whole regiments of line troops to the Republic's deception. Without a moment's hesitation Daoshen scrambled more troops to reinforce the Republic border, and braced for the RAF avalanche.

3146: CRACKS IN THE FOUNDATION

Springing the Trap

Mere days after the Chong Che disaster, Capellan agents reported another combined RAF/AFFS attack in the Tikonov Commonality. Task Force Panoply struck New Hessen and concentrated most of its assets on hitting Hessen IndustrialWorks. Neither the Home Guard nor HIW's security forces could halt Panoply's advance, and the strike crippled most of the corporation's armor manufacturing lines.

The Strategios grew frustrated by their inability to predict Julian's targets. After the Ningpo raid, they had expected Panoply to head rimward to link up with Task Force Navarre, which had last been reported crossing the Capellan border towards Goshen. Instead, the New Hessen raid threw a spanner in the works, and the subsequent raid on Tigress a few weeks later further confused matters. In a lightning strike, the Dawn Guards inflicted moderate casualties on Laurel's Legion before withdrawing from the planet altogether. When Panoply jumped, it did not reappear in the Confederation, and Maskirovka agents operating in Davion space were unable to determine Julian Davion's whereabouts.

Since the First Prince had gone to ground and his task force showed no signs of reappearing inside the Confederation's border, Daoshen green-lit the assault on the AFFS base on Marlette.

On 13 August, the CCAF strike force arrived at a pirate point in the Marlette system. Rather than risk the arrival of Davion reinforcements before the strike force could achieve their objective, the Strategios committed the Second MAC, the Fourth St. Ives Sentinels, the Third Tikonov Guards, Warrior House Dai Da Chi, and a considerable naval contingent to the assault, which included the *Feng Huang*-class cruiser *Ilsa Hyung*. Ground troops would locate the base, and *Ilsa Hyung* would bombard it from orbit so the CCAF could quickly jump back to Confederation territory.

CCAF troops quickly landed and attempted to locate the base. Instead of encountering the Marlette Crucis March Militia, the Capellans came under fire from Task Force Panoply, the First Kestrel Grenadiers, the Fifth Crucis Lancers, Clan Sea Fox's Gamma Aimag, and several mercenary commands Julian had hired on his way to the planet. As soon as the trap was sprung, a Federated Suns and Gamma Aimag aerospace fleet, which had remained farther out in the system to remain outside of detection range, converged on the Capellan naval vessels. A brutal naval engagement ensued, with most of the Suns' and Sea Foxes' firepower directed at the Capellan WarShip.

Faced with overwhelming odds, Capellan senior commander *Sang-shao* Shaiming Tao of the Second MAC called down a naval bombardment on the Fifth Crucis Lancers' position. The orbital barrage decimated and routed the Fifth, but the strike came at great cost to the CCAF. Moments after the *Ilsa Hyung* fired on the planet's surface, the AFFS and Sea Fox assault fleet broke the WarShip's keel.

Divested of their trump card, the CCAF ground forces scrambled to regroup. The Second MAC, determined to complete the assault group's objectives at any cost, continued searching for the hidden supply base while the remainder of *Sang-shao* Tao's troops attempted to hold off the AFFS. On 2 September, an air raid by the First Kestrel Grenadiers' aerospace wing destroyed Tao's temporary headquarters, killing him and his aide. Daoshen's sister, *Sao-shao* Danai Liao-Centrella of the Second MAC's Third Battalion, assumed command of the regiment. Under her leadership the Second ranged farther than before, and within a week, Danai declared that the hidden base was a carefully crafted mirage.

On 9 September, Danai met with Julian Davion and negotiated a temporary armistice that would allow the CCAF to withdraw without further casualties. The battered Capellan troops limped back to Confederation space. Via a courier network, Danai immediately traveled to Sian to bring news of the invasion to her brother. Daoshen agreed to formalize the armistice, as doing so would let his troops focus directly on the anticipated invasion from the Republic.

The twenty-ninth of September marked the official cessation of all CCAF military operations directed against the Federated Suns. The Confederation then turned its full attention coreward and waited for the Republic to make its move.

ANOTHER BRICK IN THE FORTRESS WALL

[begin transcript]

Tucker Harwell: These reports indicate Daoshen is going to test the Wall again. Is there even a remote chance that he has actually found some flaw or weak point in the Fortress?

Devlin Stone: You know how the Wall works, don't you?

Harwell: Of course I do. I *am* a genius, in case you've forgotten. Or at least I *used* to be. . . .

Stone: Then you know there's no flaw for Daoshen—or anyone else, for that matter—to find. The Capellan troop movements along the border aren't a concern just yet.

Harwell: So we just sit back and watch the good Chancellor needlessly throw human lives at the Wall?

Stone: To drop the Wall now would leave us vulnerable before we're ready. If that means more lives sacrificed now to secure our later victory, then so be it.

Harwell: [scoffs] Now you're starting to sound like a Capellan.

Stone: Make no mistake, Tucker. All human life has value. I mourn for every single life I've ever taken or that's been lost because of my own action or inaction.

Harwell: Well, when the Capellans try to jump through next time, don't expect me to monitor the Fortress's footage again. Last time was bad enough, and that *still* gives me nightmares.

[end transcript]

—*The Stone Conversations, Transcript #D226-A, 5 Jul 3146*

THE MISSING KERENSKY

Whatever happened to Garner Kerensky?

People go missing all of the time, especially in a universe as large as ours, but when important people disappear, we take notice. Our pervasive media culture never allows these scions of humanity to escape our ever watchful eye, at least for long. We may not know what goes on behind their gilded, locked doors, but we know they are there and not lounging on a beach somewhere. We know if they are still making waves or have passed away. Even in the martial society of the Clans, this general rule applies.

Not in the case of Garner Kerensky. He was the saKhan of Clan Wolf, the second most important person not only in their military, but also their government. With the recent announcement of Anastasia Kerensky as the newest saKhan of Clan Wolf, an explanation was expected, even from fellow Wolf warriors—yet none has been forthcoming. It is as if he has vanished from existence, not seen by anyone willing to admit it in weeks. So where did one of the Clans' best warriors go? What happened to him?

Kerensky's most likely location is two meters under the topsoil. Life expectancy in the Clans' warrior caste isn't great to begin with, and outside of the Sea Foxes none seem to have anything close to a retirement plan, especially in a political position that accumulates enemies faster than Callandre Kell earns kills. But that isn't enough; people die in the Clans all the time, and rarely is it a mystery. Some are so forgettable that their passing is of no notice, but when a Bloodnamed warrior passes, it is a notable occurrence, often with a line or two in *The Remembrance*.

Did Anastasia challenge him for the position? While not the generally accepted method in the Clans, exceptions abound for someone who is good on the battlefield and behind the scenes. Rumors abound of the two having a few very loud disagreements, and we all know the violent endings those can have.

Or perhaps Loremaster Liam Ward challenged him? With Garner Kerensky building up control over the Wolf Watch, this was a power struggle starting to boil over.

What about Khan Alaric Ward? Did he want his ally Anastasia to be his right hand instead? Or did Garner cross him somehow?

It is also possible Garner met his end in combat. All it takes is an errant Gauss-rifle round to end the career of any Clan warrior. Even being on the bridge of a WarShip isn't enough protection for the powerful.

Assassination could be an answer. The Republic and Successor States (or the remnants of the Word of Blake) aren't above such actions. Would the Jade Falcons stoop to that level, with their new "kill everything" Mongol policy?

Perhaps disease? Or slipping on soap in the shower? There are so many ways to die, but so few that would merit such a wall of secrecy. What did Garner Kerensky do to make the Wolves want to just forget about him?

—Investigative Article from *The Donegal Observer*

THROWING DOWN THE GAUNTLET

The Clan Wolf revolt against Archon Melissa Steiner in 3140–3141 marked the beginning of the Lyran Commonwealth's dramatic decline. Between 3141 and mid-3146, the Commonwealth weathered a military coup, the death of Archon Steiner, and the near-destruction of the famed Kell Hounds. It had suffered Clan Wolf's invasion along its rimward borders, a joint Jade Falcon and Hell's Horses land grab in the Donegal and Coventry provinces—including a combined Wolf and Jade Falcon assault on the nation's capital—and Free Worlds League encroachment. In six short years, the Commonwealth possessed only a shadow of its former prestige, but it still had a long way to fall before reaching rock bottom.



A TEST OF LOYALTY

One of the early signs that matters would continue to worsen for House Steiner came in late June 3146, when Clan Jade Falcon's Eleventh Falcon Velites launched a probing raid on the Donegal Military Province world of Cameron. The Velites landed with the intent of assessing Lyran troop strength in the region, but the Wolf Hunters mercenary regiment on-planet did not attempt to engage the Falcons. When Star Colonel Brenda issued a formal *batchall* against some of Cameron's natural assets, Alpha Dragan Fletcher reportedly replied, "This planet is no longer our concern." Then the Wolf Hunters mysteriously departed the system, leaving Cameron's militia holding the bag. The Falcons had not intended to claim the world, and the Wolf Hunters' abandonment prompted the raiding force to soon depart the system.



According to Lyran Intelligence Corps reports, Anastasia Kerensky, former Alpha of the Wolf Hunters, had recently earned the position of saKhan of Clan Wolf. Upon being appointed to the second most powerful post in the Clan, Kerensky extended to her former mercenary unit an invitation that stopped short of outright demanding they join their rightful place in Clan Wolf. The Wolf Hunters unanimously acquiesced to Anastasia's request and departed for the Wolf Empire despite still being under contract to the Lyran Commonwealth. Whether the Wolf Empire employed them as mercenaries or absorbed them into Clan Wolf's *touman* is unknown.

ANTISOCIAL GENERAL

Another barometric reading for the health of the Commonwealth occurred in July 3146. The FWLM attacks in the Timbuktu Theater and the Bolan Province between February and April caused an uproar in the province when it became clear that no further LCAF troops were coming to defend against the Free Worlds League's encroachment.

After the League advance stopped, this public sentiment led General Diego Widmer, Margrave of the Timbuktu Theater, to rail against Archon Trillian Steiner on 7 July. Among the many things he accused Trillian of, he singled out the Archon's inability to protect Buena Province. At the end of the speech, Widmer declared that Buena was seceding from the Commonwealth and he would become its protector. No response from Tharkad was forthcoming.

For his first official act as "Warlord of Buena," Widmer laid claim to the Valloire system and his homeworld of Ayacucho. He then offered to extend his protection to all nearby worlds that requested it. Many systems considered the offer, but the cessation of hostilities with the FWLM and concerns of treason against the Commonwealth government dissuaded Buena's neighbors from joining Widmer's new Buena Collective.

On 27 July, a battalion of the First Buena Guards laid siege to Loburg and forced the planetary militia to lay down their arms. Widmer publicly claimed the forceful annexation of the world would prevent League troops from viewing the planet as low-hanging fruit. However, LIC and DMI reports indicated that Widmer's goal was likely less altruistic: he wanted control of Loburg's 'Mech and tank factories for his new Collective.

Events in the Arc-Royal Theater in September only confirmed the fears of Buena Province's populace. One by one, more planets in the province joined the Buena Collective. Not everyone in the province bought into Widmer's "stand up to the Free Worlds and the Archon" sales pitch, however. The Florida Timbuktu Theater Militia sent a detachment to Urjala when Colonel Lorena Farmer caught wind of the planet's plan to secede from the Commonwealth. Fiercely loyal to the Archon, Colonel Farmer deposed Urjala's planetary council and prepared to face military repercussions from the Collective. Throughout the remainder of 3146, Widmer left Urjala alone. Whether he feared the Florida TTM, or his military assets were not as vaunted as his secession speech claimed, was up for debate.

By December, the Buena Collective numbered a total of ten worlds. Widmer's personal fiefdom continued to court Buena Province worlds, and the Archon's political control of the region eroded even further.

SEND IN THE HOUNDS

Further distress arrived on the Lyran Commonwealth's doorstep on 5 September. After planning an attack for several weeks, Clan Jade Falcon swooped down upon Arc-Royal, which boasted the largest military concentration in the Arc-Royal Theater and the Donegal Military Province. Khan Malvina Hazen and her Raptor Keshik led the assault.

Clan Wolf-in-Exile maintained the defense of Arc-Royal for many years and remained a constant thorn in the Falcons' side, but over the decades, the Lyran people had come to rely on the Clan as steadfast protectors of the theater. Malvina realized if she could deny the Exiles the planet that acted as their effective capital, the Arc-Royal Theater and Donegal Province would fall in short order.

The 5 September landings saw five Falcon Clusters make a bid for the planet. The Exiled Wolves mobilized their three on-planet Clusters in Arc-Royal's defense. The Kell Hounds on Arc-Royal—most of them still in training—and several mercenary commands from local hiring halls chose to stand alongside the Exiles and fight. Landing zones on the continents of Gutheim, Grunwald, and

BREAKING NEWS: ROGUE LCAF FORCES CLAIM LOBURG

Loburg—Less than a month after declaring Buena, Valloire, and Ayacucho to no longer be part of the Lyran Commonwealth, General Diego Widmer's forces have taken Loburg, dropping on the planet and overwhelming the defenders. A full battalion from the First Buena Guards descended en masse near the planet's spaceport. After a sporadic exchange of fire at long range, the outnumbered planetary militia pulled back to their nearest garrison. Nearly half of the militia eventually reformed under new leadership appointed by General Widmer.

A full company of the Guards advanced on the headquarters of Major Carl Fisher, commander of the militia, and proceeded to fight their way through Loburg's defenses, destroy the communication building, and retreat in an orderly fashion. Neither side suffered major casualties. Only two militia tanks were immobilized during the fight, and the Guards suffered superficial damage. With no ability to effectively coordinate his forces, no word of reinforcements, and the planet cut off from the rest of the Commonwealth, Major Fisher ordered his troops to lay down their arms.

General Widmer stated in a speech broadcast to the Estates General that the Commonwealth was no longer protecting its people or territory, thus voiding the contract between the government and the governed. He also indicted Archon Trillian Steiner, though he refused to use her name at any point, for both inaction and micromanagement. He also claimed that she had inherited her father's "feeble-mindedness" and would only help the Lyrans by stepping down and performing charity work. In the end, he invited any system in the Buena Province to join under his protection.

The systems of Buena and Valloire both agreed to unite under the suzerainty of General Widmer, who also claimed ownership of his sparsely populated home planet of Ayacucho. Neither General Widmer nor his staff have announced a name for the systems under his protection, while the media has sarcastically dubbed the collective "Widmer's Grand Empire." The invasion of Loburg was launched while all three systems mobilized reserve military forces, preparing to defend against both a Commonwealth reprisal and pirate raiding that has plagued the region for years.

StarCorps's BattleMech facilities, the centerpiece of Loburg's economy, were unharmed in the battle and remain protected by StarCorps's security forces. StarCorps issued a press release stating that they were staying out of governmental conflicts but expected that manufacturing could only continue for another six months if new supply lines were not found and if the Commonwealth issued an embargo against Loburg. By withholding Buena and Loburg's taxes to the Commonwealth, General Widmer should be able to purchase StarCorps's production to build up the forces under his control. At press time, there has been no response from Tharkad or the LCAF.

SHATTERED FORTRESS

Gerechtland were hotly contested. The Falcons came under heavy fire the moment they exited their DropShips, and many Trinaries were forced to perform combat drops to protect their transports.

Malvina Hazen viewed the Exiled Wolves as an Abjured Clan, so her Falcons deemed the primary defenders as unworthy of *zellbrigen*. Falcon units massed their fire at every turn, and the Wolves responded in kind. However, Malvina reserved her most brutal attacks for the Kell Hounds. She had assumed the unit largely destroyed after the orbital bombardment on Timkovichi in 3142, but constant spoiling attacks by Callandre Kell in the years since pushed Malvina to make it her personal mission to exterminate the remaining Hounds. Her vendetta against the mercenary unit saw her single out any Kell Hounds personnel and run them down in her *Shrike*.

By the end of the first week, the Wolves held their ground around Old Connaught and Wolf City. Malvina sent wave after wave of her warriors into the Wolf lines, but the defenders would not budge. During the invasion's second week, the Fifty-third Falcon Talon succeeded in capturing Old Connaught, and Grand Duke Martin Kell was killed while the Wolves covered his attempt to evacuate the city. Several captured planetary officials were executed on public broadcast, but the Wolves still held fast at Wolf City.

During the third week of the fighting, Malvina decided to play her whole hand. Using intelligence her Clan Watch agents had gathered in the months leading up to the attack, Malvina sent a Star of Elementals to infiltrate Wolf City.

The infiltrators located one of the Exiled Wolves' sibko facilities and destroyed every gestating embryo they found. Then they rampaged through the campus and slaughtered every single cadet and instructor they came across, regardless of age or Bloodname affiliation. By the time Wolf infantry gunned down the intruders, the damage had already been done: the Exiles lost five whole sibkos worth of embryos and cadets.

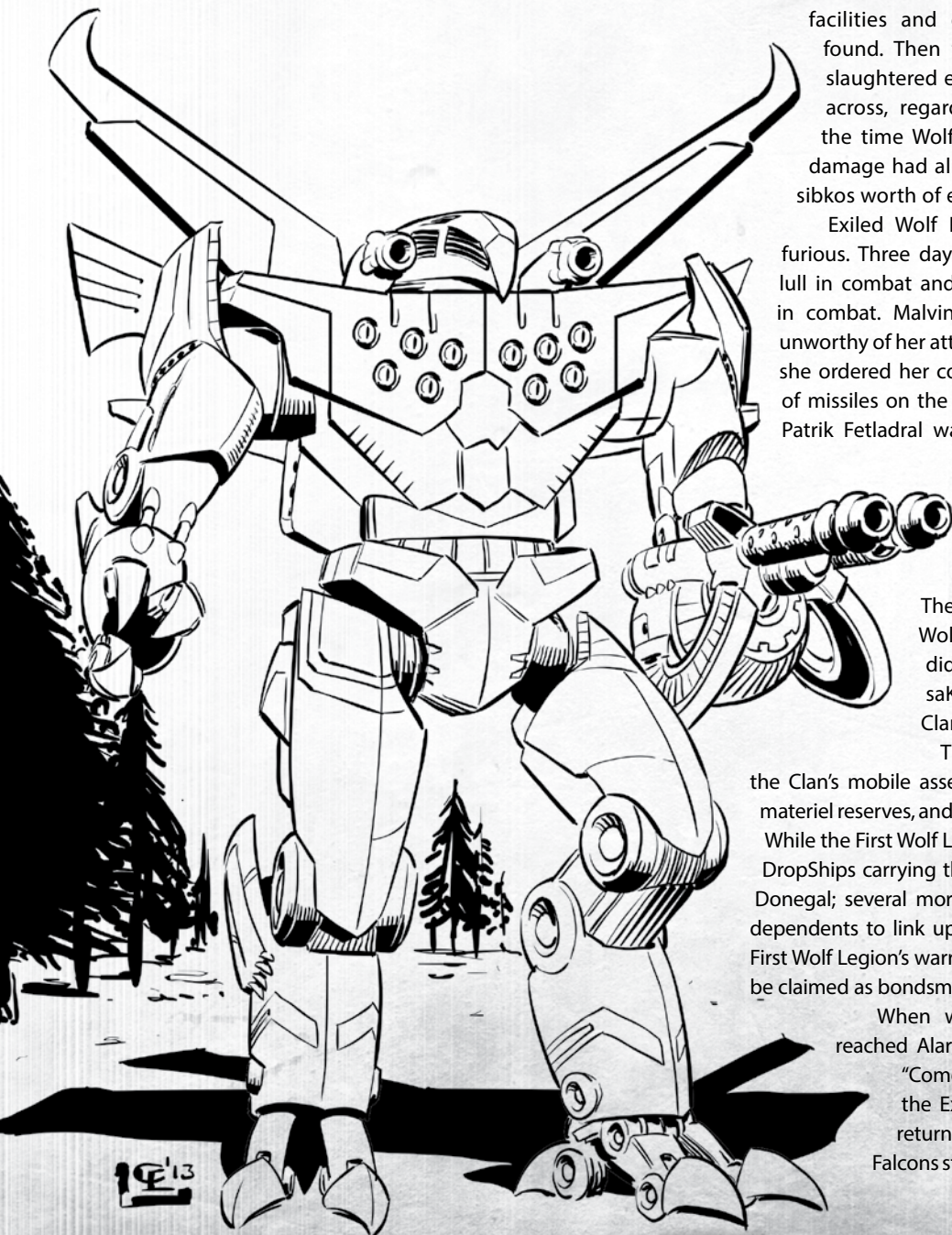
Exiled Wolf Khan Patrik Fetladral was understandably furious. Three days later, he took to the front lines during a lull in combat and personally called out Malvina to face him in combat. Malvina considered the Abjured Clan's Khan as unworthy of her attention. Rather than accept Patrik's challenge, she ordered her command Star to fire a concentrated blanket of missiles on the Wolf Khan and his fellow Elementals. When Patrik Fetladral was killed, the Wolves prepared to go on a rampage, but saKhan Miriam Shaw ordered her Clan to retreat into Wolf City instead. Although she too wished to avenge Patrik's death, she recognized time was of the essence if her Clan was to survive.

The Falcons outnumbered and outgunned the Wolves, and rather than request *hegira*—Miriam did not believe Malvina would grant it—the saKhan ordered the First Wolf Legion to buy the Clan as much time as they could.

The Exiled Wolves gathered up every one of the Clan's mobile assets, including genetic samples, sibko cadets, materiel reserves, and the most vital members of their civilian castes.

While the First Wolf Legion held off Malvina's forces, countless Wolf DropShips carrying the essence of Clan Wolf-in-Exile departed for Donegal; several more DropShips transported many Kell Hounds dependents to link up with Callandre Kell. Few of the abandoned First Wolf Legion's warriors survived the battle; fewer still survived to be claimed as bondsmen.

When word of the devastating Arc-Royal attack reached Alaric Ward, he extended an offer to the Exiles: "Come home and all is forgiven." Though many of the Exiles on Donegal considered Alaric's offer to return to Clan Wolf, most refused because the Jade Falcons still posed a threat to the Lyran Commonwealth.



AN OFFER OF AMNESTY

TBC has provided both Khan Alaric Ward's speech to the Wolves-in-Exile asking them to merge with Clan Wolf as well as the Exiles' response. There was a two-week delay between the two, but this is the first time that many in the Commonwealth will hear and see both.

To my Wolf brethren torn away from our Clan by events almost a century ago, I offer you—no, I ask of you: return to the fold of the Clan from which you were spawned, the chosen of the Founder, Nicholas Kerensky. Too long we have been apart from one another, remaining this way because of inertia and pride. We must put that aside to look into ourselves and see our true goal: to carry humanity forward to achieve Kerensky's blessed vision of unity and prosperity.

Come back to the fold; there will be no lingering hatred or animosity. We will be as one, melding Clusters and Galaxies together to strengthen our bond. Together we will fight as warriors, as equals, and most importantly, as Wolves. Malvina and her *dezgra* Falcons will withdraw once she discovers that we are united. We shall restore peace and order to the Inner Sphere, pulling out of this age of death, this age of strife, this Dark Age.

Do not delay the inevitable; do not keep Kerensky's children apart even another day. Return to us and we will forge ahead together, under common leadership from both halves of our Clan. Khan Miriam Shaw will be my right hand, aiding me in guiding the Wolves to the glorious future that Kerensky envisioned. Let Clan Wolf be whole once again.

—Khan Alaric Ward, Wolf Empire

To my respected Khan and fellow Wolves, I thank you for your offer of unity and reconciliation. The separation of our Clan has long hampered our ability to accomplish our true mission, one passed down through many great leaders, and combining our two sundered halves will allow us to unleash Kerensky's wrath on our foes. Sadly, we ourselves are currently opponents, at odds as to how to protect humanity. Until the remainder of Clan Wolf abandons its effort to dominate the people of the Inner Sphere, we cannot cleave to our other half.

To this day, you threaten our allies, our charges in not only the Inner Sphere but the very Commonwealth which has aided us for decades. Until you acknowledge Kerensky's true vision, to protect the people of the Inner Sphere, we cannot begin to repair the rift in our Clan. Commanding them as tyrants will only lead to more chaos and strife. We are warriors, not overlords. The Clans must be guides to those who did not join the Exodus, allowing them to find the path the Great Father wanted.

—Khan Miriam Shaw, Clan Wolf

TBC has confirmed some Wolf-in-Exile defections to Clan Wolf, but they are markedly few. Clearly the Exiles agree with their Khan at this time.

A HERO FALLS

After Action Report

Date: 19 Sep 3146

Personnel: MechWarrior Chiana Wolf

Operation: Extraction of Ultra

Location: Arc-Royal

Testimony: Our mission was to extract asset "Ultra" through the Van Der Waals district. As the Jade Falcons finally made a deep push into the defenses around Old Connaught, we were to escort Ultra onto a naval vessel to retreat by sea. I was on the left flank of our Star, while Ultra was in a Knox armored truck and accompanied by Star Captain Tuco in his *Timber Wolf*. We were about two clicks from the Fred T. Barry Naval Base when Bailey reported a contact at the front of our formation; a few seconds thereafter I saw a *Shrike* about 150 meters away. As it jumped, I fired both of my *Linebacker's* heavy large lasers and struck true. The loss of so much armor while in the air unbalanced it, and it crashed into the street nearby. I fired again while it peppered me with autocannon and laser fire.

Spiking heat crippled my ground movement, so I engaged my jump jets and landed a block away. I backed into an open warehouse, and the *Shrike* landed about thirty seconds later. It was searching for me, and I waited until it turned its back to me. I unleashed all my weapons and hit some ammo, blowing off the Falcon's right side. The pilot triggered their jets once again but did not realize its partial wing was gone, because the 'Mech clipped a building and tumbled out of sight.

I waited until my shutdown warnings ceased, and headed back to the extraction path. I found Star Captain Tuco between Ultra's Knox and a *Flamberge A*. His *Timber Wolf* was ablaze with inferno gel, and the Falcon unloaded another salvo at him. Over a dozen missiles exploded across his OmniMech, but the Falcon PPC missed and clipped the Knox, knocking it end-over-end into a storefront. That violated *zellbrigen*, so I fired my medium lasers at the Falcon. The 'Mech turned to look at me, turned back to Tuco, and gutted his *Timber Wolf*, almost as if he had been toying with Tuco. I exchanged a few salvos with it but received a recall order from Star Captain Ansell Ward and fell back, outrunning the *Flamberge*.

Further actions: Ultra was found deceased in the Knox's wreckage. Autopsy revealed blunt force trauma and extensive burns from PPC discharge. Cause of death was asphyxiation due to extensive tissue damage to the diaphragm.

Conclusion: Errors in communication and interpretation of intelligence led to a delay in Ultra's extraction. The escort task force lacked the resources needed to accomplish its goal given the enemy forces in its intended path of operations.

[29 Sep 3146 Addendum by Agent Huli Jing: Confirmed code name "Ultra" as Grand Duke Martin Kell.]

SHATTERED FORTRESS

NIGHTFALL

Throughout the Draconis Combine, many citizens rejoiced in the DCMS's recent victories over the Federated Suns. The year 3139 saw the Dragon finally conquer the contested Draconis Reach region; 3141 began the successful large-scale campaign to invade the Federated Suns; and 3144 peaked with the death of First Prince Caleb Davion on Palmyra. According to citizens of the Dragon, the Combine military was finally fulfilling its destiny and would accomplish anything it set out to do.

The death of Caleb Davion especially lifted the spirits of the Combine's warriors. With First Prince Julian Davion somewhere on the other side of the Inner Sphere, the DCMS High Command considered the AFFS effectively leaderless and directionless. *Gunji-no-Kanrei* Matsuhari Toranaga sought to press this advantage as far as he could take it, and Coordinator Yori Kurita fully supported this endeavor.

THE DRAGON STRIKES

Based on MIIO and DMI reports, Erik Sandoval believed a DCMS invasion farther into the heart of the Suns was a matter of *when* rather than *if*. Intelligence agents kept close tabs on known DCMS positions, but being forced to rely on courier networks meant the reports trickled in far too slowly.

For the first quarter of 3146, Combine forces gathered and shifted in the Palmyra Thumb. Then, in late April, more than two-thirds of the DCMS presence in the salient left their posts for destinations unknown. AFFS High Command scrambled to determine where these regiments had gone, but the field marshals already had an educated guess of where to expect the DCMS's attack. Rumors persisted of skirmishes on Meinrad and Leamington, but the true nature of these conquests did not reach the Fox's Den on New Avalon until it was too late.

On 8 July 3146, the Federated Suns' worst fear became reality when the Arm of the Dragon reached New Avalon. AFFS aerospace forces put up a thick orbital screen to prevent the DCMS from landing, but the sheer number of DropShips and Pocket WarShips *Kanrei* Toranaga committed to the offensive penetrated the Davion orbital defenses largely intact. For three days, DCMS aerofighters continuously bombarded strategic positions and known concentrations of AFFS forces. On day four, three DCMS regiments and three Wolf's Dragoons detachments performed coordinated landings at several key positions. The Fifth Sword of Light, the Second Genyosha, and *Ryuken-hachi* pushed deep into the AFFS's lines while the Dragoons, after being initially used as shock troops, were pulled back and relegated to rearguard and mop-up duties.

Within two weeks, Combine troops had seized critical strategic positions, but the battle for New Avalon was far from over. Much like the long-contested struggle over the Draconis Reach, the DCMS and AFFS traded ground back and forth. The First Avalon Hussars, the Davion Assault Guards, and the New Avalon Crucis March Militia dealt as much damage as they received, but they could not repel the combined might of the DCMS and the redoubtable Dragoons. The High Command sent out calls for reinforcements to break the stalemate; six weeks would pass before New Avalon's defenders learned whether anyone had heard the distress call.

GOSHEN RENDEZVOUS

Due to the continued HPG network failure, Julian Davion did not learn of the New Avalon invasion until a few weeks later, as Task Force Panoply was gearing up for the Marlette Deception. His distance from the Suns capital made him unable to repulse the Combine invasion, so the Marlette campaign proceeded as planned in hopes that a decisive outcome on Marlette would reduce pressure on the Capellan front.

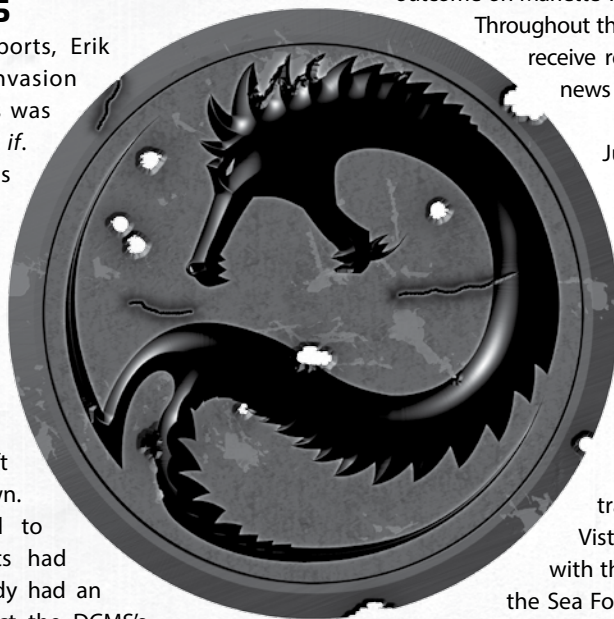
Throughout the battle for New Avalon, Julian continued to receive reports from the Combine front, each bit of news more distressing than the last.

With the success of the Marlette Deception, Julian traveled toward Goshen. Along the way, he hired every reputable mercenary force he encountered, regardless of size, and requested they arrive at Goshen by January 3147. After rendezvousing with Erik Sandoval in October, Julian hoped to lead his troops to reinforce New Avalon. Gamma Aimag then demanded the three Federated Suns worlds Julian had promised as payment for services rendered. After careful consideration of trade routes, the Sea Foxes chose Hean, Alta Vista, and Brusett, per their earlier agreement with the First Prince. Julian ceded the worlds and the Sea Foxes soon departed, depleting his ability to quickly transport his troops to New Avalon.

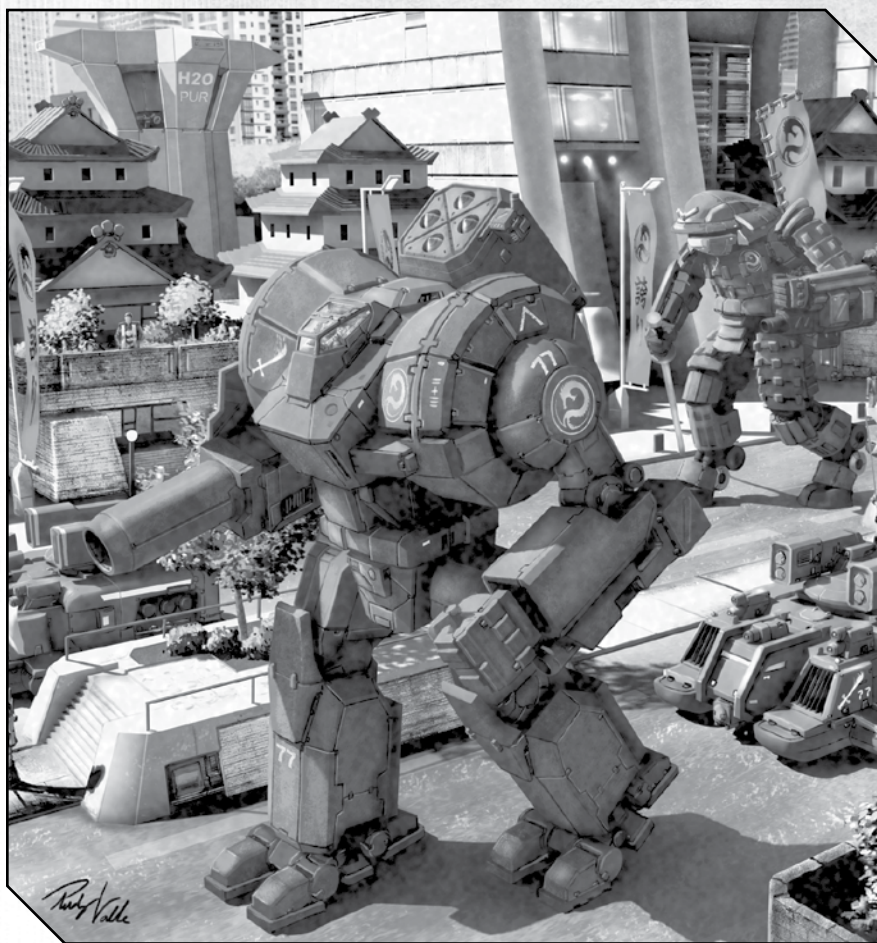
To make matters worse, Erik updated Julian with the latest grim reports from New Avalon. Julian absorbed that knowledge and poured all of his energies into helping plan Erik's campaign to take the fight back to the Combine.

THE DRAGON CONSTRICTS

Entering the third month of fighting on New Avalon, Combine troops sought to kill the AFFS defenders' fighting spirit. In addition to battlefield engagements, the DCMS began a propaganda campaign intended to convince the populace—and the AFFS—that Julian Davion had been killed fighting the Capellan Confederation on New Syrtis and important government officials had already fled New Avalon in secret, deeming the planet lost. The possibility that these rumors were true had a devastating effect on Davion morale. AFFS forces began making tactical mistakes, and the DCMS exploited each one to the fullest.



3146: CRACKS IN THE FOUNDATION



In week ten of the campaign, the Second Robinson Rangers arrived at a pirate point and made a hard burn toward the planet while their air wing punched through DCMS aerospace screens. Though the maneuver cost the Rangers a few minor DropShips and at least a third of their aerospace support, their arrival brought renewed vigor to New Avalon's defenders. The fresh troops pinned down and destroyed the Fifth Sword's Second Battalion on Connemara Plains, leading to a resurgence of aggressive assaults on the DCMS's positions. In response, Toranaga relented to the Wolf's Dragoons' clamor for offensive combat assignments, and released them to vanguard duties. To that point, the Dragoons had been underutilized in the campaign due to the *kanrei's* reservations about the mercenaries stealing the Combine's greatest glory. Within hours of their reassignment, the Dragoons tore through the Rangers' pickets. New Avalon's presumed eleventh-hour saviors broke and fled from the battlefield, sounding the death knell of the planet's organized defensive efforts.

On 3 October, the AFFS High Command signaled a general retreat from New Avalon. Sixteen hours later the High Command and key political figures escaped Combine patrols and fled to June, the remaining march capital of the Federated Suns. Most of the surviving planetary defenders also fled, but a few persistent holdouts in the Davion Assault Guards remained to wage a guerrilla campaign against the Combine.

As soon as the Combine claimed New Avalon, DCMS troops took the initiative to make it remind them more of home. They toppled statues and monuments to House Davion, some of which had stood for centuries. Any art or architecture specifically celebrating the Federated Suns was defaced, burned, or leveled.

This sentiment extended to anything the troops labeled as seditious or contrary to the Combine's way of thinking. Within the first week of occupation, Pope Beneficent XVII of the New Avalon Catholic Church was located and killed along with his College of Cardinals for "fomenting rebellion" and "publicly practicing an unsanctioned religion within the Draconis Combine." The remainder of the Church's senior leadership escaped the Dragon's clutches and went underground to join the Assault Guards' resistance movement.

GLORIOUS YORI

The conquest of New Avalon was a landmark moment in Draconis Combine history. Finally, the Combine's greatest enemy had been conquered. Never mind that the Suns' leadership was at its weakest in centuries. Never mind that the AFFS was severely wounded but far from dead. The fact that the DCMS of Coordinator Yori Kurita had succeeded where all her predecessors had failed was all that mattered. The Coordinator declared a month-long celebration on Luthien to commemorate the historic occasion and honor the troops who achieved the noteworthy feat. More important was having those troops pay public homage to her. She knew that the rest of the Inner Sphere regarded her as a puppet of *Gunji-no-Kanrei* Matsuhari Toranaga. This was an opportunity for her to demonstrate otherwise.

Coordinator Yori sat high on a pedestal, with Otomo and Izanagi snipers visibly present on the highest vantages. She wished her people to see her in her glory, but proper precautions would be observed. Luthien was secure in broad strokes, but even the ISF had little doubt that enemy agents were present in some capacity. The Coordinator watched the processions and rose to bow to those troops who had been hurriedly rotated home for the parade. In turn, those troops all but abased themselves before her.

Conspicuously absent was the *gunji-no-kanrei*. Toranaga cared not for public displays—he had a war to run. He knew the AFFS was a much-reduced threat, but consolidating the Dragon's recent gains was more important than celebrating them prematurely. Instead of receiving the adulation of the unwashed masses, he spent the month planning the next stage of the war. While he ran the DCMS, the Coordinator gained the public's love. No longer just a figurehead, Yori was now in plain view, triumphant.

—from *Yori's Glories*, ComStar Press, 3147

SHATTERED FORTRESS



3147: THE CALM BEFORE THE STORM

The year of 3147 began with a collective quiet across the Inner Sphere. New Avalon lay in flames for the first time since the Jihad and its citizens dwelt under the Draconis Combine's flag. The Lyran Commonwealth had lost several major worlds to the Free Worlds League, the Clans, and an upstart general. The Capellan Confederation waited for the Republic to drop the Fortress Wall and invade, and the Free Worlds had beaten back an invasion from three different rivals. January 3147 saw most rulers of the Inner Sphere realms sit back and adopt a reactive posture rather than risk jostling the powder keg any further.

In addition to the various conquests of the previous year, economic concerns also fueled this Sphere-wide trepidation. Over the past ten years, the value of the C-bill, the Inner Sphere's standard currency for many types of transactions, had taken a nosedive as the HPG Blackout remained in effect. Although the Republic absorbed most of ComStar's assets and administrative functions in 3141, sales of ComStar equipment to Clan Sea Fox and an infusion of Lyran cash to keep ComStar solvent could not prevent the venerated, 362-year-old currency from continuing to devalue. Likewise, the Lyran kroner suffered a great downfall. The Commonwealth's loss of several important military manufacturing centers and more than a third of its total territory in less than fifteen years risked tipping the historically strong Lyran economy into arrears. The situation in the Federated Suns, however, seemed the most dire. With New Syrtis controlled by the Capellan Confederation and both Robinson and New Avalon in the clutches of the Dragon, the Suns' consumer populace languished in the face of poor national morale.

Amid the financial turbulence, only Clan Sea Fox truly prospered. Like the Sea Foxes' previous namesake, the Clan deftly navigated these economic waters and pounced at even a hint of blood in the water. While the economies of ComStar, the Lyran Commonwealth, and the Federated Suns foundered without a lifeline, Clan Sea Fox continued to exploit the downturn and rake in the profits.

By year's end, the wait-and-see attitude of many interstellar realms had fallen by the wayside, and war once again dominated the Inner Sphere.

SEARCHING FOR THE GRAIL

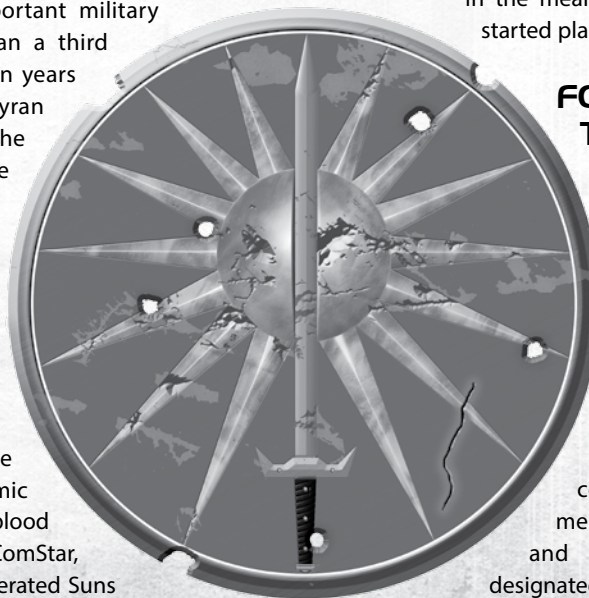
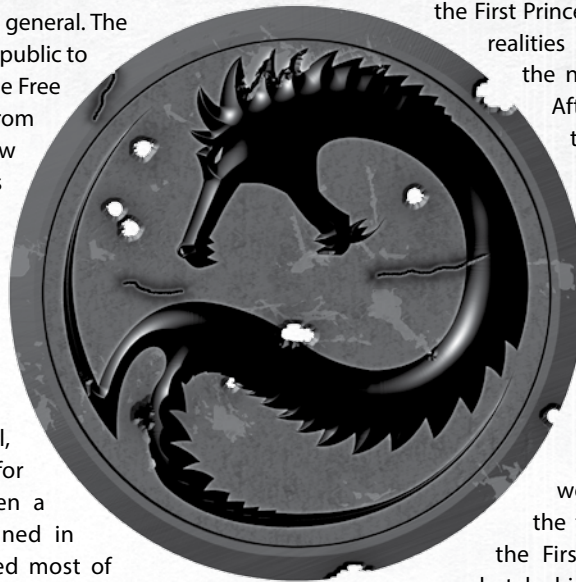
One notable exception to the reactive mindset came from the Federated Suns. The loss of New Avalon placed a great weight on the First Prince's shoulders, but the political and military realities within the Suns forced the liberation of the nation's capital to take secondary priority. After the Combine conquered New Avalon, the DCMS quickly reinforced the region of space between the former Suns capital and the Palmyra Thumb, eventually laying claim to all the worlds in between. Combine troop concentrations in this new region, dubbed *Ryuu no Shita* or "the Dragon's Tongue," guaranteed that any AFFS attempt to retake New Avalon or cut off the Tongue from the rest of the Combine would be met with force.

For better or for worse, New Avalon would remain under the Dragon's control for the time being. The notion greatly conflicted the First Prince, but this choice drove him to undertake his next actions with fire and determination. Every victory he could engineer would theoretically strip away a small layer of New Avalon's defenses, and he believed that once Devlin Stone dropped the Fortress Wall, the RAF would abide by the alliance and assist the AFFS in retaking the Suns' capital.

In the meantime, Julian and the Prince's Champion started planning their next move.

FORMING THE ROUND TABLE

The forces under Julian and Erik's command continued to grow as a combined total of three regiments' worth of scattered mercenaries arrived at Goshen. Hired during Julian's march from Marlette to Goshen, these new troops greatly supplemented the two task forces being assembled from the AFFS regiments currently on-planet. Rather than remain in their disparate company- or lance-sized units, these mercenaries were grouped into regiment- and battalion-sized patchwork formations designated Fortune Able, Fortune Beta, and Fortune Charlie to better coordinate logistic and command concerns in the coming campaigns. The few units that disagreed with this force organization were immediately dismissed and compensated according to their contracts' cancellation clauses.



A HASTENED CORONATION

[A tri-vid recording begins of a news anchor behind a desk. The Federated News Service logo is visible on the face of the desk. Behind the anchorman floats a holo of Julian Davion with the caption "First Prince Shatters Tradition."]

Colin Brandon: Federated Suns tradition was rocked to its core during the coronation ceremony for First Prince Julian Davion.

[Fade to a rafter-down view of a church. A figure kneeling at the altar stands abruptly, pulling the crown from the surprised grasp of a figure in archbishop's clerical vestments.]

Brandon: Not twenty minutes into the traditional three-hour coronation ceremony, Julian Davion crowned himself as First Prince after swearing on a copy of the *Unfinished Book*. Citing a need for urgency, more focus on defending the realm and less on "bureaucratic red tape and redundant ceremonies," he addressed the assembly after his self-crowning.

[The image cuts to a close-up of Julian Davion.]

First Prince Julian Davion: Our nation faces the greatest threat in its entire history. Not even the darkest hours of the Word of Blake's occupation of New Avalon or the Dragon's advance of the First Succession War can match the dangers we all face today.

I did not bring us to where we are today, but I accept full responsibility for bringing us out of this nightmare and back to a road of recovery. Within the hour I will depart to oversee a campaign that will change the tides of fortune in our direction, and my Champion, Duke Sandoval, is even now preparing to make his own drive toward the enemies that gnaw on our flank. Together we will ensure our enemies learn why their ancestors rightfully feared angering the Suns.

I assure you all that the heart of the Federated Suns remains strong. When we as a nation have conquered all of the challenges on our doorstep, I will stand before you again and ask you if you still wish me to be your Prince.

[The tri-vid fades, returning to the anchorman.]

Brandon: True to his word, First Prince Davion departed the church within the hour and is now meeting with his advisors. Not even the late Victor Steiner-Davion ever gave such short shrift to the timeless traditions of the Suns. It is not even six hours after the aborted ceremony, and some legal scholars are already calling into question whether the coronation was valid.

—Tri-vid footage from FNS June broadcast affiliate, 14 March 3147

The first task force was assigned to Operation PERCEVAL, an attempt to root out DCMS forces in former Draconis March worlds. The second task force, designated for Operation CERBERUS, consisted largely of the hired mercenaries, and their ultimate destination was not disclosed in an attempt to thwart Maskirovka agents thought to be seeded amongst the mercenary population. By the end of January, all of the plans had been laid out, and the two task forces departed for their eventual destinations. The First Prince, however, took an honor guard of First Davion Guards and headed for June to meet with the Federated Suns government-in-exile for his official coronation.

When Task Force CERBERUS departed Goshen in early March, details of the group's true destination were on a need-to-know basis. The first jump destination was announced as a resupply run to Acala. The task force jumped, and when several mercenary units were sent planetside to load supplies, Tiger Hunt, a company assigned to Fortune Able, went AWOL. Using aerial reconnaissance, CERBERUS's overall commander, Admiral Ryan Davion-Coles III of the Fifth Crucis Lancers, realized the mercenary company was attempting to link up with Capellan agitators operating on the planet. However, Tiger Hunt's commander did not realize until too late that the task force had made planetfall on Axton, not Acala, and the mercs had no one to support them. In fact, the resupply mission itself was a smokescreen intended to expose potential traitors among the ranks.

For such an egregious breach of contract, Admiral Davion-Coles denounced Tiger Hunt as traitors and sent the First Davion Auxiliary to hunt them down. The Auxiliary, being properly briefed on Axton's landscape, chased down the Hunt across Axton's countryside and cornered the mercenaries against an impassable mountain range. Tiger Hunt fought to the last man, but the Auxiliary was under strict orders to not kill the mercs. Instead, the Davion troops destroyed all of Tiger Hunt's equipment and abandoned them on the slopes. Admiral Davion-Coles then informed the planetary government of the Hunt's treachery, and the planetary governor immediately issued kill-on-sight orders to the local militia. Stranded and with no means of defending themselves, the members of Tiger Hunt either died on the mountain slopes or became the targets of a worldwide manhunt.

OPERATION PERCEVAL, ROUND ONE

By late March, Erik Sandoval had gathered Operation PERCEVAL's regiments on Remagen, which had served as the rally point for the surviving AFFS regiments that fought on New Avalon. The Davion Assault Guards were considered too ponderous for PERCEVAL's objectives, and the New Avalon Crucis March Militia had suffered too many casualties to be included. The First Avalon Hussars, however, retained a higher level of operational capacity and fit the tactics PERCEVAL would require.

Using Markesan as a staging area for the first leg of the campaign, Operation PERCEVAL began in mid-June with a raid-in-force on Franklin in Barlow's End Prefecture. Now well experienced in heavy raiding missions, the First Davion Guards led PERCEVAL's vanguard against the Fifth Ghost Regiment's supply bases. The Fifth hit hard, expecting the Guards to commit to a head-on battle, but the Guards conducted running battles while the First Kestrel Grenadiers and First Avalon Hussars linked up with resistance cells that had been conducting partisan attacks on the Fifth Ghost since the planet's occupation. The AFFS resupplied the cells with all the equipment and munitions that could be spared, and the PERCEVAL task force withdrew to its DropShips.

Shortly after the raid, the Franklin resistance targeted the Fifth Ghost's commander, *Tai-sa* Toshio Hayashi, but the assassination attempt failed and killed his XO instead. Until that point, Hayashi had ignored the ineffective Franklin resistance movement as all five previous attempts on his life had been disastrous failures, but this attempt roused him to action. The *tai-sa* used every yakuza resource at his disposal to ferret out the resistance's primary headquarters. Though the Fifth Ghost was still in less-than-optimum shape after the PERCEVAL raid, Hayashi sent one of the Fifth's battalions to put a decisive end to the partisans. The by-the-book raid on the hideout in the planet's capital wiped out the resistance—including most of the supplies the AFFS had provided—but the

3147: THE CALM BEFORE THE STORM

destruction leveled several important city blocks and only created a new resistance movement from the ashes of the old.

After departing Franklin, the PERCEVAL task force moved spinward within the prefecture and struck Sakhara V. The defending Seventh Ghost Regiment was already on alert after learning of the Franklin attack and attempted to catch the attackers as they made planetfall. The First Davion Guards landed first, and the Seventh pounced on them immediately. While the Seventh was embroiled in action against the Guards, the Grenadiers and Hussars landed in the Seventh's rear areas and demolished the planet's logistics bases. Faced with three-to-one odds, the Seventh fell back to a more defensible position to prepare for a planetary assault. Instead, the PERCEVAL task force returned to orbit and left Combine space.

Although the AFFS could have likely claimed Sakhara V without much difficulty, Sandoval's standing orders forbade the task force from taking planets from the Combine during the campaign. Since PERCEVAL lacked the means to hold these planets, Sandoval insisted on a strict "strike and move" strategy for each objective. The campaign's long-term goal was to weaken and confuse Combine forces in the Draconis March; the liberation of these planets would have to wait until a later date.

OPERATION PERCEVAL, ROUND TWO

From Sakhara V, the AFFS task force doubled back and returned to Markesan to repair and rearm. Once resupplied, PERCEVAL headed anti-spinward into Iruzun Prefecture and hit Le Blanc, a world that had returned to prominence as a mercenary-hiring center after the razing of Outreach during the Jihad. Since Warlord Angmar Kyuzu expected further raids in the New Samarkand Military District, the First Kestrel Grenadiers caught the garrisoning Nineteenth Galedon Regulars unprepared. The Nineteenth quickly recovered and deflected PERCEVAL away from its targets, which cost the Grenadiers valuable time. Upon witnessing the AFFS's arrival, mercenaries that went into hiding after the occupying DCMS forces shuttered all of the planet's hiring halls opted to take the fight to the Combine. The mercs banded together and assaulted the Nineteenth's rear areas, pulling their attention from the AFFS. The Grenadiers took advantage of the distraction, destroyed the Nineteenth's supply bunkers, and withdrew. Several mercenaries whose BattleMechs survived the battle petitioned to join the AFFS rather than face an uncertain fate under Combine rule. To replenish combat losses, Sandoval offered to absorb as many of the mercs into PERCEVAL as possible, but the task force's DropShips only had room for a finite number. Those unfortunate few forced to remain behind when PERCEVAL left the system were hunted down by the Nineteenth. The DCMS then cracked down on the seedier parts of the planet, rooting out all manner of subversives and detractors among the underworld.

In Proserpina Prefecture, the Forty-fifth Benjamin Regulars were prepared when PERCEVAL appeared at a pirate point in the Clovis system. Fighters from the Forty-fifth Aerospace Wing intercepted the AFFS troops and destroyed one of the First Avalon Hussars' primary DropShips during orbital insertion. Two of the First Davion Guards' DropShips suffered critical damage and were forced to make emergency landings. The Forty-fifth's

two battalions then tore into the superior force, inflicting as much damage to the Hussars as possible before falling back to regroup. The First Davion Guards put pressure on the Forty-fifth's frontlines, but the DCMS troops refused to fall back and give the AFFS an easy route to their objectives.

Although Erik Sandoval wished to press his advantage to compensate for the troops lost in the landings, AFFS intel from before the raid placed at least two DCMS units within striking distance of Clovis. If PERCEVAL was to succeed, the AFFS troops needed to get in and get out in before it was too late. The Forty-fifth held several important targets, and Erik pushed to reach at least one objective before abandoning the world. To this end he tasked the First Kestrel Grenadiers with charging through the Forty-fifth's pickets while the First Davion Guards attempted to swoop in with a flanking maneuver and hit one of the largest DCMS supply caches in Proserpina Prefecture. The battle played out much like Erik had planned. The Forty-fifth's lines broke under the unexpected strain and attempted to reform in such a way as to deny the AFFS troops' advantage. During the battle, Erik received notification of incoming DropShips at the pirate point: the Second Legion of Vega had arrived.

PERCEVAL's senior staff knew they could ill afford to delay any further. Erik forfeited the objective then ordered a general retreat before the Second Vega could arrive. Due to the lost and damaged DropShips PERCEVAL suffered during planetfall, not all of Erik's troops would fit on the remaining transports. When Erik asked for volunteers, Second Battalion of the First Avalon Hussars opted to remain behind and work alongside the planet's emboldened resistance movement. Before the task force lifted off, Erik swore their selflessness and devotion to the First Prince would not go unremembered. His pledged to them: "We will come back for you."

The task force then jumped back to Federated Suns space and prepared for its next move.

THE DRAGON'S RESPONSE

The people of the Draconis Combine saw the conquest of New Avalon as further proof the Dragon was on the right path toward fulfilling the destiny First Coordinator Shiro Kurita gave the nation more than eight centuries earlier. *Kanrei* Toranaga refused to jeopardize this vision, and left no room for error when dealing with conquered worlds along the Draconis March and in the Dragon's Tongue region. DCMS forces and Friendly Persuader units cracked down on any hint of rebellion or sedition on former Federated Suns worlds. Resistance cells were rooted out by the dozens; however, for every large rebel nest the Combine smoked out and destroyed, two or three smaller groups seemed to replace it. As commonly practiced on Kurita-held worlds, harsh curfews, production quotas, and trade restrictions were placed on planets in the Dragon's Tongue. The Combine tolerated no deviations from its new rules, going so far as to publicly execute offenders for even the smallest of infractions. The Combine promised to ease restrictions on newly conquered worlds once their populations settled down and accepted the Coordinator's benevolent rule, but seven months after the Dragon claimed New Avalon, those restrictions remained firmly in place in the former Draconis March and the Tongue systems adjacent to the Suns' conquered capital.

Word of the Federated Suns strikes along the Draconis March border greatly upset Toranaga and the High Command. Both he and the Coordinator had believed the loss and defacement of New Avalon would have lasting negative repercussions on the AFFS's morale and offensive capabilities, but these bold, seemingly random strikes along the frontlines demonstrated that the soldiers of the Federated Suns still had some fight left in them. Conflicting reports from the front made it unclear whether the raids in the New Samarkand and Benjamin Military Districts had been conducted by one unit or many. The DCMS was already stretched thin along three fronts, and heavy raiding by an unknown number of AFFS regiments meant the Federated Suns might be able to seize the advantage. Rather than take chances and risk losing any of the Dragon's considerable gains during the three previous years, Toranaga opted to consolidate his forces throughout the Draconis March Border and the Dragon's Tongue.

After the Forty-fifth Benjamin Regulars' success in holding off the AFFS strike on Clovis, the *kanrei* and the High Command believed the DCMS could adequately repel any Davion attempt to regain lost territory. Further conquest of the Dragon's longtime enemy, however, would require additional troops to replace combat losses and ensure the DCMS was not spread too thinly across the Combine's abnormally long new border with the Federated Suns. Toranaga petitioned the Coordinator to conscript additional troops, but his request encountered several obstacles. Though the Dragon remained triumphant, the incorporation of so many former Davion worlds had placed a great strain on the Combine's resources.

Work stoppages and riots became commonplace at many of the factories and logistic hubs the DCMS had captured, even after the assimilated Davion workers were threatened with lethal force. In most cases, whole factories needed to be restaffed with loyal Combine civilians after DCMS troops were ordered to detain entire workforces due to their intractability. The most extreme case occurred in July 3147, after word of the first AFFS raids on Barlow's End Prefecture reached Robinson. Spurred to action by the AFFS's successes, workers on the Robinson Standard BattleWorks' *Atlas* production line held part of the plant hostage by stealing a lance of half-finished *Atlases* from the assembly line and blockading that wing of the industrial complex. The Eighth Sword of Light responded by destroying the partially armed 'Mechs with well-placed fire. Immediately afterward, a battalion of Savage Dragons infantry swarmed through the entire factory complex and put a bullet in every single factory worker they encountered, regardless of age or station. The plant lay silent until September, when skilled foremen on loan from Luthien Armor Works were able to recruit and train new workers who had been born in the Combine. Even after this wholesale workforce replacement, by year's end occasional sabotage attempts halted RSBW's production for several days at a time.

Though Toranaga's request for the creation of additional regiments was denied, Coordinator Yori Kurita assured him she was seeking a solution to the problem.



DELAYED VENGEANCE

On 4 January 3147, before the newly convened session of the Free Worlds League Parliament could cast a no-confidence vote against the absent Captain-General, Jessica Marik emerged from her self-imposed isolation after four full months of mourning. Her closest advisors remarked that she seemed a wholly different person than she had been before Philip Hughes' death. Many had expected her to be a broken shell of a woman upon returning to public life, but these pessimists were gravely mistaken. The intervening months had changed Jessica Marik into a fiery instrument of vengeance, as her grief had mutated into incendiary anger.

For her first public appearance since going into isolation, she appeared before Parliament to make clear her intentions to hunt down and eradicate the party responsible for Philip's death. She requested the support of Parliament and Minister-General Kenyon Marik in her crusade, but few MPs wished to openly commit to such a gamble. Although conclusive proof that Hughes had been murdered had never been established, Jessica chose to follow her course nevertheless. When concerned MPs voiced their opposition to the Captain-General's plans, the assembly saw the change in Jessica Marik firsthand. Though her calculated, determined resolve remained intact, her responses to various MPs came across as uncharacteristically curt and often bordered on outright rudeness.

During the proceedings, Augustine's MP Fletcher Grandin, acting as Speaker of the Parliament, made the mistake of mentioning that SAFE had not yet determined who killed Philip Hughes, assuming he had in fact been murdered. He claimed Jessica's determination to undertake such a quest was foolhardy and dangerous. Grandin went on record saying, "You would be better off firing at the cliff he fell from and be done with it."

Cautiously, the MP for Tamarind inquired about Jessica's specific plans and asked which suspect nation—the Regular Fiefs, the Duchy of Andurien, or the Magistracy of Canopus—should pay for the supposed crime. Jessica's answer shocked the Parliament chamber into silence.

"All of them," she announced.

Regardless of which nation—if any—had ordered the assassination of her former husband, her reasoning was twofold. Punitive strikes against all three realms would not only punish the culprit responsible for Hughes's murder but would also repay the

League's neighbors for the August 3146 TRIUMVIR invasions that had exploited the Captain-General's grief.

Behind closed doors after the parliamentary session, Jessica's daughter Nikol attempted to dissuade her mother from this course, claiming that fighting a full-blown war on three different fronts would risk tearing the infant League apart just as it was finally learning to walk. Jessica, having counseled Nikol for decades in the intricacies of politics, found herself on the receiving end of sage advice and reluctantly accepted her Warden-General's recommendations. Instead of attacking all three suspect nations, Jessica altered her plans and set her sights on attacking the Duchy of Andurien, considered the lesser of the League's antagonists.

TIGHTENING THE BELT

Of all the Free Worlds League's member-states, only the MPs from the Clan Protectorate worlds acceded to the Captain-General's original plan of action against all three of the League's most recent aggressors. Clan Sea Fox took Jessica Marik's condemnation of Regulus, Andurien, and Canopus as a mandate to take action in order to secure the League's collective interests. Although Spina Khanate did not possess enough ground forces to conduct an invasion singlehandedly, saKhan Petr Kalasa had other assets at his disposal.

Interdiction

Within two weeks of the Captain-General's proclamation, Spina Khanate Aimags appeared in three systems in the Regular Fiefs: Tiber, Harmony, and Regulus itself. The Sea Fox fleets did not initially broadcast their presence to each world; instead they waited at each system's most commonly trafficked jump points and accosted every vessel that jumped in-system or attempted to dock with an outbound JumpShip. In each case, the Aimag fleets transmitted the same automated ultimatum on a clear channel: "We are Clan Sea Fox. For crimes perpetrated against the Free Worlds League, the Regular Fiefs is hereby off limits to all merchant vessels. We offer you your lives and safe passage to your point of origin in exchange for your cargo. This offer is nonnegotiable. Any attempts to circumvent our fleet will be met with deadly force."

Sea Fox marines boarded every JumpShip and DropShip that chose to stand down. The few vessels that refused were destroyed by precision strikes intended to leave the craft largely intact. The Foxes would then board disabled vessels or sift through the wreckage of destroyed ships for any salvageable goods. In a few isolated cases, DropShip crews offered the Clan marines armed resistance upon their boarding. Once the Foxes put down the insurrection, the marines spaced the DropShip's crew and claim the DropShip itself as payment for the Clan's troubles; other DropShips docked to the same JumpShip would be left alone as a demonstration of the Foxes' gratitude for their compliance.

In addition to the standing blockades around the Regular Fiefs' major worlds, several Sea Fox vessels laden with assault DropShips began wandering in a haphazard pattern around the Fiefs, accosting merchants unaware of the Fiefs' current state of mercantile affairs. In many cases, the Fox patrols allowed these vessels to depart without confiscating the merchant's goods as long as no DropShips attempted to undock while the JumpShip recharged for its return journey. Rather than risk a chance encounter with a Sea Fox patrol, foreign trading vessels quickly learned to avoid the Fiefs altogether, and after several weeks, the Fox patrols encountered little more than pirate vessels with no intentions of caving to the Clan's demands.

Each blockade allowed only courier or passenger vessels to enter or leave an embargoed system, but every DropShip was thoroughly searched for contraband. Ships of a clearly military designation tended to give the blockades a wide berth, as each Aimag's assault DropShip and aerospace assets possessed far more firepower

ECONOMIC INTERDICTION EQUIVALENT TO STATE- SPONSORED PIRACY

In a recently published article, Dr. Lisa Minuet of the Grand University of Milnerton praised the economic interdiction enacted by the Clan Protectorate in response to the attacks and raids by the Regular Fiefs. In her learned opinion, the interdiction opened a "second front" to the aggressions of the Regulars, and she was excited to see cooperation and participation across the Free Worlds League.

While I do not expect to change Dr. Minuet's mind, I do hope that this response might allow some to see the errors of her ways, if they haven't achieved that feat unassisted.

First, let me unequivocally condemn the attacks by the Regular Fiefs. They lack any and all merit, and can easily be described as opportunistic and short-sighted. Some demagogues have referred to the attacks as piracy, and it suits me to agree with them.

That said, I wish to make clear that the actions by the Clan Protectorate must be condemned. They have publicly explained their "economic interdiction" policy as a proactive embargo, as an economic bombardment intended to slow and disrupt the advance of Regular troops. I cannot dispute that this strategy seems to have achieved the Clan's goal. Regular goods are increasingly difficult to gather, many are no longer transported using legitimate methods, and even Regular goods that are on the Sea Foxes' "Absolved" list are subject to very uncompetitive pricing.

But we must condemn the method of this interdiction, the aggressive boarding and interception actions executed by the Sea Foxes and other opportunists who have happily accepted their de facto Letter of Marque. Loss of life is increasing well past the point of incident, obvious even with the spotty and unreliable reporting of those activities. It's also unclear what happens to any seized Regular goods, but the most likely assumption is probably true: they are sold off later to profit the pirates.

And pirates they are, make no mistake.

While we share the field of historical economics, Dr. Minuet will be unable to provide a historic example where piracy was economically beneficial to any sponsoring nation.

Worse still are reports of the increasingly violent interdiction of non-Regular merchants who are attempting to do business in the Fiefs. Such activities cannot have a positive effect on commerce, even before the Regulars engage in the traditional response to state-sponsored piracy: more state-sponsored piracy.

—Letter to the editor, submitted by Dr. Helena Calvin, University of Oriente, to The Oriente Merchant Review, 8 April 3147

SHATTERED FORTRESS

TORMENTINE IS BURNING

[The camera focuses on a young man in typical business attire standing in the shadow of an Aurora-class DropShip. Behind him, technicians and soldiers in FWLM uniforms rush in and out of frame. The distant sound of artillery fire and explosions can be heard faintly in the background.]

Ian Hernandez: This is Ian Hernandez of the FWNS, reporting live from Borden Memorial Spaceport. I'm here with the Seventh Tamarind Regulars' Third Battalion, and the scene behind me is one of chaos and confusion. We've just learned that Marian troops may have broken through the Codiak Gap and are heading straight for the spaceport.

Voice Off-Camera: Get those munitions loaded, I want Second Company ready to move in five!

Hernandez: There's Major Driscoll Everett, Third Battalion's commander. Major Everett! Major Everett! Do you have a moment?

[Hernandez and the cameraman rush over to a middle-aged man dispatching a set of runners. He looks obviously distressed.]

Major Driscoll Everett: I'm sorry, as you can see I am incredibly busy. . . .

Hernandez: Sir, can you confirm that Third Company was destroyed, and that the Marians have also dispatched the militia outside of Port Brunswick?

Everett: All I can confirm is that a large force sporting the colors of the Hegemony's III Legio have made contact with Captain Valenta's Third Company. Now, if you'll excuse me I've got to get the rest of the battalion moving. . . .

Hernandez: But sir. . .

Everett: Enough!

[Major Everett places his hand over the camera lens, shoving it out of his way before storming off, leaving only Hernandez in view.]

Hernandez: Jim, did you get all that?

[The camera moves in an up-and-down motion.]

Hernandez: Good, back on me. It is now confirmed that the Hegemony's III Legio has made contact with Third Company and is moving this way, but Major Everett seems confident that Third Battalion will repel the Periphery invaders. While this stretch of League space is no stranger to raids from the Marian Hegemony, this kind of attack is uncharacteristic of the upstart Periphery nation, and it may be the first indication of a new, bloody chapter in Hegemony-League relations. Perhaps, it even signals a full invasion—

[An air-raid siren begins to whistle. People drop what they're doing and run for shelter.]

Hernandez: Look, over there!" *[He points off-camera.]*

[The camera pans up and around wildly before catching an image of two small objects streaming thin white contrails as they zoom overhead. The camera tries to follow, but the objects pass out of view almost immediately. A bright flash and shockwave knocks the camera to the ground. Resting on its side, the camera's lens is cracked and a bloodied arm is visible in the foreground. Beyond, the broken remains of two different DropShips burn in the distance, along with a number of other bodies and destroyed vehicles.]

—Recorded broadcast recovered 22 April 3147 by SAFE

than any guns the Regulans might bring to bear. Vessels designated exclusively for courier duty received the lion's share of the Foxes' attention, but the Aimags made a point to permit the free flow of information: they wanted Regulus' neighbors to know exactly why the Fiefs was under interdiction.

When word of the blockades reached Atreus, Jessica Marik was both incensed and satisfied. Although she had not given the Sea Foxes direct authorization for their action, she applauded their initiative in carrying out her mandate through creative methods. She wanted to embarrass and destroy Lester Cameron-Jones, and the interdiction was the least violent means of doing so. In a return missive to saKhan Kalasa, she neither denounced nor supported the Sea Foxes' actions, which the saKhan interpreted as the Captain-General's tacit approval of continued action. Parliament, however, was in an uproar over the unsanctioned blockade, but no MP could offer an easy solution for resolving the situation.

Constriction

By the end of January, the blockaded Regular systems were beginning to feel tremendous pressure from Spina Khanate's economic interdiction, and the Sea Foxes had positioned additional blockades at Wallis and Clipperton. Regulus, being the most populous of the five blockaded planets, felt the belt-tightening sooner than the other systems. Though boasting a robust economy, due to the interdiction the Regulans could not import or export goods, which led to a manufacturing standstill, mass layoffs, and runaway inflation—all of which in turn led to rioting and theft.

Impassioned riots in the streets of Regulus City prompted Lester Cameron-Jones to take action. Via the courier network, he contacted the RSMC's naval assets scattered around the Fiefs and enacted a plan to deal with the blockade. Under normal circumstances, the Sea Fox blockades and patrols left Regular military vessels alone, provided the crews submitted to searches to prove they were not carrying contraband to interdicted systems. Regular assault ships posed little threat to the might of an entire Aimag, so the Sea Foxes fired only on foolhardy belligerents. This oversight allowed the RSMC to mass Pocket WarShip fleets at Regulus and Harmony.

The 31 January attack against Alpha Aimag in the Harmony system caught the Sea Foxes by surprise. The Foxes never expected the Regulans to contest their naval superiority, but the Regulans were quickly running out of options. Assault ships swarmed the Aimag while most of its elements were conducting a JumpShip inspection. The Sea Foxes retaliated while attempting to screen CSF *Silentshark* from immediate danger. By the end of the hour-long engagement, the Regular naval forces were obliterated and *Silentshark* had sustained critical damage to its maneuvering thrusters after the RSMC employed nuclear warheads. The *Carrack*-based CargoShip could still function, but until the Sea Foxes could conduct repairs, she would be confined to Harmony's zenith jump point.

Hours later, a second Regular naval task force arrived at Regulus. Beta Aimag met the assault head on, and the battle ended almost as soon as it began. CSF *Talismantia*, a *Sovetskii Soyuz*-based CargoShip, fired into the swarming Regular craft while the rest of the Aimag's assault ships carved up the survivors. Beta lost only three DropShips in the battle—all of them to the Regulans' sizable nuclear arsenal—but the entire Regular task force was wiped out.

In response to these ambushes and the brazen use of nuclear weapons, Beta Aimag landed troops within striking distance of Regulus City. The Second and Seventh Regular Hussars immediately mobilized, but Beta's warriors did not attack. Instead, ovKhan Matthew Horn addressed the

3147: THE CALM BEFORE THE STORM

Regular people directly: "Your illustrious leader saw your planet shackled, but by attacking us in this cowardly manner, it is clear to us that he now instead wishes to see you destroyed."

Instead of attacking, Horn offered the people of Regulus a chance to buy and sell goods directly with Clan Sea Fox. Lester Cameron-Jones, hidden away in a secret base to avoid capture, forbade any Regular from accepting the Clan's offer, but citizens nonetheless lined up in droves to do business with the Clan. Cameron-Jones then ordered the Seventh Regular Hussars to arrest anyone treating with the Foxes. Further rioting ensued, but the Captain-General's moratorium on buying from the Foxes took effect.

Thus Beta Aimag and the Regular Hussars stood off in uneasy silence at the outskirts of Regulus City, each waiting for the other side to cave.

Hunger Strike

By July, the Regulars had suffered enough. Against his better judgment, Cameron-Jones elected to send the First, Fourth, and Thirtieth Regular Hussars on a deep strike into League territory. The Captain-General hoped that a decisive strike at the Sea Foxes' home port in the League would goad them into lifting the interdiction on the Regular Fiefs. Task Force Hunger Strike, as the mission's commanders took to calling the operation, arrived in the Clan Protectorate's Marik system on 25 July. The Hussars immediately took out their anger on the Purifier Cluster. As the First and Fourth advanced on the Purifier Cluster's lines, the Thirtieth concentrated on rearguard actions, the foremost being raids on supply depots suspected of harboring rations or other foodstuffs.

The opening salvos of the battle went in favor of the RSMC, with the Purifiers faltering under the Hussars' initial charge. Once the Clan Protectorate forces withdrew to regroup, the Hussars split up and attempted to secure two of the planet's key strategic locations. The First Hussars headed towards Masket, and the Fourth concentrated on reaching Dormuth while the Thirtieth brought up the rearguard.

Masket was the site of the pre-Jihad LCCC, and the Clan Protectorate Military employed it in much the same way. The First Regular Hussars attempted to capture the CPM command center in hopes that it might stall the rest of the Clan forces on planet. The outnumbered Purifier Cluster dug in for an extended siege while the First brought in artillery.

The Fourth Hussars' target, the Winter Palace at Dormuth, was the ancestral home of House Marik and the current seat of the Clan Protectorate's provincial government. Galaxy Commander Rikkard Nova Cat, leader of the Spirit Cats within the Clan Protectorate, led the Shiva Keshik in the palace's defense. At first, the Shiva Keshik scythed through the Fourth, but a quick rally and additional support from the Thirtieth Hussars pushed Rikkard's warriors into a defensive position.

During the battle, Rikkard challenged the Fourth's commander, Colonel Juliette Mejia, to a duel. Having never fought against Clan forces, Mejia ignored the challenge and ordered her lance to mass fire on Rikkard's *Firestarter*. Although the Galaxy Commander's 'Mech was shot down, he survived the attack. In response to such a dishonorable attack on their leader, Shiva Keshik surged forward with savage, unbridled ferocity and tore into Mejia's stunned troops, sending them into retreat.

Cameron-Jones intended for the Thirty-first Regular Hussars to reinforce the Marik offensive. Two weeks after the fighting began on Marik, the Thirty-first arrived at Harmony on its way toward the Clan Protectorate. As soon as Alpha Aimag positively identified the Thirty-first's JumpShips, Aimag forces fired on and destroyed every attached DropShip without prior warning.

CANOPUS-CAPELLAN COLLUSION

[Exarch: On three separate occasions, SAFE agents penetrated Marian security and gained access to a number of supply depots being constructed by the MHAF on Gibraltar. At first it was believed that these supplies were stocks built up over the years by typical Marian pilfering; however, a closer examination of their contents revealed a number of inconsistencies between the observed equipment already in use with the MHAF and the stockpiled materials. Our agents managed to obtain the relevant data for our own analysis, which we cross-referenced with information provided by deep cover assets embedded in StarCorps and other Capellan companies. Following the paper trail, the DMI has uncovered an elaborate ruse to mask and redirect substantial materials to the Marians. Coupled with the following intercept, we have solid evidence linking Sian and Canopus IV with the MHAF's invasion of the Free Worlds League. Given the Chancellor's ceasefire with Julian and the Federated Suns, I think we should leak this information and the attached timetable to Jessica Marik. With any luck, a League response will slow the CCAF's reconsolidation efforts in the Tikonov and Chesterton Commonalities. —Lakewood]

PEONY BLOSSOM Progress Report

Greetings, Most Honored Citizen Gregori Bugakov,

The recent shipment of materials earmarked for the MHAF has left the Sian and Victoria Commonalities as scheduled and should arrive on Landfall by way of Chagos on 2 September. Our contacts in the Hegemony have requested that additional munitions, rations, and fuel supplies be allocated in future shipments. The changes were minimal, and I have given the revised supply manifest to the appropriate procurement operatives.

As Operation PEONY BLOSSOM proceeds apace, I suggest that the timetable for the transport and delivery of these goods be accelerated to reflect the MHAF's growing success. Despite this operation being a masterstroke of genius befitting the Celestial Wisdom's greatness, I am worried about Marik's response if she is given any breathing room.

Even now, the Maskirovka has received reports of the FWLM shifting away from the Andurien border toward the Marian thrust exactly as foretold, but I am concerned it is not enough. As a loyal daughter of the Confederation, I would never question the Celestial Wisdom. But with our forces readying themselves for victory over the *fèi wù* Republic of the Sphere and a ceasefire reached with the Davions, I believe it is imperative that we keep the Free Worlds League concentrated fully on the Marians. We cannot allow Jessica Marik to further consolidate the League's position or focus the FWLM's attention on the Confederation, lest she interfere with our preparations. Having the Marians maintain pressure on the League's soft underbelly is essential to achieving the Chancellor's mandates.

With your blessing, I would like to move the next two shipments from Detroit ahead of schedule, and I ask for your support in doing the same for the Magistracy materials leaving Dunianshire.

[signed]

Citizen Kanya Williams

— *Zang shu jian* intercept (veracity confirmed) 11 October, 3147

SHATTERED FORTRESS

OvKhan Ike Hawker had learned of the Thirty-first's destination from Clan Watch operatives; in addition to denying Regular reinforcements for the Marik campaign, Alpha Aimag exacted retribution for the near-destruction of *Silentshark* six months prior.

When the Regular troops on Marik learned no reinforcements would be forthcoming, Rikkard Nova Cat extended *hegira* to his enemies and allowed the surviving Hussars to return to Regulus.

THE GIBRALTAR SETBACK

In early April, Jessica Marik's plan to send FWLM forces into the Duchy of Andurien hit a major snag when reports from the Duchy of Tamarind-Abbey trickled in. SAFE had noted evidence of activity along the Marian Hegemony border as early as February, but the LCCC initially dismissed the findings as rumblings of the Periphery nation's semi-regular border raids. These new reports showed the Marian Hegemony Armed Forces conducting a far more organized effort than it mustered for mere border raids. Within two weeks, Atreus learned that MHAF troops had seized the Tamarind-Abbey worlds of Atzenbrugg and Lepaterique.

The new border with the Hegemony remained quiet for several months, during which Jessica Marik and the LCCC continued to plan for an offensive campaign against Andurien. However, news from Tamarind-Abbey in early October put Jessica's invasion plans on hold.

On 11 October, elements of II and III Legio dropped on Gibraltar and spread out to subdue all major population centers.

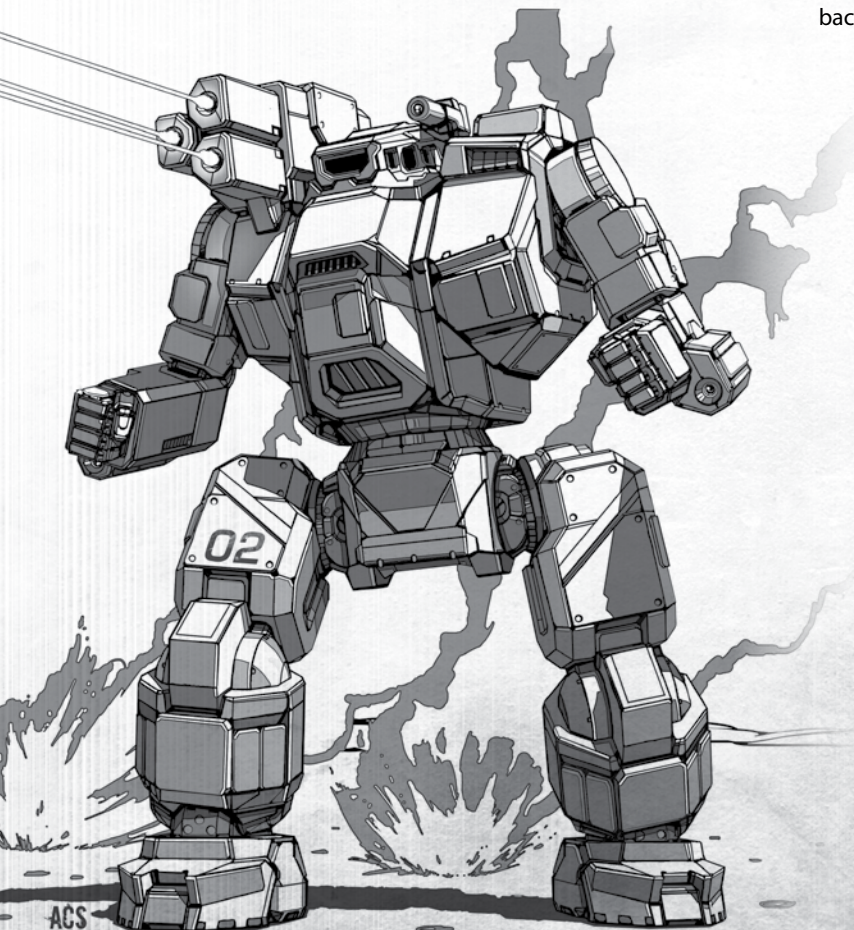
First Battalion of the Seventh Tamarind Regulars expected a Marian raid-in-force, but the Seventh instead quickly rallied to push back a full planetary invasion and called for reinforcements. Fontaine Marik dispatched a Camacho's Caballeros battalion to aid in Gibraltar's defense, but when the Caballeros arrived, the Seventh Regulars had already withdrawn deeper into the Duchy. The Caballeros had no choice but to withdraw as well, leaving the planet in Marian hands. However, Gibraltar's order of warrior-monks, the Brotherhood of the Rock, resisted the Marian occupation by striking MHAF infantry patrols and fomenting rebellion among the populace. This ensured the conquerors encountered nothing but difficulty attempting to assimilate the planet into Marian rule.

The loss of Gibraltar dealt a severe blow to Tamarind-Abbey's morale. The system was not a true military stronghold, and it possessed neither industrial nor economic significance, but retained sentimental value among the Tamarind-Abbey people. During the Lyran occupation of Tamarind, Fontaine Marik had chosen Gibraltar as his temporary capital, and after Tamarind's liberation in 3142, the LCCC based one of the new FWLM's military districts on Gibraltar due to Tamarind's uncomfortable proximity to the Commonwealth's border.

Despite Fontaine's hope to liberate Gibraltar and Jessica's desire to punish all of the League's enemies, the LCCC agreed that attempting to wage war across several potential battlefronts would result in the FWLM's eventual collapse. Jessica bowed to prudence and focused her attention on driving off the invaders in her nation's backyard before returning to planning the Andurien campaign.

However, additional information from the Marian front prompted Jessica Marik to permanently cancel her Andurien invasion plans. By late October, SAFE operatives observing MHAF forces on Gibraltar reported unusual findings. Many of the supplies arriving on-planet—including munitions, spare parts, and standard military rations—originated not from the Hegemony but from corporations in the Magistracy of Canopus and the Capellan Confederation, implying both nations had offered tacit support to the Hegemony's invasion.

This alarming news was presented to Parliament in a special session on 2 November, and MPs split evenly down the middle as to the best approach for the situation. Speaker Fletcher Grandin advocated that cooler, diplomatic heads prevail: if the Confederation was not directly involved, angering the stronger nation would likely result in disaster. Others favored punitive strikes on both the Hegemony and the Confederation. Ultimately, the division over the issue came down to a difference of six votes in favor of a compromise between the extremes. Parliament authorized strikes against the Marian Hegemony, and on 7 November, the Free Worlds League surprised its neighbors by enacting a trade embargo against the Capellan Confederation. In reality, the embargo was little more than a political formality, as the FWLM had insufficient assets to enforce the measure, but the document was the first major step in souring relations between the two realms.



THE THREE-HEADED DOG

On 14 March 3147, Julian Davion was officially crowned First Prince of the Federated Suns in a ceremony on the Periphery March capital of June. Over the next several months, Julian and the AFFS High Command discussed plans for dealing with the loss of New Avalon and the two other march capitals. Although New Avalon's liberation was considered the highest priority, Julian argued that a campaign to retake the capital would put considerable strain on the Federated Suns' already limited resources. Erik Sandoval had reported moderate successes during the PERCEVAL raids, but the AFFS needed to further destabilize the Combine border and the Dragon's Tongue before any serious attempt at reclaiming New Avalon or even Robinson could be considered.

Faced with a rapidly deteriorating national economy and no easy means of recovery, some of Julian's military advisors convinced him the most feasible option for bolstering the economy and the AFFS as a whole was to approve a strike at the Capellan Confederation. Operation CERBERUS had been in the works since Task Forces Navarre and Panoply rendezvoused on Goshen, but aside from maneuvering the pieces into place, Julian had not yet formally given the order to launch the operation. Having reached a ceasefire with Daoshen Liao the previous year, Julian was loath to void the agreement and reopen old wounds. He believed exposing the Federated Suns to renewed war with the Confederation might ultimately jeopardize the Suns' only remaining capital.

In late September, Julian rendezvoused with Sandoval and Task Force PERCEVAL on Remagen, the home base for PERCEVAL's future operations. Mounting pressure from his command staff encouraged him to strongly consider approving CERBERUS. Even if the task force fell short of the operation's final goal, every world returned to the Federated Suns would give the nation's economy a much-needed shot in the arm and bring them ever closer to mounting a future campaign to liberate New Avalon.

The First Prince reluctantly agreed. By the beginning of October, all elements of Task Force CERBERUS were in place at New Damascus. Julian chose to lead CERBERUS personally; if the ceasefire with the Confederation needed to be broken in order to preserve the Suns, he refused to allow anyone else to shoulder that responsibility. If Daoshen would have anyone's head over the invasion, Julian ensured it would be his own.

CHIMERA

Once Julian gave the go-ahead, the three task forces of Operation CERBERUS went their separate ways. Task Force Chimera jumped to Hobson on 2 November.

When Chimera made landfall, the Dawn Guards and the patchwork mercenary regiment codenamed Fortune Able advanced on the local garrison. Chimera attempted to surround the local Home Guard detachment and force them to surrender, but Warrior House Kamata had other plans.

The Kamata *janshi* knew they could not hope to stand up to two whole regiments—one being the mysterious RAF regiment about whom many Tikonov Commonality ghost stories were still being told—so they opted for a different approach once the invaders subdued the Home Guard.

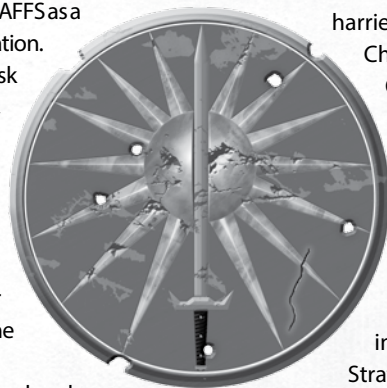
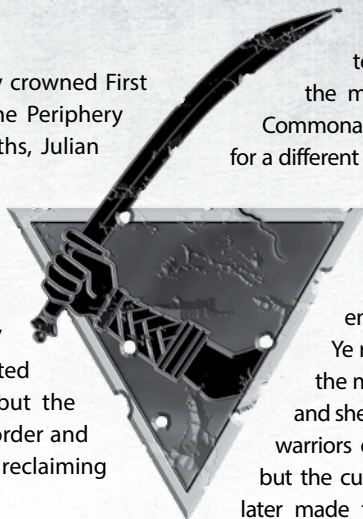
Throughout the Hobson campaign, House Kamata waged hit-and-run battles, often catching Davion companies by surprise with ambushes and shots to rear armor. Kamata's precision attacks were not enough to turn the tide, however, and *Shiao-zhang* Ying-Ye realized her tactics were unsustainable in the long term: the mercenary and "Republic" troops were far too numerous, and she was losing four 'Mechs for every one Chimera 'Mech her warriors downed. Ying-Ye attempted to call for reinforcements, but the curt reply from *Gang-shiao-zhang* Jiang Hui several days later made the situation starkly clear: "Sian Commonality under attack; multiple fronts. Hold as long as possible."

For the remainder of the month, Warrior House Kamata harried the invaders. Each Kamata loss helped delay Chimera's timetable for invading additional worlds. Once Ying-Ye felt her Warrior House had sufficiently delayed the invasion force, she ordered her troops to withdraw from the system.

Chimera's attack on Hobson and the simultaneous assaults of CERBERUS's second and third task forces elsewhere in the New Syrtis prominence reinforced Daoshen's belief that the Republic and the Federated Suns were indeed acting in concert. Though pressured by the Strategios to authorize the relocation of troops into the salient to shore up the CCAF's defenses, Daoshen refused. If the Republic dropped the Wall and the RAF stormed rimward, he feared the Tikonov and Sarna Commonalities would fall. To complicate matters, the Free Worlds League had enacted a trade embargo just weeks before. If Jessica Marik was gearing up for an armed response against the Confederation, Daoshen could not afford to pull many troops from the League border either.

Chimera's 16 November assault on Taygeta legitimized the Strategios' greatest concern about the invasion: the Republic troops were assisting the Federated Suns by attempting to cut off New Syrtis from the rest of the Confederation. Not only was the Republic allied with the Suns, Daoshen believed Devlin Stone was actively helping Julian Davion take back the worlds CELESTIAL REWARD claimed in 3144 and 3145.

During planetfall, the First Liao Air Defense attached to the Dynasty Guard managed to cripple two of Fortune Able's DropShips in orbit, forcing many of Able's BattleMech forces to perform emergency orbital drops to prevent total troop loss. This decision preserved most of Fortune Able's operational capacity, but it resulted in Able's troops being scattered like sticks in the wind across the surface of Taygeta's primary landmass. One of the unloaded DropShips was destroyed in reentry; the other would need extensive repairs before being able to fly again. While Fortune Able's ad hoc battalions attempted to regroup and strike their assigned targets, the Dawn Guards sought to uproot the Dynasty Guards' garrisons alone.



SHATTERED FORTRESS

Using the First Liao's aerial recon, Warrior House Tsang Xiao worked its way across the countryside, picking off Able 'Mechs that had yet to link up with the rest of their regiment. Coupled with casualties sustained during the orbital drop and Tsang Xiao preying upon stragglers, Able's forces had been whittled down to less than two battalions by the time they regrouped with the Dawn Guards. However, the Dynasty Guard could not hold back the combined pressure of both Able and the Dawn Guards, and Tsang Xiao used up the majority of its good luck in hunting down Able. Both Tsang Xiao and the Dynasty Guard planned to hold the capital until the bitter end, but orders from Daoshen required that they withdraw. On 5 December, the CCAF defenders abandoned the planet to Task Force Chimera.

ORTHUS

The second head of CERBERUS, designated Task Force Orthus, jumped into Capellan space on 3 November, moving on a course parallel to Task Force Chimera. While Chimera convinced Daoshen that the Republic was operating in alignment with Federated Suns interests, the attack of Orthus gave Daoshen conclusive proof that Julian had violated the previous year's armistice.

The mercenaries of Fortune Baker took point on Beenleigh, clearing the way to the planetary capital of Queensland while the Fifth Crucis Lancers moved into position. Baker bore the brunt of the rapid counterassault by the defending Harloc Raiders, but the Fifth flanked and scattered the surviving Raiders. Within hours, the Raiders had seemingly vanished even from the Fifth's aerospace flyovers. Orthus marched cautiously toward Queensland. Halfway to the capital, Harloc aerospace began strafing the Fifth's lines while the Raiders attacked from

blinds. The Raiders persisted with hit-and-run attacks for the next several days, slowing Orthus's advance to a near-standstill. The Capellan resistance held on for another week before Fortune Baker pushed through into Queensland, forcing the Harloc Raiders to abandon the planet.

However, the Raiders' attached aerospace wing, the Harloc Corsairs, remained in-system. Hidden behind Beenleigh's largest moon, the Corsairs lay in wait for Orthus to depart for its next target. During Orthus's burn towards its JumpShips, the Corsairs intercepted and destroyed two Fifth Crucis Lancers DropShips before Orthus fighters and assault ships could chase them off.

Forewarned about the Federated Suns invasion, Lockhardt's Ironsides attempted to ambush Orthus when the task force landed on Jaipur a week later. The CCAF troops pounded the Davion LZ with artillery and aerospace bombardment, which compelled the task force DropShips to abandon the site immediately after unloading their cargo. Without a permanent base of operations, the Fifth Crucis Lancers and Fortune Baker had to stay on the move until their aerospace support could find a safer location to land.

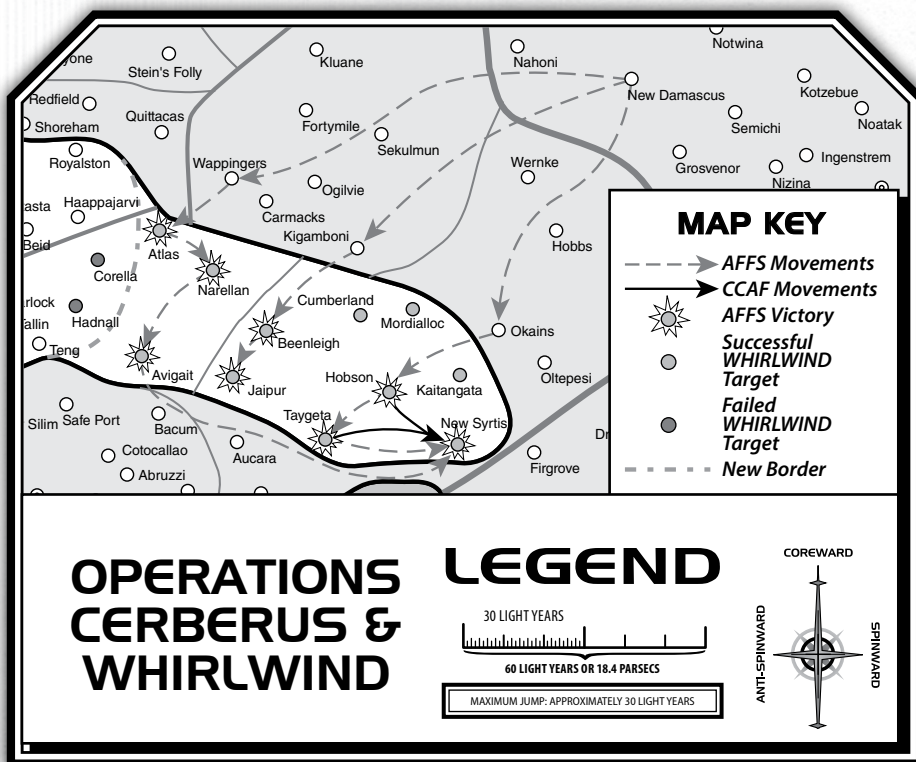
The Ironsides used this to their advantage, often attacking isolated Orthus companies when they stopped to rest. Once the task force established a new LZ, Lockhardt's Iron Flight swooped in and put more than half of Orthus's already damaged DropShips to the torch. With no easy way to evacuate from the planet, Task Force Orthus settled into defensive positions. Apart from occasional Fortune Baker raids on Ironsides supply depots, few battles occurred between the on-planet forces.

This stalemate would continue well into December; Task Force Orthus would be unable to offer Operation CERBERUS further support.

HYDRA

Julian Davion chose to personally command Task Force Hydra, CERBERUS's third head. As such, he assigned Hydra the most regiments and some of the operation's hardest targets. Hydra consisted of the First Davion Guards—fresh from a refit on Remagen—the First and Second Davion Auxiliaries, and the hodgepodge mercenary regiment designated Fortune Charlie. However, since the task force would strike deeper anti-spinward into the Confederation than Chimera or Orthus, Hydra ran the risk of Capellan defenders being reinforced by other Sian Commonality troops. Hydra's job was to expand the buffer between the Confederation and New Syrtis and prevent as many CCAF units from reinforcing the occupied Capellan March capital as possible.

On 4 November, Hydra made planetfall on Atlas. Expecting heavy resistance from the Second St. Ives Lancers, Julian ordered sustained air strikes on the enemy positions. The Lancers dug in deep, and Hydra braced for Capellan reinforcements to arrive while they chased down the opposition at every



3147: THE CALM BEFORE THE STORM

turn. No reinforcements from the Sian Commonality arrived. Within three days of heavy fighting, the Lancers wilted under the strain of Hydra's numbers and retreated off-planet.

Hydra continued on its intended flight path, arriving at Narellan on 17 November. Warrior House Imarra and the Second St. Ives Cheveau-Légers put up a much better fight than had Atlas's defenders, considering the sheer weight of Task Force Hydra. House Imarra kept the First Davion Guards alert at all times, as the Warrior House *janshi* often isolated and destroyed lances one 'Mech at a time. Julian assumed House Imarra was merely stalling to allow time for backup to arrive, but no new Capellan JumpShips appeared. By week's end, Warrior House Imarra withdrew with minimal casualties and departed the system. The Second Légers held out for a few more days before throwing in the towel and following Imarra's lead.

Similar circumstances repeated on Avigait with the Fourth Confederation Reserve Cavalry: the Capellans held long enough to realize defeat was inevitable and then withdrew deeper into the Confederation. Julian had expected complications, but Daoshen refused to dedicate enough troops to repel CERBERUS's advances, for fear that doing so would overextend the CCAF at a critical juncture.

CROSSING THE RIVER STYX

Having accomplished most of CERBERUS's objectives, elements from all three task forces congregated on Taygeta for the operation's final phase. Under the First Prince's direct command, Task Force Styx comprised seven regiments—four AFFS and three mercenary. In addition to Fortune Charlie, Julian enlisted the aid of the Twelfth Vegan Rangers and the Illician Lancers' Fifty-ninth Striker—both long-time Federated Suns—employed regiments.

On 4 December, Task Force Styx arrived at two pirate points in the New Syrtis system. After several fiercely contested landings across the Mawreddog continent, the Fifth Crucis Lancers led Styx's vanguard toward the planetary capital of Saso.

In addition to encountering Warrior House Hiritsu patrols and First and Fourth McCarron's Armored Cavalry pickets, Julian discovered the presence of the Dynasty Guard and Warrior House Kamata, both of which had fled Task Force Chimera's combat operations. On direct orders from the Chancellor, the Dynasty Guard and House Kamata survivors had retreated to reinforce the New Syrtis garrison after repairing and rearming.

Styx then split up to capture key strategic targets. The First Davion Guards and Fortune Charlie were assigned to take the Cave, the march capital's subterranean command center. The Fifth Crucis Lancers and First Davion Auxiliary were tasked with securing the Hasek family's ducal mansion, which acted as a secondary command center and morale booster. The Fifty-ninth Striker and Second Auxiliary aimed to control Saso's primary spaceport, and the Twelfth's goal was to secure the march capital's government building and administrative offices.

The Fifth Lancers had little trouble reaching the Hasek estate, located near the planet's equatorial desert. Shortly after the first shots were fired, Dynasty Guard *Sang-shao* Eliza Zhao realized her command had little hope of holding back two full BattleMech regiments, so she ordered her troops to hold off the Fifth while her command company evacuated the Capellan officers, nobles, and other important personages occupying the mansion. Once the evacuation was complete, the Dynasty Guard performed a fighting withdrawal and then poured enough artillery into the mansion to level it completely.

Hindering the Fifty-ninth Striker's quest to secure Saso Spaceport, the First MAC pinned down the mercs with aerospace strikes. Every one of the Fifty-ninth's attempts to break through the First's pickets resulted in disaster, as the First sold themselves dearly for every meter of ground the mercs tried to take. The Illician Lancers requested reinforcements, but Julian kept the Second Auxiliary in reserve.

The Twelfth Vegan Rangers likewise ran into difficulty in taking their objective. *Janshi* from Warrior House Hiritsu seemed to block every single one of Saso's streets. Several times, the Rangers ran into perfectly planned ambushes. The sudden arrival of the Dynasty Guard at the Rangers' rearguard sent the mercenaries into a retreat.

Julian personally led the assault on the Cave. Located in a confusing network of tunnels buried deep under Saso, the Cave formed the linchpin of the CCAF's hold on the planet. While en route to the Cave's hidden entrance outside the city, the Fourth MAC and elements of Warrior House Kamata attempted to flank the First Davion Guards. Julian ordered Fortune Charlie to hold off the Capellans as best they could while he led the First into the Cave complex. Though he possessed reliable maps, the Capellans had collapsed tunnels and laid minefields. Several Guards 'Mechs lost limbs to pitfalls and other traps. Twenty minutes later, Fortune Charlie caught up with the First Guards deep in the tunnels.

Julian noticed the mercenary 'Mechs barely had their paint scratched. Mere moments later, Charlie elements fired on Julian's troops at point-blank range. The First Prince's command company shielded Julian's *Templar III*, many of them sacrificing themselves to rear shots that cored their fusion engines. A brutal firefight shook the tunnel, and Julian had no choice but to progress towards the Cave as his troops held off the traitorous elements of Fortune Charlie.

Within an hour, Charlie units suddenly stopped pursuing altogether. Julian would later learn that the Fifth Crucis Lancers had abandoned the demolished Hasek estate to come to his aid and caught both Charlie and the Fourth MAC in a pincer within the tunnel network. His rearguard now clear, Julian's command company broke through into the Cave and cleared out all pockets of resistance.

Once the Cave fell, the Capellan defenders had few reliable means of coordinating their efforts. One by one, CCAF regiments began giving ground, going so far as to torch civilian structures and settlements in order to cover their retreats. By 21 December, Task Force Styx controlled all of its objectives, despite CCAF troops still on-planet. Four days later, the First Prince declared New Syrtis liberated. Ragged and woefully understrength Capellan holdouts would continue conducting small raids and guerrilla attacks for another two months before retreating in late February 3148.

After the dust settled, the Styx mercenary commands had sustained nearly as many casualties on New Syrtis as the Capellans, and nearly 50 percent more than the accompanying AFFS regiments. Many mercs claimed their casualty rate was due to Julian's inclination to preserve Davion line troops by wasting mercenary lives. Others believed the casualty rate was evidence of his fault as a battlefield commander. Some put forth the idea that Julian trusted mercs to get the job done more than he trusted his own troops. Despite the victory on New Syrtis, AFFS and mercenary confidence in the First Prince's command slowly began to wane.

ELSEWHERE IN THE INNER SPHERE

Although the Lyran Commonwealth, the Clan territories, and most of the Periphery did not experience the type of far-reaching consequences occurring in other nations during 3147, these regions were far from quiet. The following noteworthy events would shape these nations in the coming years.

CHALLENGING THE ARCHON

According to man-on-the-street polls in the Lyran Commonwealth, Archon Trillian Steiner was purposefully ignoring the cancer slowly metastasizing in her nation's rimward reaches. She rarely mentioned the rebellious microstate in her public addresses, as though broaching the topic would grant legitimacy to "Warlord" Widmer's claims. However, Trillian's refusal to acknowledge the Buena Collective acted as a double-edged sword: the more she evaded addressing Widmer's claims to deny him official recognition, the more the nation—and the Collective specifically—began to believe these claims.

Public outcry demanded that Trillian answer for the LCAF's lack of protection in the Buena Province. The citizens of the Commonwealth challenged her to either grant the Buena Collective its independence or take decisive military action against it. Either case would foreseeably go against the court of public opinion by either making her look weak or unnecessarily hawkish. The Archon's detractors claimed a middle-of-the-road approach—mere diplomatic or economic entreaties—would never work. Trillian brushed off her critics just as fervently as she had supposedly washed her hands of the Collective.

The Archon remained mum on the issue until 6 June, when LCAF forces performed an orbital drop on Valloire. Elements of the Carlisle Buena Province Militia, the Second Buena Guards, and the Lyran Irregulars attempted to seize the spaceport, but resistance estimates provided by Loki operatives were woefully outdated. A battalion of the newly rechristened First Collective Guards opened fire on the invasion force and pinned the LCAF troops in place with precise artillery strikes and conventional fighter flyovers. The LCAF task force pulled back to a more defensible position, then circled around and flanked the Collective Guards. The Second Buena Guards sustained moderate casualties during the maneuver against its former sister regiment, but the First Collective Guards were forced to withdraw into the spaceport. During the fighting, one of the spaceport's concourses collapsed on weapons fire, killing several hundred civilians. On 10 July, the Buena Collective troops withdrew to their JumpShip and returned to Buena.

Also on 6 June, the Florida TTM jumped to Widmer's homeworld of Ayacucho and cut through the planet's militia on a drive toward the seat of government. However, LIC reports had failed to report the presence of the still-forming Second Collective Guards being trained at proving grounds near Widmer's personal estate. The untried Second Guards took up arms and assaulted the TTM.

VICTORY ON VALLOIRE

Valloire [DBC]—The remnants of General Diego Widmer's forces on Valloire have finally capitulated, ending a month of fighting between the Collective and the mixed Lyran force under Kommandant Ludwig Steiner, commander of the Lyran Irregulars. Major Ricardo Gonzales-Gonzales did not contest the Irregulars' drop around the Yrba Reservoir, choosing instead to deploy around the Valloire spaceport and his headquarters near Sisku City. An initial foray against the spaceport was repulsed by the Collective Guards and their artillery support. The Irregulars cut off water to the city, further galvanizing the inhabitants to Widmer's cause. Despite the support of the citizens, Major Gonzales-Gonzales was forced to marshal his forces after a week of water rationing to dislodge the Irregulars.

Outnumbered two-to-one, the Lyrans held out for a few hours before being dislodged. Kommandant Steiner's *Banshee* covered the retreat, cutting a *Neanderthal* in half with Gauss rifle and heavy particle cannon fire and forcing Gonzales-Gonzales to consolidate his position at the reservoir. The gain was costly for the attackers, putting a full quarter of their number out of commission while the Lyrans sustained moderate losses, primarily to the Second Buena Guards. Steiner led his troops in a loop back to Sisku City and, after a small skirmish with the garrisoning forces, captured the city and base.

After returning water service to the city, and with it the Lyrans, the major reunited with the remainder of his forces at the spaceport and attempted repairs with what material they could scavenge. Repeated raids by the Irregulars wore them down, and the rebels sallied forth once again in a desperate attempt to retake their base of operations before they were completely out of ammunition and spare parts. Their initial attack succeeded in pushing into the base, but their greater numbers quickly evaporated as so many of them were combat-ineffective as the fresh Irregulars pushed back. With little more than a lance of BattleMechs operational, Major Gonzales-Gonzales ordered an evacuation of his unit to their JumpShips, taking about half of their inoperable equipment with them.

Sadly, the struggle continues on Widmer's home of Ayacucho, despite Colonel Lorena Farmer's previous experience with Collective forces. Widmer's defenders have dug in around the few habitable regions, and the locals have for the most part refused to help Commonwealth forces requisition food and supplies. With a limited amount of support from Tharkad, Colonel Farmer has taken to brief engagements, reminiscent of the late thirtieth century, pulling back forces before they can be lost permanently. Most of the fighting is occurring on Widmer's family estate, making each fight a personal attack on the general no matter what the outcome.

Despite popular support, the opposition has been unable to press the Florida Timbuktu Theater Militia due to lacking off-world support from General Widmer. Though the beneficiary of StarCorps's reduced output on Loburg, the general has only sent shipments to his forces on Buena, leaving the rebels on Ayacucho to rely on what little the system has in the way of military manufacturing.



3147: THE CALM BEFORE THE STORM

Much to the Buena Collective Military's surprise, the Theater Militia troops possessed sharper teeth than expected. Since its occupation of Urjala a year prior, the Florida TTM had been staffed with fresh recruits and refitted with as much new or updated equipment as the LCAF could provide, given the uneasy quiet from the Falcon and Wolf borders. Because Colonel Farmer's troops had previously demonstrated their proactive loyalty to the Archon with the Urjala occupation, the Quartermaster Corps ensured the battalion received all the support it could get. This new equipment allowed the TTM battalion to even the odds against two battalions of half-trained Guards troops. However, Colonel Farmer was unable to properly rout the Second. Within two weeks, the Florida TTM and the Second Guards camped within several hundred kilometers of each other, on opposite sides of the Widmer estate. Both dug in and prepared to wait for reinforcements, which would not arrive before year's end; the LCAF could spare no additional troops, and the young BCM refused to abandon Warlord Widmer's home. Apart



MYSTERY RAIDERS

Exarch,

Jade Falcon worlds, including Chahar, Roadside, and Black Earth, have been raided by a small but skilled force. The company of raiders avoided PGC forces as much as possible while they cleaned out non-military stores of food and medical supplies. In each case, the local HPG was briefly occupied, but the technicians report no message bursts were sent. However, after each HPG's next broadcast operation, the facility exploded and leveled an area half a kilometer in diameter. By that time, the raiders were long gone.

The identity of the raiders is unknown. Their 'Mechs were stripped down to primer and bore no regimental insignia. The state of repair of the 'Mechs showed they lack access to proper parts or facilities. Limbs were mismatched from other chassis, and weapons were shoehorned into spaces not designed to house them. That such a force could overcome even *solahma* and PGC forces is remarkable, even if they shied from combat.

The most interesting aspect of these raids is the small flotilla of unmarked and transponder-free JumpShips that accompanied the raiders. Each bore the maximum number of DropShips it could carry, but only a battered *Fortress*-class DropShip landed to deploy the raiders. Like the 'Mechs it carried, the DropShip bore no indications of affiliation. After each raid, the entire flotilla jumped away as soon as the *Fortress* returned to its berth.

The ultimate goal of these raiders is unknown at this time.

[Signed]

Agent 684-991-302

19 November 3147

HOUNDS GO TO GROUND

[Exarch: The following message was found encoded and attached to all outgoing HPG transmissions leaving Jade Falcon space. This news could hit First Prince Julian particularly hard. I recommend suppressing further transmission to whatever extent we are able. —Lakewood]

To: Kell Hounds survivors

From: Col. Callandre Kell

Date: 24 November 3147

Wherever this message finds you, I am glad you are alive to read it. Our losses are critical. The Falcons' goal is no longer simply conquest. It seems they have declared a Trial of Annihilation against the Kell Hounds. I cannot allow that to occur.

We're down to less than half strength. While whatever aid you might offer would be appreciated, the priority now is to secure our civilians. All families and other innocents affiliated with the Hounds have taken up all available space on our few remaining DropShips. With the Commonwealth collapsing around us, there are few options. We must preserve what we can before everything is lost. Therefore I am enacting Directive KH-09.

Any and all Kell Hounds, past or present, and their families, are to make best speed to rendezvous Where It All Began. Our arrival date is nine weeks from the date of this message. We will wait for four weeks. Sign and Countersign per Hound Code 1-A-1. If you cannot make it in time, a message capsule will be placed at the site of the First Encounter. Our first destination will be contained within.

Hurry. We cannot afford to wait.

[Signed]

Calamity

SHATTERED FORTRESS

from regular probes to assess troop positions, both sides refused to commit to open battle, as neither commander wished to risk troops without an absolute guarantee of victory or explicit orders from higher up the command chain.

During the week of 15 June, news media outlets throughout the Commonwealth began rolling out stories with headlines to the tune of "Archon Orders Strike on Commonwealth Citizens" and "Buena Province Under Attack by LCAF." Trillian addressed these allegations personally. In a 23 July address to the nation, the Archon stated that General Widmer would pay for his crimes against the Commonwealth and that she was exploring all future methods of handling the Collective's armed insurrection. She did not detail any of the plans she had already put into place.

THE SILENCE OF THE CLANS

Apart from the quiet, black hole contained within Fortress Republic's walls, the relative silence from the Clan empires, dominions, and occupation zones during 3147 disturbed the Inner Sphere more than anything else. Events in the Clans' territories may not have made the evening news, but the Clans were by no means idle: most important happenings merely transpired far behind Clan borders.

The most notable development was instigated by Clan Hell's Horses. Malvina Hazen's successful Trial of Possession over the Mongol Doctrine in 3135 left the battle philosophy, which originated within the Hell's Horses, in the Falcons' hands. Her formation of the Golden Ordun in her alliance with the Hell's Horses allowed the Horses to, in effect, license the ideology they had originally created by fighting under the Ordun's banner. Rather than revel in the battlefield successes achieved during the Hell's Horses' alliance with Clan Jade Falcon, Horse saKhan Fulk Lassenerra witnessed Malvina Hazen twist

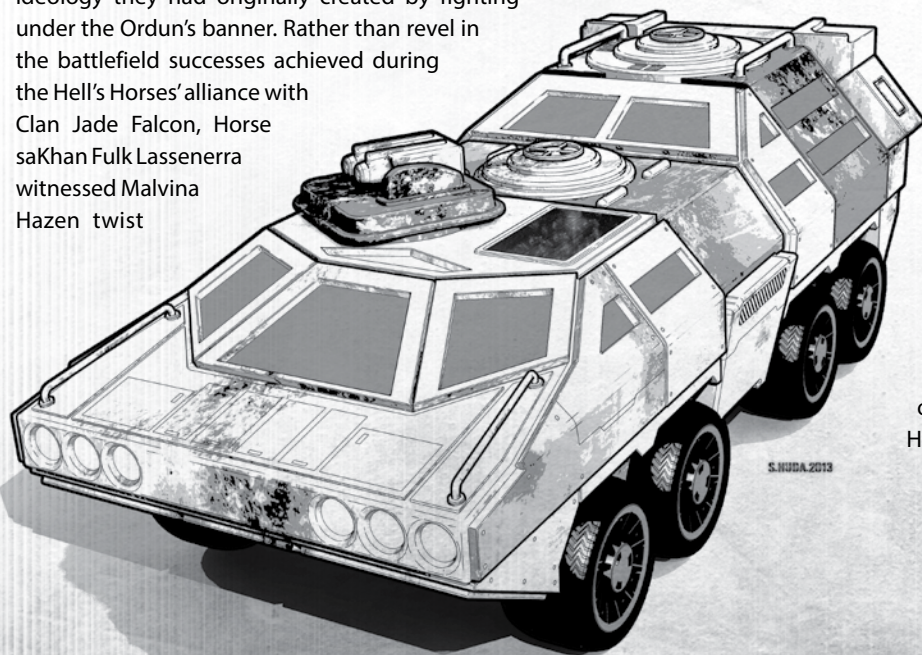
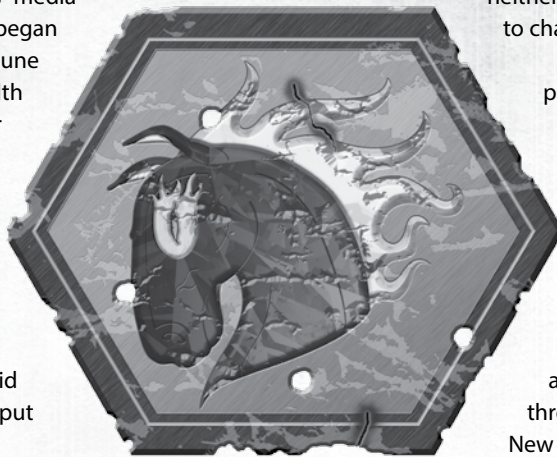
and pervert the Mongol Doctrine he had adopted. While Malvina lay in a coma in 3145, the Horses withdrew to their occupation zone, nullifying their alliance with the Falcons. The Mongol Doctrine, however, remained firmly in the Falcons' talons and neither of the Horse Khans felt confident enough to challenge her for it.

SaKhan Lassenerra decided that Malvina's perversion of the Mongol Doctrine meant she had forfeited her right to the original spirit of the doctrine itself. In late 3146, Lassenerra developed a plan to demonstrate what Malvina's course lacked. Phase One of the operation, codenamed NOYAN, began on 7 April 3147 with attacks against the Rasalhague Dominion. Using traditional swarm tactics as befit the untainted Mongol Doctrine, three Horse Clusters descended on St. John, New Oslo, and Unzmarkt to declare Trials of Possession for each world. Though the Dominion garrisons raised valiant defenses against the Horses, the Horses claimed all three systems, verifying that the traditional application of the Mongol Doctrine was still viable.

At the next Clan Council assembly on Csesztreg, the Council expressed concern that the saKhan's use of the Mongol Doctrine would provoke Malvina into action. Lassenerra countered by stating, "She wants to enforce her possession of the doctrine? Then let her try." He then outlined NOYAN Phase Two, and the Council admired his audacity.

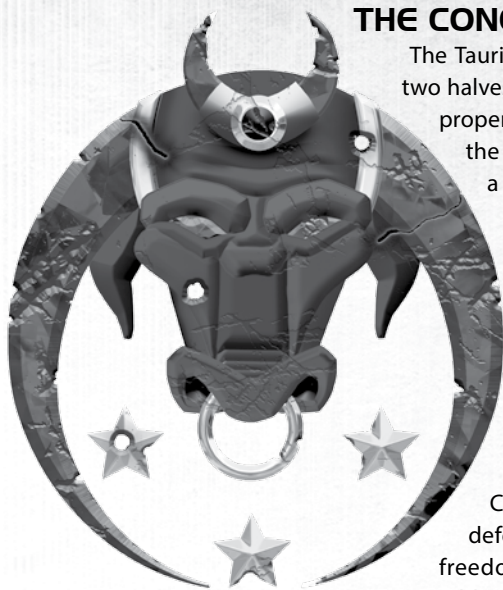
On 17 June, the Hell's Horses attacked the Falcon border, targeting Biota, Colmar, and Leskovik. The Falcons were unprepared for an attack from their former allies, and their defenses quickly shattered. Both Biota and Colmar fell quickly to the Horses' swarm tactics. NOYAN's sole wrinkle occurred on Leskovik, where the Eighteenth Falcon Regulars denied *safcon*. During planetfall, the Falcons' aerospace shot down a full fourth of the forces the Seventy-first Mechanized Cavalry had bid for the Trial of Possession. The remaining Horses warriors were ultimately unable to claim victory and limped back to their OZ.

The Clan Council claimed NOYAN an overall success and consolidated the Clan's gains before sitting back and waiting for Malvina to challenge their right to enact the Mongol Doctrine. The infraction did not go unnoticed, but the "Chinggis Khan" was otherwise occupied. Malvina's expected challenge to the Horses never materialized.



3147: THE CALM BEFORE THE STORM

THE CONCORDAT'S FUTURE



The Taurian Concordat had been fractured into two halves since September 3066, the Concordat proper and the Calderon Protectorate. Initially, the breakaway Protectorate was formed as a temporary measure to preserve the essence of the Concordat before it could complete its slide into darkness. Many claim the post-split changes within the Concordat validated Baron Cham Kithrong's foresight and boldness in repudiating the nation's direction and declaring the Calderon Protectorate's secession. In the decades since the split, the Concordat mutated from a paranoid, defensive nation that valued individual freedom to a belligerent warmonger incapable of recognizing itself in the mirror. While the Concordat suffered and steadily shrank in size due to its leaders' martial, diplomatic, and domestic sins, the Calderon Protectorate and the descendants of Concordat founder Samantha Calderon waited in relative silence. Many citizens of the Protectorate began to believe that reunification with the Concordat was nothing more than a pipe dream.

In 3127, one of the Concordat's most disastrous leaders was deposed after he threatened to use weapons of mass destruction against a world that chose to break away from the Concordat. Marshal Kaff Doru then claimed the Protectorship and spent the next two decades attempting to restore the government's relations with the citizenry and repair the damage his predecessors had made. Protector Doru was largely successful in these endeavors, which led to the Concordat entertaining serious diplomatic discourse with the Protectorate for the first time in decades.

On 29 August 3147, nearly eighty-one years to the day that the Calderon Protectorate announced its secession, Doru and Sam Calderon, Protector of the Calderon Protectorate, delivered a historic proclamation on Taurus: Doru's twelve-year-old daughter Reva and Calderon's eight-year-old son Bryant would marry once Bryant came of age. This meant that ten years hence, the Taurian Concordat and Calderon Protectorate would reunite as a single realm. In the meantime, the two states would engage in expanded trade and mutual defense, with provisions in place to prevent unsavory incidents like the 3067 Bromhead Massacre from occurring in the future.

The announcement swiftly created a shared nationalistic fervor. Families from the Concordat began reaching out to long-lost cousins or other family members whose ancestors had chosen to side with the Protectorate. Trade and communication flowed freely between both states, and reenlistment rates in the Taurian Defense Force and the Calderon Protectorate Military reached a ten-year high.

For at least one nation in the human-occupied Sphere, things were beginning to look up.

TAURIAN CONCORDAT TO REUNIFY IN 3157

(3 August 3147)

Taurus [TB] – Protectors Kaff Doru and Sam Calderon signed the Taurus Reunification Accord today, arranging for the marriage of Reva Doru (12) and Bryant Calderon (8) on his eighteenth birthday on 3 August 3157. Their marriage will rejoin the Calderon Protectorate with the Taurian Concordat and end a painful separation.

The announcement on Taurus is seen by many as a diplomatic accomplishment by Protector Doru, who has spent the last few decades undoing the damage done by former Concordat Protector James Urratia and his predecessors. Doru achieved a number of successes in recent years, most prominently the recent trade agreement with Sterope. The governments of Sterope and Atreus Prime have both announced that they would rejoin the Concordat on that day as well.

Protector Doru was quick to respond to insinuations that he was the junior partner in this merger.

"I think that's the wrong way to look at this. We're all Taurians. They've never stopped being Taurians. That's true for everyone in the Protectorate, and it's true for everyone who declared their independence from the insanity of Urratia. It's insanity and short-sightedness like that which divided us, not something fundamental. With that out of the way, we're left with the common ancestry. Only a Taurian can understand what it means."

Protector Calderon commented on comparisons with another interstellar merger sealed by marriage.

"I think the odds of us repeating the mistakes of the Lyrans and Feddies are near zero. For one, they tried to unite two people with no historical ties, no common ancestry as Protector Doru puts it. For another, we will be rejoining something that was broken, not because the Taurian people wished to be divided, but because of a temporary emergency measures. And we're not rushing into this. We'll spend the next decade working out all the kinks and ensuring that future generations won't have to deal with a new separation."

News of the accord has spread through both realms and was generally met with positive responses. Administrator Lars Kolby of Grossbach was not one of them.

"New Taurians. Old Taurians. I don't give a damn, and no one else here does either. They can all take their flags and get bent. Grossbach belongs to no one but those who were born here, and that's how it's meant to be. Doru and Calderon can die in a ditch."

SHATTERED FORTRESS



3148: THE COMING SHADOW

The beginning of 3148 saw the Inner Sphere in a tense state of affairs. The Federated Suns was still trying to hold onto the Capellan March's partially liberated capital, the Free Worlds League was attempting to narrow its many battles to only one enemy at a time, and the Lyran Commonwealth had set its sights on bringing a wayward province back into the fold. The Capellan Confederation was still reeling from the loss of a major Sian Commonality world and feared for future losses in the region. The Draconis Combine had suffered debilitating raids against its frontlines while trying not to stretch its military too thin. Even the Clans had experienced disruptions in their rear areas.

The year would touch every nation within the Inner Sphere, for good or for ill. The future of 3148 lay like a viper hidden in the sand, coiled and ready for each unsuspecting victim to draw close. Before the new year arrived, 3148 would claim a celebrated leader, push another head of state to the brink of death, give rise to a besieged nation asserting its authority, and witness historical reconciliations with far-reaching implications.

And all the while, the Republic remained hidden behind its impenetrable Fortress Wall, silent as the empires of the Inner Sphere rose and fell.

EXCISING THE CANCER

Considering all of the catastrophes and setbacks that had plagued the Lyran Commonwealth since Gray Monday, January 3148 shone a ray of sunlight through the nation's personal raincloud. After January, however, matters within the Commonwealth quickly returned to a downward trend.

CHEMOTHERAPY

Within Warlord Diego Widmer's Buena Collective, matters remained at a standstill. Widmer wished to break the stalemate on Ayacucho, but after the fall of Valloire the previous year, he needed all the BCM troops he could spare to protect the Collective's capital and the vital 'Mech factories on Loburg. His homeworld would have to fend for itself until the BCM was in a better position.

Ayacucho

Buena Collective residents who had never supported Widmer's secession publicly accused the self-appointed warlord as being more of a hypocrite than the Archon he denounced. By early January, fliers from

anonymous opposition groups littered several key worlds in the Collective. These fliers featured a caricature of Widmer saying, "I can protect this nation against the Free Worlds League but not against the Lyran Commonwealth." Anti-government riots exploded into the streets of Buena, Loburg, and Ayacucho. One of the bolder protest groups picketed in front of the Widmer estate grounds on Ayacucho, heedless of the two camps of armed soldiers on either side of the warlord's manse. On 7 January, the Florida TTM received word from off-planet. Later that day, Colonel Farmer approached the Collective dissidents, and the following day one of the TTM's aerospace flights rocketed over the entrenched Second Collective Guards' cantonment and dumped literally tons of the group's flyers—as many as the dissidents had been able to print for Colonel Farmer's use.

The message Farmer wanted to convey to the Second Collective was clear: Widmer was operating on borrowed time. Two days after the flier-bombing, a mixed LCAF regiment made planetfall within a two-hour march from the Widmer estate. After assembling on Acrux, Task Force Kingbreaker—one battalion each from the Eighth Lyran Regulars, First Buena Jaegers, and First Bolan Jaegers—had jumped to one of Ayacucho's pirate points and performed an orbital drop to take the Second Collective by surprise. Colonel John Nelson, commander of the Eighth Regulars and the task force, hoped the pressure of a fresh LCAF regiment would cause the rookie Second to break, but the Second was made of sterner stuff. Also, Widmer had not taken his detractors' criticism lying down. Within hours of the Lyran task force's landing, a mercenary battalion identified as the Thunderstruck revealed its presence and tore into the Lyran lines.

Nelson's troops quickly fell back under the Collective's counterattack—but not due to any intrinsic merit in the Second Collective Guards' tactics. Kingbreaker lances were purposely pulling their punches or hesitating to fire until it was too late, as they had not expected to experience discomfort when firing on what were essentially fellow Commonwealth citizens. Nelson ordered his troops to pull no punches: though the enemy may have been brethren at some point, according to the Archon, all Buena Collective soldiers were guilty of treason until proven otherwise. Nelson's troops complied, and within two days, Kingbreaker and the Florida TTM ejected nearly half of



**TIMBUKTU COLLECTIVE FORMED,
FLORIDA TTM ABSORBED**

(24 June 3148)

Florida [FFP] – The Commonwealth has been officially informed today of the formation of the Timbuktu Collective, a “protective alliance” between Coldbrook, Halifax, Hinkley, Wiltshire, and Timbuktu. This announcement came as a surprise to all except the Rim Collection, which reportedly signed an immediate mutual protection pact with the Timbuktuans. It is not clear what has become of the Florida Timbuktu Theater Militia, stationed at a former Explorer Corps base on Halifax. The missive from the Collective indicates that they have voluntarily joined the new Collective Armed Guards as the First Timbuktu Guards. Reports from various other sources indicate that a firefight broke out on the Halifax base, and a small force consisting of several ‘Mechs and vehicles escaped into the wilderness. Regardless of the truth of those reports, the Florida TTM had been whittled down to less than a third of its number, meaning they’re not likely to begin marching on nearby worlds.

The LCAF response to events has been negative.

According to General Tiemba McCorrin (Ret.):

“Disgraceful. That’s just what the Commonwealth needs right now, some rats leaving the sinking ship. I blame the proximity of that Brewer cad. Apparently betrayal radiates out a couple of jumps.”

According to Dr. Loreena Jenkins, former governor of Florida:

“Very troubling indeed. My heart goes out to all affected by this treacherous act. I know for a fact that this wouldn’t be a unanimous decision, not by the TTM, and not by all those in the Collective. My niece is a lance commander in the TTM, and I guarantee you she wants to see Florida again.”

According to Governor Locus O’Callister:

“Those lads up in Timbuktu must have stumbled over some five century-old *sake* or something. I don’t know what they’re thinking, but I’ve petitioned the Commonwealth to swing by the place for some housecleaning when they get around to stomping on Alekseyevka. When the current troubles with the Clans come to an end, I’m confident that opportunistic nonsense like this will be thoroughly dealt with!”

[EDITOR’S NOTE: Governor O’Callister’s “*sake*” remark may be referring to the division of *Draconis Combine* troops the *Star League* housed on Timbuktu during their intervention into the *Rim World Republic* in the twenty-sixth century.]

the Second Collective Guards from the planet. The Thunderstruck vanished during the fighting and were never seen again, but Nelson placed the unit on the LCAF’s blacklist in case it reappeared in the future.

Members of the Second Collective who laid down their arms were arrested and subjected to drumhead courts-martial. In the course of justice, Nelson learned that a good deal of the surrendering troops were conscripts drafted into the BCM rather than voluntary soldiers, further testifying to Widmer’s hypocrisy. Many of the soldiers had not even supported the Collective’s secession and had been coerced into serving with BCM line units rather than being assigned conscientious objector duties in administrative areas. Buena Province commander Martha Steiner authorized Nelson to enlist Commonwealth-loyal volunteers from the Second Collective as an auxiliary force. Thus the remaining Second Collective Guards battalion joined Kingbreaker as the rechristened First Buena Volunteers.

Buena

Realizing the imminent danger to the Buena Collective’s existence, Widmer pulled the recently mustered Third Collective Guards from Loburg’s garrison to reinforce the Collective’s capital. Though this left the Collective’s main industry protected solely by Loburg’s planetary militia, the move likely prevented Kingbreaker from shattering Buena’s defenses in the first charge. Widmer also sent a message to Duke Vedet Brewer and the First Hesperus Guards, which were holding station on Rapla near the edge of the Buena Collective’s border. Widmer had personally corresponded with Brewer several times after the duke became a deposed Archon waiting in self-imposed exile at the fringes of the Commonwealth, and a few times he had invited Brewer to throw his support behind the Buena Collective in hopes of creating further legitimacy for Widmer’s fiefdom. If anyone sympathized with challenging the Archon’s authority, it would be Brewer, Duke of Hesperus II. However, Brewer remained aloof from the Collective. His personal regiment, the First Hesperus Guards, had moved closer toward the Buena Collective in recent months, so Widmer once again extended Vedet Brewer an offer of asylum on Buena in exchange for supporting the Collective’s defense. Widmer did not receive a response before LCAF troops were spotted at Buena’s L1 pirate point.

On 24 January, Task Force Kingbreaker made planetfall on the continents of Luego and Dominika. The Eighth Lyran Regulars and the First Bolan Jaegers made a play for Fort Buena on the continent of Dominika while the First Buena Jaegers and the First Buena Volunteers were assigned to seize the planetary capital, Ciudad del Mar.

Fort Buena, which housed the War College of Buena, was defended by the Third Collective Guards, the Buena Training Battalion, and several hardpoints. The Eighth Regulars approached from the west and engaged the Third Collective Guards, pinning them in place until the Bolan Jaegers could flank them. Colonel Nelson’s standing orders to Kingbreaker were to disable enemy combatants and kill only when necessary. Nelson knew these measures were necessary to show goodwill to the enemy and ease the Collective’s anticipated reintegration into the Lyran Commonwealth, but the tactics slowed the Eighth’s progress. When the Third’s commander ordered the Buena Training Battalion to fill the gaps in Fort Buena’s defenses, Nelson knew the battle was lost. Rather than choosing to outright destroy his misguided countrymen, he ordered a fighting withdrawal to regroup.

As soon as the colonel sounded the retreat, the ‘Mechs and armor of the Buena Training Battalion targeted troops from the Third Collective Guards, delivering several debilitating rear-strikes before the Third realized they had been betrayed. Nelson’s after action report indicated the training battalion’s cadets had been coerced into service as well. Many of them had remained loyal to the Archon while enrolled at the War College, staying only out of fear that Widmer would have them arrested for attempting to leave Buena. The young MechWarriors and armor crews could not in good conscience follow the order to fire on the same Lyran troops whom the cadets had witnessed were purposely not killing the Third’s MechWarriors.

3148: THE COMING SHADOW

Shortly after the Buena Training Battalion rebelled, the Third retreated into the forests of Dominika, leaving Fort Buena in the LCAF's hands.

On Luego's northern shores, the First Buena Jaegers and First Buena Volunteers marched on the coastal city of Ciudad del Mar. Both the Jaegers and the Volunteers had requested the assignment to strike the capital city, for they believed claiming the Buena Collective's seat of government in the name of the Archon would go a long way toward restoring the pride of Buena Province's military. The First and Second Collective Guards attempted to halt the LCAF's advance with bombing runs and artillery, but the Jaegers and Volunteers could not be diverted so easily. The First Collective Guards lost too many fighters to return fire, and the Second's insufficient battlefield experience allowed the LCAF to break through into the city's outskirts.

Throughout the battle for Buena, Warlord Widmer kept his eyes on the sky. He believed Vedet Brewer and the First Hesperus would arrive at the jump point at any moment with the Collective's salvation. Brewer never came, but a short message from Rapla made its way to him in the last few days of the battle. "I hope you have an exit strategy," the duke's note said.

On 30 January, the First Buena Volunteers stormed Widmer's command center and took him prisoner. Two months later, by official order from Tharkad, former Margrave Diego Widmer was executed for high treason against the Lyran Commonwealth, and the Buena Collective died with him. The Archon granted clemency to the First Buena Volunteers, to all troops from the rebel state who had surrendered peaceably, and to all BCM conscripts who had official conscientious-objector status in their service record.

For the First Buena Volunteers' commendable service to the Archon, prominent members within the unit were awarded the Commonwealth Star, and the unit received high priority status from the Quartermaster Corps.

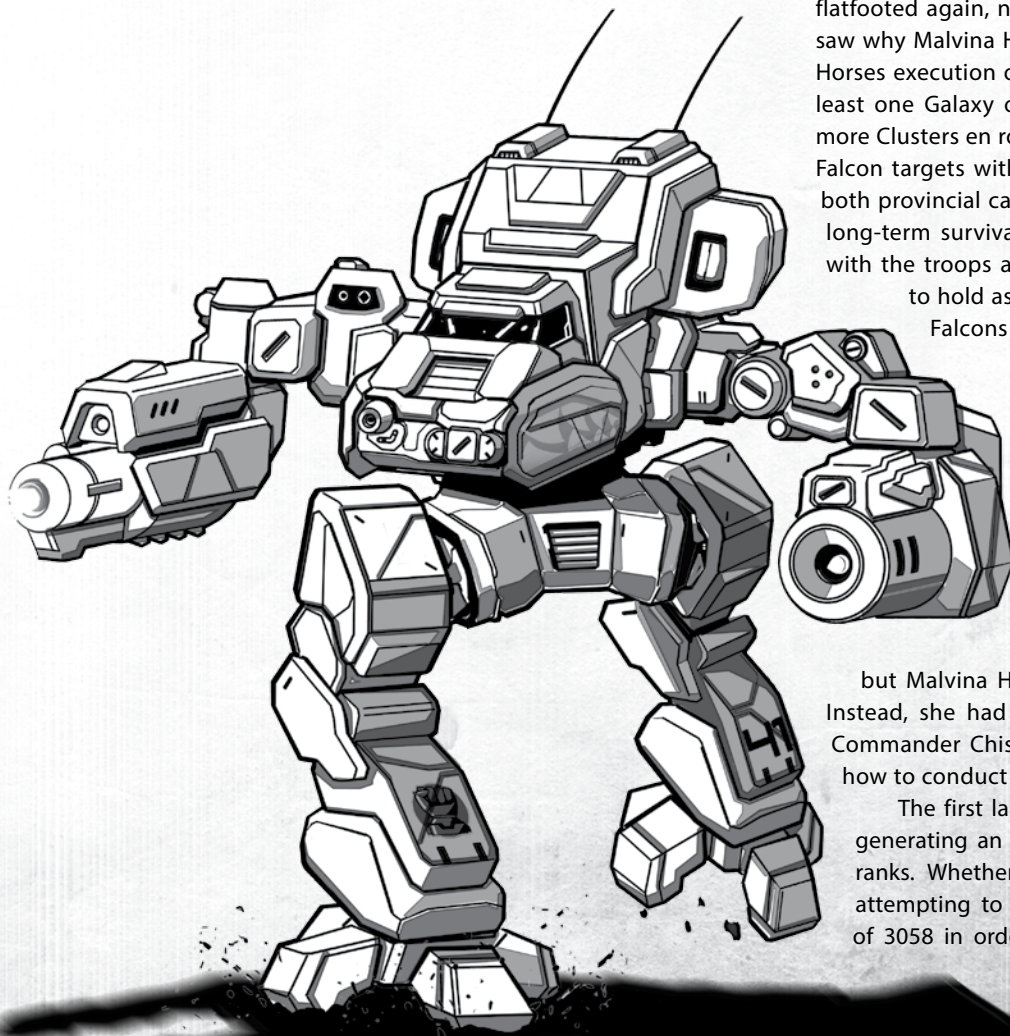
THE FALCONS ADVANCE

Within days of the Commonwealth finally closing the book on the Buena Collective, an even worse threat dropped into the Archon's lap.

Since the loss of Arc-Royal in late 3146, Trillian Steiner ensured LIC agents kept even tighter tabs on Jade Falcon troop movements. She swore the Falcons would never catch the LCAF flatfooted again, not on her watch. By December 3147, the LIC saw why Malvina Hazen had largely chosen to ignore the Hell's Horses execution of Operation NOYAN: intelligence reported at least one Galaxy of Falcons massing on Upano, with possibly more Clusters en route. The Archon's advisors saw two potential Falcon targets within striking distance: Donegal and Coventry, both provincial capitals and both vital to the Commonwealth's long-term survival. Unable to properly reinforce both worlds with the troops at the LCAF's disposal, High Command chose to hold as many in reserve as possible and wait for the Falcons to attack before choosing where to commit.

On 15 February, elements of two Jade Falcon Galaxies descended on Coventry. Galaxy Commander Stephanie Chistu of Delta Galaxy declared *no batchall*, instead landing all five Delta Galaxy Clusters and two Clusters from Gamma Galaxy at strategic locations around the planet. Lieutenant-General Francine Ross of the Seventeenth Arcturan Guards RCT kept scouts posted for signs of the Falcon Khan, but Malvina Hazen had not accompanied the strike force. Instead, she had given full operational command to Galaxy Commander Chistu, leaving her with specific instructions on how to conduct the battle for Coventry.

The first landing occurred at Port St. William Spaceport, generating an eerie sense of déjà vu throughout the Lyran ranks. Whether Galaxy Commander Chistu was purposely attempting to emulate the Jade Falcon Coventry incursion of 3058 in order to unbalance the LCAF remains a subject



SHATTERED FORTRESS

LIVE FREE, LIVE LYRAN

SBC—Landgrave Jasek Kelswa-Steiner, Duke of Skye, Porrima, and Tamar, died on 11 March defending the freedom of a realm he was not born into, a nation whose values brought him into our embrace.

Born in the Republic of the Sphere on the planet Skye, he joined the Republic Armed Forces. After watching his birth nation betray its people with inaction following Gray Monday, he gathered forces loyal to the people of the region and formed the Stormhammers. As their commander he fought for the safety and freedom of those under his stewardship. His leadership and success drew allies such as the Steel Wolves, Northwind Highlanders, and even Duke Vedet Brewer's troops and the LCS *Yggdrasil*. Following a Falcon invasion of Skye, he successfully extracted his troops from certain annihilation.

Duke Kelswa-Steiner was a notable attendee of the funeral of Victor Steiner-Davion and represented the Commonwealth in a simulated re-creation of the War of 3039. He led the Stormhammers into the fold of the Commonwealth, ancestral home of the Isle of Skye. The Stormhammers joined the LCAF, and the duke was appointed to a high level of command by Archon Trillian Steiner. Many of his activities in the LCAF are still classified, but his greatest action was responding to a Jade Falcon attack on the vital system of Coventry.

Upon arriving on Coventry, he was immediately pressed into the fighting. When a Falcon offensive cut deep into the Lyran flanks, his command company rallied to halt the advance but faced a full Binary led by Galaxy Commander Chistu herself. The shattered hulk of his *Templar*, missing most of its armor, is a testament to his tenacity. Evidence of his fighting prowess was clear in the three Falcon OmniMechs he personally destroyed. According to General of the Armies Roderick Steiner, General Kelswa-Steiner personally rushed Chistu and engaged her in a vicious point-blank battle that shattered the Falcons' offensive in the Dales. BattleROM data recorded Jasek crying out, "For Skye! For the Commonwealth!" before he fell to a horrific death-from-above maneuver. His sacrifice bought enough time for his troops to push back the Falcon advance and turn the battle in favor of the Commonwealth.

Kelswa-Steiner is survived by his father, Gregory Kelswa-Steiner. His funeral will be held on Tharkad with full state honors. A schedule for viewing will be made available locally.

Live free, live Lyran.

of some debate. However, throughout the campaign it became clear that officers on both sides had extensively studied holovids and textbook analyses of the Battle of Coventry in either academies or sibkos. Old tactics would not work. In fact, after securing Gyrfalcon Galaxy's landing zones, Galaxy Commander Chistu went out of her way to send a small Beak Binary to the Cross Divide Mountains. The Binary located all known entrances to the mines—which Lyran forces had used to great effect nearly a century earlier—and collapsed them. BattleROM footage of the destroyed entrances was then broadcast to General Ross with a simple message attached: "The old ways are of no use to you."

While a battle in the Ridesein River Valley raged between the Seventeenth Arcturan Guards and three persistent Falcon Clusters, Galaxy Commander Chistu sent another special detachment into the countryside on an undisclosed mission. At the town of Whitting, a First Falcon Striker Trinary encountered a company from the Coventry Province Militia standing guard near a monument to the 3058 victory over the Jade Falcons and the resultant First Whitting Conference, which ultimately gave birth to the all-too-brief Second Star League. Though the Coventry CPM soldiers fought tooth and nail to stop the Falcons, the Trinary overcame Whitting's defenders and left no survivors. Instead of claiming the town, the First Falcon Striker acted under Chistu's direct orders—which had come down from Khan Hazen herself—and leveled everything in sight, scouring the monument, the town square where Hauptmann Caradoc Trevena had offered Khan Marthe Pryde *hegira*, and the assembly building where the coalition task force's leaders had met to decide the fate of the Inner Sphere. Within hours, Whitting lay in complete ruins, with thousands of civilians dead.

According to the Jade Falcons, the Second Star League that germinated at Whitting was a sham, having been created without the guidance of Aleksandr Kerensky's descendants. For the Falcons, annihilating this physical reminder of the Great Houses' affront to the Clans' destiny was necessary to remind the Inner Sphere that, even a century after Operation REVIVAL, the Clans alone would give birth to humanity's next golden age. To this end, Galaxy Commander Chistu had the First Striker record Whitting's destruction and send the footage to General Ross for dissemination. Attached to the footage was a message from Chistu: "When the new Star League is born, it will be with Clan Jade Falcon as the iClan."

Morale along the Lyran front plummeted. Even the 27 February arrival of General of the Armies Roderick Steiner and Commonwealth champion Hauptmann-General Jasek Kelswa-Steiner—at the head of the Second Royal Guards and Fifteenth Arcturan Guards RCTs, respectively—could only buoy the Lyrans' spirits so much.

The addition of two regimental combat teams to Coventry's defense greatly bolstered the Lyran lines. Major battles occurred near the Coventry Military Academy, the Coventry Metal Works industriplex, and the city of Lietnerton, with the Falcons and LCAF trading ground back and forth every few days. The final straw came on 11 March, when a Jade Falcon attack encountered Jasek Kelswa-Steiner's command company in the Dales as it attempted to blunt a flanking maneuver during the Lietnerton offensive. Sustained fighting destroyed Kelswa-Steiner's *Templar* and several other 'Mechs from the Fifteenth Arcturan Guards, but their sacrifice forced the Falcons to strategically withdraw.

The death of a Commonwealth hero mortified the LCAF troops. General Steiner knew that, unlike the 3058 Coventry invasion, there would be no coalition task force to save the planet this time, no easy means to exploit Clan tradition, and he instilled a do-or-die mentality in the Lyran defenders. Across several faltering battlefronts, the Lyrans began pushing back the Falcons and winning engagements, but just barely.

3148: THE COMING SHADOW

During the thrust to reclaim Port St. William Spaceport, the Second Royal Guards gained the upper hand and drove back the First Falcon Striker, and the Fifty-third Falcon Talon suffered enough casualties that Galaxy Commander Chistu ordered them back to Upano—the Coventry task force’s staging point—for repair. Chistu quickly found her command outnumbered, and General Steiner would soon evict the Falcons from their most important strategic asset if Chistu did not resort to drastic methods. Malvina’s standing orders were to employ Delta Galaxy’s stockpile of nuclear warheads if the situation warranted. Though Chistu initially believed tactical nukes would not be necessary to take Coventry, she had brought along the cache just in case. A few tactical nukes would have quickly turned the tide in the Falcons’ favor, but deploying them would risk destroying a good portion of the spaceport the Falcons had fought so hard to keep. A staunch traditionalist at heart, Galaxy Commander Chistu contravened Malvina’s orders by eschewing the warheads in favor of a fair and honorable fight.

When Roderick Steiner received a personal challenge from the Falcon commander, he recalled tales of the incident between Malvina Hazen and Patrik Fetladral on Arc-Royal two years prior. Against his aide’s advice, the LCAF General of the Armies met the Falcon Galaxy Commander at the front of the Falcons’ faltering lines. Piloting a *Rifleman IIC 3*, Roderick disabled Chistu’s *Thor* in a brutal fight but did not kill her. Instead, he offered her *hegira*, mirroring Caradoc Trevena’s gesture of 16 June 3058.

Galaxy Commander Chistu accepted Roderick’s offer and recalled all of her warriors from the field. Many of Chistu’s subordinates openly criticized her for not following Malvina’s orders to the letter, but no one challenged her over the decision.

Before the Falcons could withdraw from Coventry, news of Wolf-in-Exile attacks on Falcon holdings in the OZ reached Chistu. The Wolves had already wrested Upano and Incukalns from the Falcon garrisons. At Malvina’s urging, Chistu immediately jumped the task force to Pobeda to forestall any further attempts by the Exiles on Falcon worlds. Her action proved fortuitous: the Wolves had sent only the Bronze Kreshik to claim the planet in the belief that the Falcons tied up on Coventry would not easily be able to respond. Within twelve hours, two Clusters of Falcons quickly overwhelmed the Wolves. Rather than destroy all of the Wolves, Chistu offered *hegira* to Galaxy Commander Annie Ward. The offer surprised Ward, given what she had read of reports on the battle of Arc-Royal. When asked why she had extended *hegira*, Chistu replied, “I am not Malvina Hazen.” The Wolves then bowed out and returned to Upano to consolidate their gains.

Once the consolidation was completed, LCAF leaders in Coventry Province received peculiar requests from the Exiled Wolves to station garrisons on Upano and Incukalns as soon as possible. The tone of the communiqués read more like orders than advice, despite the Wolves having no true jurisdiction over Commonwealth troops. Given the support the Wolves had provided during the recent Falcon invasion, regional brass acquiesced to the requests and transferred as much garrison and militia support to these planets as they could provide.

Within days of the new garrisons assuming their posts, the Exiled Wolf forces departed both planets. Within the next several weeks, other Wolf-in-Exile forces within the Lyran Commonwealth also packed up and left. Some went with minor fanfare from the local population; others withdrew silently, the planets unaware of their absence until after the Clan’s DropShips had left orbit.

AFTER ACTION REPORTS

Date: 27 Apr 3148

To: General Madchen Gupta, House Troops Liaison

From: Khan Miriam Shaw, Clan Wolf (In Exile)

As part of our defensive agreement, here is a summary of our recent actions against the Falcons.

Upano: The First Wolf Strike Grenadiers Cluster successfully repulsed the Fifty-third Falcon Talon while they were undergoing repairs and refits. Initial staging was at Auklake, with the First driving straight into the garrison at Cimony. As the Falcons regrouped, recon units harried them while the rest of our forces attacked the remainder of the Falcons at Domieir Station. They initially tried to hold against the attack, but the sheer weight of our units was too much, and they pulled back to their DropShips. As our two forces converged on the retreating forces from Cimony, the remnant of the Falcons were either destroyed or claimed as bondsmen.

Incukalns: The landing of the Wolf Spider Keshik was opposed not only by Falcon fighters but DropShips as well. A *Mule* carrying supplies was lost, and the *Union C-class Pack’s Blood* was damaged in the engagement, but the Falcon force was dispatched. Upon landing, the Keshik found themselves opposed by a *solahma* force deployed in the Lorraine Forest. Rather than fight their way into a prepared position, the Keshik performed a combat drop into the middle of the forest and suffered only one loss. The Falcons were unable to recover. Half were defeated in the forest while the remainder retreated, only to be caught in the open.

Pobeda: The Falcons allowed the Bronze Keshik to land uncontested, and Galaxy Commander Stephanie Chistu’s First Falcon Striker Cluster and some of the Falcon survivors from Coventry met Galaxy Commander Annie Ward’s forces on the battlefield. The initial Falcon assault inflicted heavy damage on the Bronze Keshik, which slowly fell back to the spaceport. Wolf fighters soon picked up a flurry of incoming DropShips, which disgorged the Falcons’ Fifth Battle Cluster, still bearing the scars of hastily repaired battle damage from Coventry. Galaxy Commander Ward’s warriors pulled back to the Black Valley region but have yet been unable to withdraw from the planet.

Further assistance on Pobeda would be greatly appreciated and in the best interests of both of our nations. While additional combat resources may be difficult to allocate at this time, materiel assistance and intelligence briefings could be beneficial to our forces in the field.



FOR THE DURATION OF THE CRISIS

Though 3148 brought change to nearly every Inner Sphere power, arguably the nation that underwent the year's most tumultuous change was the Free Worlds League. Faced with enforcing an economic embargo on a powerful neighbor, bringing a belligerent ex-province to heel, and prosecuting a war against a Periphery neighbor, the League already had its hands full. While Regulus felt the brunt of Clan Sea Fox's economic sanctions and the FWLM scrambled to keep its many ducks in a row, several wheels in and around League space were set into motion.

STATE OF EMERGENCY

After nearly fourteen months of the Sea Fox blockade, the Regular Fiefs had been pushed to the breaking point. The people of Regulus in particular feared for their future. Lester Cameron-Jones's proscription on buying from and selling to Beta Aimag had resulted in many citizens being arrested for treason, all for trading with the Sea Foxes to keep themselves or their businesses solvent. Regular jails began to fill with so many prisoners that the justice system suffered an unprecedented backlog. Many protests outside Cameron-Jones's mansion ended in violence and arrests, and in one instance, the Regular Captain-General's personal guard shot down a few of the most violent demonstrators.

Hidden wheels soon began turning, and the fate of the whole region changed overnight.

In the mid-morning of 2 March 3148, a massive explosion tore through the Halas family palace at Amur, Oriente. According to palace staff who survived the explosion, Jessica Marik had been in residence and was treating with diplomats from the Duchy of Andurien when the bomb went off and collapsed the building. The Ducal Guard immediately sealed off the palace grounds and put the whole of Amur on lockdown, even going so far as to halt all spaceport traffic leaving the system. DropShips already en route to JumpShips were accosted by the FWLS *Santorini's* aerospace wing and ordered to stand down or be fired on.

One DropShip attempted to run the aerospace screen before being disabled. The boarding party found a single man hiding in the vessel's smuggling compartment; after a thorough examination,

traces of the palace bomb's accelerant were detected on him. General Wilburn Kirkland of the Ducal Guard put the screws to the assassin, but the interrogation attempts extracted only a single confession from the assassin: "House Selaj sends its regards." The following morning, the assassin was found dead in his cell.

The Selaj family, rulers of the former Principality of Regulus nearly five centuries ago, were infamous for their alleged involvement in the Scourge of Death terrorist bombing in 2678 that claimed the life of Captain-General Terrence Marik. Within a few decades, Terrence's son Gerald had supposedly hunted down the family's members to extinction, but in the centuries since, House Selaj and the Scourge of Death terrorist group remained the League's bogeymen.

When Jessica's daughter Nikol learned of her mother's death and the implication of old ghosts, she left Atreus and traveled to Oriente to discover the truth of the matter. Upon the Warden-General's arrival, General Kirkland tendered his resignation as commander of the Ducal Guard, but Nikol refused to accept it. Instead, she tasked him with investigating this crime and determining whether any truth resided in the assassin's message.

Captain-General Jessica Halas-Hughes Marik was interred at the House Halas estate on Oriente, next to her late husband Philip Hughes. Nikol attended her mother's state funeral and was briefly reunited with her elder siblings, Julietta, Elis, and Christopher, before being called away on state business. After the funeral, General Kirkland shared his findings: the assassin's message pointed to Regulus, where the Sea Foxes had corroborated rumors of a group calling itself the Scourge of Death. Further infiltration of this group revealed that its last employer was Major General Fred Marshdale, aide to Lester Cameron-Jones.

Nikol immediately returned to Atreus to address an emergency session of Parliament. Though Minister-General Kenyon Marik put forth his candidacy for the Captain-Generalcy, Parliament instead confirmed Nikol Marik as the next Captain-General of the Free Worlds League on what many suspected was largely a sympathy vote. Many MPs expected her to name Kenyon or General Kirkland to succeed her as Warden-General, but she went in an altogether different direction. Nikol proclaimed that the Free Worlds was undergoing a political and military crisis: war with the Marian Hegemony was already underway, and the murder of her mother meant the Regulars had also declared war. Rather than compartmentalize the political powers of the Captain-Generalcy and the military powers of the Warden-Generalcy, Nikol announced she would hold both offices "for the duration of the crisis now confronting the Free Worlds League."

Parliament quickly ratified Resolution 39, which allowed Nikol to act as both statesman and commander-in-chief of the FWLM. As her first official act as Captain-General, Nikol shared Kirkland's findings with Parliament and moved to declare war against the Regular Fiefs, although she did not openly reveal the potential Scourge of Death or House Selaj connections. Save for the seven Clan Protectorate MPs who had a stake in the economic interdiction, Parliament cast a unanimous vote to ratify unreserved military action against the rival state.

A CAMPAIGN OF VENGEANCE

While FWLM troops stationed in the Duchy of Tamarind-Abbey conducted punitive strikes against the Marian Hegemony, forces stationed within the League's Atreus Isthmus and within the Oriente Protectorate geared up to bring justice to the Regular Fiefs. On 22 March, Beta Aimag lifted off Regulus and headed for orbit. On that same day, the Sea Fox blockades around Regulus, Tiber, Harmony, Clipperton, and Wallis likewise vanished. Sea Fox naval patrols also left the Fiefs' rimward borders. Several days passed before the blockaded systems even realized the trade interdiction had been lifted.

General Marshdale and his fellow RSMC leaders rejoiced at the League apparently caving to Regular demands. Within a week, however, the calm broke with spectacular fury. With the full military support of Spina Khanate forces, FWLM troops spilled into the Regular Fiefs along two different fronts.

On the spinward front, the First Orloff Grenadiers and elements of Alpha Aimag touched down on Tiber. The First Regular Hussars raised a solid defense of the planet, but a final stand at the Earthwerks-FWL plant ended in the Grenadiers' favor, and the Hussars retreated towards Regulus. On Avior, Beta Aimag and the Steel Wolves dropped on the Fourteenth Regular Hussars' positions. Beta Aimag ground away at the defenders for a week before the Steel Wolves were able to push behind enemy lines and capture the Fourteenth's command staff. The rest of the Fourteenth quickly surrendered and were taken prisoner. Beta Aimag and the Steel Wolves then divided the captured equipment between them.

On the anti-spinward front, the Sixth Oriente Hussars faced the Fifteenth Regular Hussars on Trinidad. Before the ground forces even engaged in battle, the Sixth Hussars Aerospace Wing conducted several sorties against the Fifteenth's assets. By the time the Sixth Hussars joined the ground battle, the Fifteenth had suffered too many losses to mount an effective defense. Within two days, the RSMC forces surrendered. On Ibarra, the Second Loyalty Defenders and Second Rim Commonality Guards attacked the Eighth Regular Hussars. Though the LCCC ranked the Eighth Hussars among the RSMC's most combat-effective formations, the Second Loyalty Defenders' animosity toward the Regular military quickly turned the battle in the FWLM's favor. Rather than surrender, the Eighth retreated to Norfolk.

Once the initial FWLM assaults into Regular space met with success, Nikol Marik organized a task force around the Ducal Guard with the intent of striking Regulus itself. Though she did not expect to claim the planet with the troops she had available at the time, the strike would cripple the Regulars' military-industrial capabilities and afford the Ducal Guard a measure of vengeance against Jessica Marik's killers.

Before the task force could launch, news along the Duchy of Andurien border reached the LCCC, stalling the invasion. ADF troops had pushed into the region of independent worlds that lay between Andurien and the Regular Fiefs. Most worlds surrendered with little to no resistance, as only planetary militias or trumped-up pirate bands protected these systems. The Fourth and Fifth Andurien Cavalry had also landed on Eleusis and were attempting to oust the Third Marik Protectors from the planet. Once the ADF claimed the planet, the duchy boasted a total of eleven annexed worlds.

Rather than move League troops to the Andurien border, Nikol chose to let the situation be. Andurien expansionist efforts seemed to be directed towards Regulus, which meant Lester Cameron-Jones would likely have Andurien forces on his doorstep before long if Duke Humphreys chose to press his advantage. After careful consideration, the LCCC determined that the threat of Andurien pressure would have a dramatic negative effect on the RSMC's morale. The time to avenge Jessica Marik's murder was at hand.

PUTTING DOWN THE WELCOME MAT

Odette Kourouma: Court watchers have noticed the arrival of the newest members of the Central Committee to Crimson, representing the worlds of Obrenovac, Payvand, Ruschegg, Rohinjan, Saonara, and Ayn Tarma. Their formal presentation is a cause for celebration, and MNN's own Stacy Calbright is there.

Stacy Calbright: I'm here at the foyer of the Magistrix's palace, on the red carpet, with Baroness Mirjana Kraljevic. She's the new Committee member representing Obrenovac, a world which was a proud member of the Magistracy before the Star League's conquest during the Reunification War and which officially returned to the Canopian fold this September. Baroness, you were part of the negotiations. Could you fill our viewers in?

Mirjana Kraljevic: I'd love to. We on Obrenovac have always remembered our association with the Magistracy and welcomed Canopian traders and visitors, so it was only natural that we looked back to Canopus for help in these troubled times. The Magistrix was gracious enough to share intelligence on the pirates infesting our area of space, so it was a firm base to build on when the Regular situation started getting out of hand.

Calbright: By that you mean Lester Cameron-Jones's murder of Captain-General Jessica Halas-Hughes Marik? Wasn't that just like a man, lashing out at a woman who could do things better than he could?

Kraljevic: I wouldn't attribute the hostility between Cameron-Jones and Marik to anything that petty. But as the Sea Fox interdiction made the Regulars more desperate, they started raiding nearby worlds. The new League couldn't protect us. Canopus could. And then Oriente occupied Regulus, treating it like a conquered enemy. That sobered up our planetary leadership. If Parliament was willing to treat a founding member of the Free Worlds League like that, how would they treat less important worlds?

Calbright: Well, that's nothing to worry about now. The women and men of the Magistracy Armed Forces stand between them and you. And from the turnout here, everyone who is anyone on Canopus welcomes you all back. Why, those purple highlights to your dress might even change the course of Crimson fashion. All the green has been a bit dull lately, hasn't it?

Kraljevic: I wouldn't know about that.

Kourouma: If I might interject, Baroness Kraljevic, how do your people feel about the tensions between the new League and the Magistracy?

Kraljevic: We've made our choice, if that's what you mean. The old League was never very responsive to Periphery issues, whereas the Magistracy has always been close to our own interests. That said, I wish our former countrymen the best, as long as they respect our right to self-determination. If they do, I don't see any reason we can't all get along.

Calbright: Thank you, Baroness. Canopus will keep you safe from those beaten old buzzards. Oh, and just entering is Cristina Obajoun, star of *On Her Majesty's Black Tribuna!* Ms. Obajoun, a word please for our viewers!

—Transcript from evening Magistracy News Network coverage, 28 October 3148

PIRACY RAMPANT IN RIM TERRITORIES

Kwangjong-Ni [IMI]—Residents have nervously been keeping an eye on the sky, despite knowing that if they spot anything, it would already be too late. The citizens of this cultured planet have become increasingly wary after the recent losses of Elume, Canal, Tsarahavana, and Issaba to marauders based out of the Rim Territories, a common source of raids in the past. Commonwealth citizens living on the Periphery border are used to parasites living off of their hard work, but the meager LCAF forces in the region are now unable to prevent these poorly equipped bandits from conquering whole systems.

Canal was the first system assaulted, with nearly a full battalion of pirates claiming it in the name of the Rim Territory. The invaders seemed shocked when the planetary militia fought back, using their two *Quasit* MilitiaMechs to destroy an entire lance during the first week. Frustrated by the guerrilla tactics, the bandits finally sent a *Firestarter* to a town unluckily named New Bern and set it ablaze. The threat of further violence led to the capitulation of Canal. Tsarahavana fought a pitched battle with the bandits, initially forcing them back before David “Bloodrinker” Munis killed the first of his MechWarriors to retreat past him. The pirates regrouped and continued the melee until the militia capitulated, having lost more soldiers than they could stomach.

The majority of those living in the sparsely populated system of Elume may not even know they have been conquered. The marauders landed their DropShip on the large ferrocrete slab that serves as a spaceport, rushed into the nearby capital of Elmwood, and received the surrender of Governor Liza Grbez and the five thousand or so people who call that town home. The invasion of Issaba started out much like Elume, but the pirates blundered into a parade, complete with most of Issaba’s militia forces. The bandits immediately opened fire, but the unprepared militia had only a few rounds of ammunition available. After that initial bloodbath, Rim Territories representatives have experienced a very cold reception from Issaba’s populace and have learned to only eat food they have prepared themselves.

Here on Kwangjong-Ni, a spokesperson for Defiance Industries said that the company was making preparations for hostile activity, but added that their facility has been ready for pirate raids ever since its reopening, given its proximity to the Commonwealth’s Periphery border. “It took us seven years and over twenty million kroner to just find the facility,” said Denise Russo. “Even if any attackers locate it, they will need a regiment or two to crack the defenses. The factory’s residents have enough supplies to last half a decade. We will stay true to the Commonwealth. We know they will come to our aid, should we need it.” The last sentence is likely a jab at StarCorps Industries, which supplied General Diego Widmer after his short-lived Buena Collective captured Loburg.

A HARD BARGAIN

Nikol Marik chose to personally oversee the attack on Regulus. On 2 April 3148, a task force comprising the Ducal Guard, the Steel Wolves, the First Orloff Grenadiers, and Spina Khanate’s Beta Aimag arrived at the Regulus system. Rather than use a pirate point to perform a blitzkrieg attack on the Fiefs’ capital, the task force jumped to Regulus’s zenith point and destroyed enough RSMC aerospace vessels in the vicinity to pave the way for the FWLS *Lancelot*—bearing Nikol and her entourage—to arrive safely in-system. Nikol chose to use a standard jump point because she wanted the Regular military on-planet to spend several days knowing the fiery hand of League judgment was swiftly approaching. In fact, she and General Kirkland hoped the crippling of Regulus’s navy and the overwhelming odds facing the Regular troops would encourage them to yield before the FWLM strike force landed.

T-minus two days to planetfall, the *Lancelot* received a transmission from the surface of Regulus. Lester Cameron-Jones wished to personally address the senior commander of the League task force and was surprised when Nikol Marik answered his summons. When *Lancelot* reached orbit two days later, an honor guard of Second Regular Hussars escorted Lester to Nikol’s flagship, and the two Captains-General met to discuss the future. In response to Nikol’s scathing accusations regarding her mother’s death, Lester disavowed General Marshdale’s actions, and offered Marshdale’s head and the surrender of Regulus in exchange for clemency for his family and his troops.

Nikol considered his offer, but decided it was not enough. The League’s struggle against Regulus had cost the Free Worlds a great deal, both economically and militarily, and the League’s citizenry would want someone to blame for Jessica Marik’s death. For Parliament and the LCCC to officially recognize the Regular Fiefs’ surrender, Nikol requested that General Marshdale and the RSMC command staff be remanded to her custody and that the Fiefs turn the industrial and resource-rich worlds of Harmony, Clipperton, and Norfolk over to League control.

Negotiations continued for several weeks. On 7 July, Lester Cameron-Jones assented to the League’s demands. In addition to Nikol’s initial requests, Lester also agreed to a number of other concessions. He relinquished the title of Captain-General, but the surrender terms allowed him to reclaim the traditional Regular title of Prince. Any Regular Hussars units convicted of war crimes would be disbanded, and the rest would be stationed along the Lyran Commonwealth border as FWLM forces to prevent sedition and rebellion against the League. For the next ten years, the Regular Fiefs would retain a provisional status in the League, with limited rights and voting privileges in Parliament. At the end of those ten years, the Fiefs could petition Parliament for full membership in the Free Worlds League.

Immediately following the official signing of the surrender at the Palace of Mirrors in Regulus City, Beta Aimag landed on Regulus and opened its stores to a populace desperate for normalcy. Despite buying and selling at low profit margins at Nikol’s urging, the Sea Fox merchants raked in considerable profits before moving to the other formerly interdicted Regular worlds.

TROUBLE IN PARADISE

Although Julian Davion declared New Syrtis liberated in late 3147, Capellan resistance continued until the end of February 3148. Capellan line units had retreated from the march capital, but sinister forces continued to work against Federated Suns’ interests in the region. To make matters worse, all was not well in the AFFS. If the First Prince was to keep what he had sacrificed so much to obtain, he would need to continue to fight against not only the Capellans but also a burgeoning chorus of critics.

3148: THE COMING SHADOW

UNFIT TO LEAD

Satisfied that New Syrtis and its immediate neighbors were firmly in Federated Suns control, Julian retired to Remagen and convened strategy meetings with Erik Sandoval and his senior staff to quell rumors and discontent regarding the direction and goals of the AFFS. He had planned to discuss options for the nation's next moves, but the assembly quickly devolved into an interrogation, with harsh criticism directed at Julian's methods. Some field marshals questioned the value of throwing AFFS troops at the Capellan March capital when New Avalon remained firmly beneath the Dragon's claws. A few outright condemned the New Syrtis offensive, despite the effectiveness of CERBERUS and Task Force Styx.

Julian weathered the criticism well, for his belief that the Republic would help liberate New Avalon when the Wall was dropped held firm. Had he directed the energies of CERBERUS at New Avalon instead of New Syrtis, he believed Stone would have committed fewer of the promised Republic troops when the time came. By letting New Avalon remain occupied, Julian felt Stone would offer as many RAF troops for the offensive as needed. As part of his agreement with Devlin Stone, he remained silent on all matters concerning the Republic and its promise, for fear it might irreparably damage Stone's plans. However, Julian's inability to share this vital information, coupled with various strategic and tactical choices, caused the AFFS High Command to question his ability to lead. Many claimed he did not trust the AFFS to conduct its own battles during the New Syrtis campaign and that he had treated mercenaries poorly by throwing them into vanguards without proper support elements.

Rather than alleging outright treason, the marshals in attendance urged Julian to reconsider his day-to-day command of the AFFS. Erik trusted Julian's plan regarding the Republic—despite not being privy to the details—so he offered a compromise: if Julian temporarily passed operational command of the AFFS to him, he would back Julian's play with the High Command. As First Prince, Julian would remain the nominal leader of the AFFS while Erik, as the Prince's Champion, would act as primary strategist and battlefield commander.

Julian agreed. The High Command grudgingly accepted the compromise, and Erik began outlining the next phase of Julian's plans.

COSTLY SACRIFICES

Late February marked the end of formal CCAF resistance on New Syrtis, but the Capellan Confederation refused to fully relinquish its hold on the march capital, which remained the political linchpin of most AFFS assaults into the Confederation. The Capellan capture of New Syrtis and the execution of Duchess Amanda Hasek

had meant future AFFS invasions from the Capellan March would need to receive their marching orders from elsewhere; the subsequent liberation of New Syrtis meant this constant thorn in the Confederation's side would rise up yet again. To prevent this, Daoshen Liao sought to regain the world at any cost.

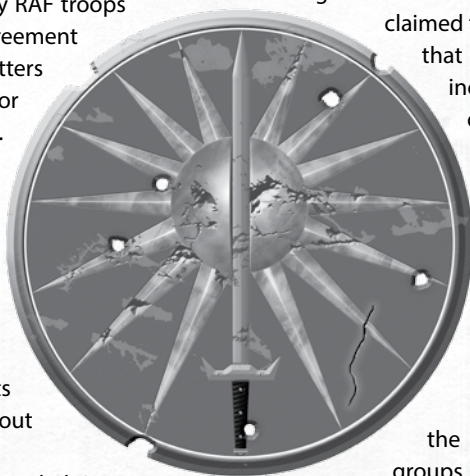
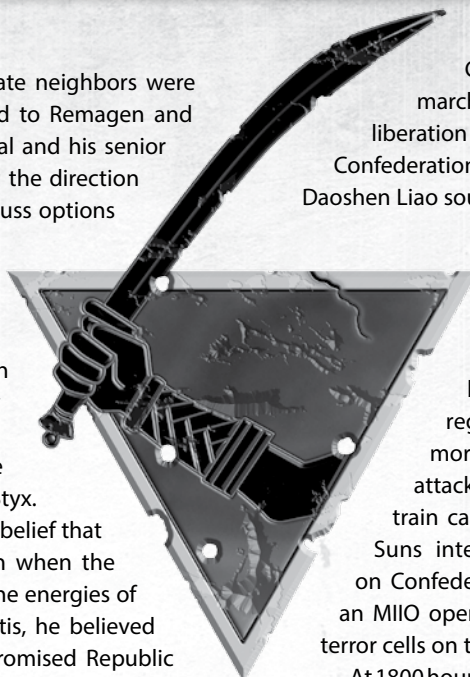
Though CCAF line units had all withdrawn from the planet by the beginning of March, cells of Capellan agitators remained in force. Terror bombings, most of them directed at AFFS checkpoints, bases, or public functions occurred on a semi-regular basis. The attacks usually claimed no more than several dozen lives at a time; the largest attack claimed five hundred souls when a maglev train carrying AFFS soldiers derailed. Once Federated Suns intelligence agents began fomenting rebellion on Confederation-held worlds neighboring New Syrtis—an MIIO operation codenamed WHIRLWIND—the Capellan terror cells on the march capital raised the stakes.

At 1800 hours on 18 July, a massive blast rocked the planetary government offices in downtown Saso. The explosive itself claimed few lives, but the blast dispersed a nerve agent that killed an estimated fifty thousand people—including the planet's newly installed governor—once the wind picked it up and spread the toxin to the city's suburbs. Unfortunately, the nerve agent persisted rather than going inert, and people continued to die. The entirety of Saso was placed under quarantine, and AFFS cantonments were moved as far from the scene as possible. Within a week of the initial blast, rough estimates placed the death toll near 200,000.

At first, planetary officials thought to pin the blame for the attack on Capellan insurgency groups, but the modus operandi of the bombing did not match any previous attempts. Previous attacks had used conventional explosives against AFFS targets; this time the bomb seemed to have specifically targeted civilians. Further investigation revealed the bomb and nerve agent dispenser had been placed inside a monument in Saso's city square, but the trail ended there.

Two weeks after the initial bombing, a disturbing report came in from Ross, a small town of twenty thousand people on the continent of Snowden. The town residents woke up one morning to find countless hundreds dead in the streets. Most appeared to have been killed in their sleep and dragged outside. At this point, the AFFS and the planetary government knew they were not dealing with an ordinary insurgency effort. Two days after the Ross incident, an unnamed one-horse town in the fringes of the Copplin continent suffered the same fate, only this time all but a select handful of witnesses had been killed.

Analysis of the nerve agent used in the Saso attack confirmed the AFFS's fear: this was the same agent used in the Black May attacks of 3062 carried out by Chancellor Sun-Tzu Liao's sister, Kali



SHATTERED FORTRESS



Liao, and her cult of fanatical Thuggees. Although Kali's Thuggee cult was believed destroyed during the Jihad, signs pointed to this new series of terror attacks as being perpetrated by similar Thuggee cultists. The civilian deaths they caused were intended as blood sacrifices meant to appease the cultists' deity.

Despite valiant efforts by the AFFS and the New Syrtis police force to apprehend the perpetrators, two subsequent nerve gas attacks at opposite sides of Cilitren occurred within days of each other. More small towns also suffered midnight murder sprees. Public uproar moved the lieutenant governor to impose martial law and establish a strict, planetwide curfew. Even with AFFS troops patrolling city streets, the attacks prompted the citizens of New Syrtis to take up arms and fire on any suspicious persons wandering around after curfew. Within a week, cases of wrongful deaths skyrocketed, and at least one further terror bombing in a Saso suburb unaffected by the first blast was allegedly carried out by an AFFS soldier believed to in fact be a Capellan double agent.

By the beginning of August, the First Davion Guards and Fifth Crucis Lancers were in complete disarray attempting to keep the situation under control. Not even Julian, who had returned to New Syrtis to personally address the problem, could defuse matters.

On 3 August, he was in a protected and secure location when a group of 'Mechs assaulted the Fifth Crucis Lancers barracked near the Saso spaceport. The attackers were initially identified as Death Commandos, but their black 'Mechs were trimmed in crimson rather than Liao green, and below the standard skull insignia, an image of the Hindu goddess Kali was painted. The Fifth attempted to forestall the Commandos, but their lack of cohesion let the Capellan elites tear through their lines. Julian led the First Davion Guards forth to assist the failing Fifth.

As soon as the First Davion took to the field, a sizable fleet of Capellan JumpShips appeared at a pirate point near the planet's moon. Upon reaching orbit, the Second McCarron's Armored Cavalry, Dynasty Guard, and Tau Ceti Lancers performed orbital drops on New Syrtis. Julian hastily organized defensive strategies, but the combined weight of three 'Mech regiments nearly crushed the Federated Suns defenders in the initial engagements.

With the majority of the Fortune mercenary regiments farmed out to garrison the Sian Commonality worlds Operation CERBERUS had claimed, Julian had only a small pool of reinforcements from which he could draw. Without knowing whether the CCAF was also attacking neighboring worlds, he dispatched couriers to all AFFS units within a few jumps and pulled back to a better position on New Syrtis.

3148: THE COMING SHADOW

By mid-August, the AFFS had lost significant ground. Julian worried that New Syrtis would again become a Capellan possession, and that he might end up dead or in irons. But the planet's citizenry began turning its personal arms against the invaders, often striking from hiding as Capellan troops paraded through cities in search of Davion units. Several of these independent guerrilla attacks cost the Dynasty Guard and the Tau Ceti Lancers key personnel. From that point on, CCAF forces on-planet started exercising extreme caution during their marches, especially near large concentrations of civilians. This caution also found its way onto the battlefield, where the Capellans undertook quick strikes against the Davion lines rather than commit to hard-hitting frontal attacks. The longer the campaign stretched on, the more cautious the Capellan troops became, especially around areas that had been targeted by nerve gas attacks.

Both sides settled into a back-and-forth stalemate of feint and counter-feint until 17 August. In the midst of a battle between the First Davion Guards and the Second MAC on the outskirts of Cilitren, the Dawn Guards combat-dropped onto the field. The Dawn, having newly arrived from garrison on Taygeta, now sported Federated Suns emblems and olive drab camo instead of RAF colors. The Dawn Guards plowed into the Second MAC, but a Capellan counterattack from Death Commandos stole the wind from the Dawn's sails and stopped them cold. Julian led the First Davion into position to provide some relief for the Dawn.

At that moment, *Sang-shao* Danai Centrella-Liao, commander of the Second MAC, called down an air strike and artillery barrage on the incoming First Davion Guards. McCarron's Armored Mosquitos and the Second's artillery company laid down a punishing barrage on the First Davion, most of which struck Julian's command company. When the smoke cleared, Julian's *Templar III* was down, and he was not responding on any channel.

Both the First Davion and the Dawn Guards fanned out to buy rescue efforts time to reach the First Prince's 'Mech. When aid reached him, Julian was alive but unconscious. An endo-steel beam from the 'Mech's inner workings had buckled and crushed Julian's left leg. As the Dawn Guards drove back the enemy, Julian was airlifted to a secure location, where his personal physicians conducted emergency surgery. Within a week of the incident, Julian regained consciousness but would be in no position to lead from the battlefield for some time to come; his left leg was amputated below the knee and he had also lost some fingers. But he addressed his troops via holo vid broadcast as soon as he was able, to reassure the realm that he had survived.

The knowledge of the First Prince's recovery spurred both the AFFS and civilian militias to hit the Capellan forces as hard as they could at every turn. Danai and her troops were constantly forced on the defensive, despite prosecuting a planetary invasion. Her losses continued to mount, and on 30 August, the AFFS's harrying efforts paid off. *Sang-shao* Danai Centrella-Liao, acting in her capacity as operational commander of the New Syrtis task force and the Chancellor's ambassador, offered to meet with the First Prince in a neutral location, much as they had done on Marlette two years prior. Danai knew that even if her flagging troops defeated the AFFS defenders, they would be unable to hold the planet from a Federated Suns counterattack. And, were the Republic to attack soon, her remaining troops would be better spent damming that tide instead. Given how the campaign against the AFFS had developed, Danai believed New Syrtis could wait until after the Republic was dealt with.

THE FOX BITES

After Action Report: Operation WHIRLWIND
To: Regional Command Office, Kathil

SUMMARY: WHIRLWIND can be deemed a success. Of the five sub-operations, two have led to a best-case result, one has achieved the target goal, and one has not seen any noticeable change to date. Unfortunately the last operation was compromised and is a total loss.

As a reminder of mission scope, WHIRLWIND's objective was to generate unrest on Capellan occupied worlds in the Syrtis thumb, with the goal of provoking the CCAF into a disproportionate response. Best-case scenario was to incite the populace to rise up against the occupying force; target goal was to create enough unrest on the world to make an AFFS assault far more feasible.

On Kaitangata and Mordialloc, planetary resistance has been highly successful in keeping their Capellan occupiers off-balance. Once our deep-cover agents fomented unrest through false-flag operations, our counterinsurgency agents worked with the existing resistance cells to mount full-scale revolts on both worlds. As of the end of March, both worlds are free of Capellan occupation forces. On Mordialloc, the CCAF left behind enough supplies and damaged equipment that we can have a combined-arms company operational within two months. Analysis indicates that Capellan garrisons on both worlds were withdrawn to New Syrtis.

Cumberland's distributed land masses made a large-scale uprising more difficult. At the time of this report, the majority of all CCAF and Capellan administrative staff has withdrawn to within twenty kilometers of the planet's capital and main spaceport. This has left the remainder of the populace essentially under self-government, and MIIO agents are working to organize and arm resistance fighters with captured and smuggled supplies. An AFFS insertion on the far side of the world from the capital should be able to establish a firm beachhead. With support from local resistance, such a force would need to consist of no more than a reinforced combined-arms battalion of mobile units, provided sufficient aerospace support is included.

Operations on Corella have seen no noticeable effect. False-flag operations are being discontinued to reduce the impact on friendly civilian populations.

On Hadnall, the local resistance cells had been compromised. While false-flag operations led to the desired upheaval, Maskirovka strike teams led attacks on the resistance leaders and our counterinsurgency agents. This cut off the head of the uprising, and the disorganized resistance formations were then dealt with piecemeal. Only our deep-cover agents remain operational; per standard protocol they have gone to ground to await new orders. CCAF forces on world have suffered only minimal casualties, and the risk assessment for a counter-invasion remains unchanged.

—Intercepted MIIO report sent from *Firgrove*, 4 April 3148

SHATTERED FORTRESS

A LITTLE FAITH

[begin transcript]

Tucker Harwell: So I assume you've seen the latest reports: our knight in shining armor has been wounded. What now?

Devlin Stone: He survived. We proceed with our original plan.

Harwell: Yes, but he's not exactly the picture of health.

Stone: [pauses] Do you think the Prince's Champion will still support us if Julian dies?

Harwell: Honestly? I haven't a clue. Erik Sandoval got Julian to make him the commander-in-chief of the AFFS while New Avalon remains occupied. That's got to count for something.

Stone: Maybe.

Harwell: But on the other hand, wouldn't it behoove us to seek other allies, just in case Julian *does* die and Sandoval—or whoever takes the throne—doesn't support us?

Stone: To whom would we turn? The Confederation's sworn to destroy us as soon as we drop the Wall, the Commonwealth can't keep its own enemies at bay, and the Combine seeks to place the entire Inner Sphere under its hegemony.

Harwell: Okay, then what about Nikol Marik? She seems to have her head screwed on straight.

Stone: The Free Worlds League's never been a friend to the Republic. When we drop the Wall, we'll need to keep a sharp watch for attacks from that direction.

Harwell: [snorts] Then I guess we'd better pray Julian doesn't die on us.

Stone: You always so cynical?

Harwell: Sorry. I think the optimistic part of me must've been burned out when I got brain-damaged back on Luyten.

Stone: [pauses] If it'll ease your mind, I've already sent a number of Terra's top-rated orthopedic surgeons and prosthetists to give the First Prince the best recovery options available, outside of Clan technology.

Harwell: So we're putting all our 'Mechs in one DropShip, so to speak? Pardon me if I'm not exactly brimming with confidence here.

Stone: Then maybe you need to consider the viability of allies beyond the Great Houses.

Harwell: Let me guess, you already have someone in mind for us to throw our support behind?

Stone: Possibly. Have a little faith, Tucker.

Harwell: *Faith?* [laughs hollowly] That's *exactly* what I'm afraid of. The *Blakists* had faith, and that put the entire Inner Sphere to the torch.

[end transcript]

—*The Stone Conversations, Transcript #D179-A, 5 Sep 3148*

Julian agreed to the meeting but disguised the full extent of his injuries. During the proceedings, Danai disavowed and condemned the terror attacks, and the two commanders ultimately agreed to a temporary ceasefire, with Julian extending terms for a formal armistice. Within hours of reaching a compromise, all Capellan forces began preparations to depart New Syrtis.

CESSATION OF HOSTILITIES

At first Daoshen Liao outright refused to entertain another formal ceasefire with the Federated Suns. The First Prince had already signed and broken the previous armistice within the span of a year—what would prevent him from doing so again? When Danai returned to Sian with Julian's terms, Daoshen was still adamant about retaking New Syrtis and threatened to officially censure Danai for negotiating with Julian Davion without the Celestial Wisdom's express permission. However, Danai sought to convince him of the benefits of her negotiations. Shoring up the Federated Suns border, despite the Confederation's loss of New Syrtis, would let the CCAF focus the tiger's share of its resources against the Republic for as long as an armistice signed by Julian Davion could last. Every month that the armistice bought the Capellans would increase their chances of eventual success against the Republic's military might when Devlin Stone inevitably dropped Fortress Republic's Wall. Daoshen saw merits in Danai's arguments, but withheld a final decision until he could review a full series of intelligence reports on the matter, and determine what, if anything, Julian was trying to hide. The CCAF could ill afford another Marlette Deception.

Daoshen's younger cousin Ki-linn Liao was furious that he was even considering letting the Federated Suns retain hold of New Syrtis. One of the most vocal proponents of war against the Suns in 3144, she refused to sit still and do nothing. Even her Thuggee followers among the Death Commandos had been unable to turn the tide on New Syrtis. Though many in Sian's court believed Ki-linn had inherited some of her great-grandmother Kali Liao's penchant for dramatic and deranged actions, few believed she would make good on her threats to show her dedication to ensuring the Federated Suns' downfall.

On 7 September, Ki-linn proved all of her naysayers wrong. She gathered seven of her most loyal household staff and stood on the steps to the Chancellor's Summer Palace, shouting to the gathered crowd of politicians and civilians that she would see the Confederation prevail. Then Ki-linn doused herself with kerosene and set herself on fire while her attendants followed her example. In her dying screams, she laid a curse on House Davion.

Ki-linn's self-immolation shocked Daoshen to his core. He had believed her threat an idle one, something she would never be brave enough to carry out. Her public spectacle caused him to reverse his stance on the armistice: as a tribute to Ki-linn's actions condemning any overtures of peace, however temporary, the Chancellor publicly announced there would be no official ceasefire with Julian Davion and the Federated Suns.

Despite Daoshen's blustering anti-Davion speeches, open war along the Capellan March border did not resume. With New Syrtis back in Federated Suns hands, the Chancellor and the Strategios had determined that Julian would greatly scale down military actions along the Confederation border and focus on the threat at his back door: the Dragon perched atop New Avalon. With Julian Davion and Erik Sandoval distracted by the Combine, Daoshen could direct his full attention toward the impending Republic front without needing to ink an official ceasefire agreement with an enemy already shown to be an oath breaker.

Apart from customary intelligence-gathering raids, the Sian Commonality and the Capellan March quieted. Both the Chancellor and First Prince kept close watch on the silent Republic for very different reasons. Daoshen feared the Republic invasion would come too soon; Julian feared the Stone's promised support would arrive too late.



THE DRAGON'S SHADOW

During the early months of 3148, the Draconis Combine attempted to recover from the damage done to the Pillar of Steel by Operation PERCEVAL. Lost supply bases, outposts, munitions, and troops were slow to be replaced, and *Kanrei* Toranaga worried that the Davion troops might find and exploit holes along the Benjamin and New Samarkand Military Districts if they applied pressure at just the right places. Minor PERCEVAL raids in the region continued throughout the first half of the year, but various factors prevented the *kanrei* from tracking down where the raids were coming from. DCMS units in the region were stretched thin due to being on alert for potential hit-and-run raids that could irreparably damage the districts' logistical infrastructure. Toranaga rotated his regiments as much as possible, given the circumstances, but he worried it would not be enough. He believed the Dragon had taken New Avalon far too early and was now feeling the consequences of biting off more than it could swallow.

NEW STEEL

At least once each month since the start of the PERCEVAL raids, Toranaga held a private audience with the Coordinator. Each time, he requested the conscription of additional forces to counter PERCEVAL's border raiding and better shore up defenses on New Avalon and the Dragon's Tongue. Each time, Yori Kurita gave him the same answer: "Patience." This response frustrated Toranaga to no end: he had personally groomed the Coordinator to rule the Draconis Combine, and she normally granted him everything he requested out of a sense of obligation for his support. Each time, Toranaga left Unity Palace with more frustration than before, and the hope that the troops he had would be enough to weather a potential surgical strike from Davion forces. During his May 3148 meeting with the Coordinator, Yori forbade him from inquiring about additional military formations or funds to hire more mercenaries: the Combine's academies, proving grounds, and militia training centers were producing as many troops as they could.

In June, Toranaga made his customary trip to Luthien to visit the Coordinator. Instead of meeting him in their usual place, Yori requested he come to the parade grounds near the palace. In addition to the Coordinator

DÉJÀ VU

To: Precentor Martin McDaniels
 From: Adept XI Flora Lofgrin
 Date: 29 November 3148
 RE: Xieng Khouang Investigation

After debarking at Phonsavan Spaceport, I was met by local police and a "political liaison" who introduced himself as Philip Chang. Chang was obviously Maskirovka and took over my handling shortly after my documents were processed. He confirmed that our personnel had been taken into protective custody, and blew off my attempts to meet with them.

I slipped out in casual clothes soon after checking in at my hotel in the city's industrial quarter. Unfortunately, downtown had the same somber mood as the rest of the city. The Confederation is at war, but it's also winning in a way it never has before. The oppressive atmosphere was palpable, and the people I met looked at my "foreign" features and knowledge of Mandarin with suspicion. Nothing new in the Confederation, but normally Canopian citizenship will generate some curiosity and guarded tolerance. There was nothing of the sort here.

The next day I met with Chang to press him on the matter of the detainees. He again brushed aside my concerns, and my efforts to wheedle more information out of him proved futile. But his demeanor intrigued me. The usual Maskirovka arrogance was gone; he seemed worried about something.

That evening that I found out the real story. One of the hotel's night watchmen was up when I returned, and we began chatting. He was a centenarian veteran of the Jihad; apparently I reminded him of a nurse who had helped him recover from a war injury. He was also willing to talk about what had happened back in September.

It's exactly what we feared.

Those rumors that we can repair the HPG grid, but refuse to do so, have mutated into a charge that we are actively keeping the Confederation under communications blackout because we hate Capellans. My source didn't know my affiliation, and he showed an alarming tendency to conflate ComStar with the Word of Blake. In any case he confirmed that there had been a riot in Phonsavan and that the HPG compound had been breached. He also claimed that he had witnessed ComStar personnel being swarmed by the mob, with "a couple dozen" being lynched on the overpass running near the facility.

The next meeting with Chang was more productive. He knew I had found out about the massacre. He attempted to make me a job offer, though he was a bit put out when I clarified that I was from legal affairs rather than HPG Operations. He implied I would be allowed to see the detainees soon, and that they would be allowed to leave the planet. But he made it clear that a nondisclosure agreement will be required.

I will continue to press Chang and the planetary government while I await your reply. I recommend taking the offer, however. It's probably the best we're going to get from the Mask, since we lack any leverage to apply.

SHATTERED FORTRESS

and her attendants, Toranaga found a sea of soldiers and equipment assembled on the grounds. Each BattleMech, tank, and battlesuit was painted flat black with blood red trim, and the MechWarriors, tank crews, and infantry stood in perfect regimental formation.

The Coordinator introduced the unit as the Hikage: "The Dragon's Shadow is my gift to you for your loyal and unflagging service to the Draconis Combine." Staffed with DEST-trained soldiers and equipped with the most recent output from Luthien Armor Works, the Hikage was a combined-arms formation structured along similar lines as an augmented AFFS light combat team, though with a greater focus on 'Mechs than armor and infantry. This composition would allow the unit to fill the mobile roles Toranaga most desperately needed along the border.

The *kanrei* was stunned at the revelation. He was of two minds: though ecstatic about the prospect of new troops he sorely needed, Yori had somehow accomplished this feat without his knowledge. To form the Hikage, she had to have altered records and shuffled around personnel and materiel without him learning of her actions, which would have required extensive clandestine aid from the ISF and the district Warlords. If his Warlords could keep this kind of secret from him, he began to wonder what else was transpiring without his knowledge. In any case, Toranaga was furious: he was losing his grip on the puppet he had placed on the throne of the Draconis Combine. Fortunately, the Hikage answered directly to him rather than being attached to any one military district.

TSUJIGIRI

Eager to blood his new troops, Toranaga planned a daring offensive against the Federated Suns. ISF agents had confirmed Remagen as the staging base of Operation PERCEVAL, and Toranaga believed the best way to halt the border strikes was to eliminate their source. He also felt such an attack would better demonstrate the Hikage's effectiveness than fending off a small border raid: dueling an opponent on equal footing was far more honorable than slicing a single ant in two.

In early July, Toranaga ordered Task Force Tsujigiri to traverse the Dragon's Tongue and reach New Avalon. The task force, comprising the Hikage and a support battalion from *Ryuken-hachi*, was named for the ancient Terran samurai's method of testing a newly forged blade: he would walk a city street at night and strike down the first lower-class person he encountered, in hopes of a clean kill worthy of a keen edge. Toranaga intended to do just that, using the AFFS as his peasant. The task force's goal would be two-fold: disrupt the AFFS's capacity to conduct raids-in-force along the Combine border and kill or capture Prince's Champion Erik Sandoval, who was believed to be personally commanding PERCEVAL.

Tsujigiri waited until ISF agents reported Task Force PERCEVAL had returned to Remagen to repair and refit. When the Hikage's CO, *Sho-sho* Hisao Ikeda received confirmation, the task force jumped to a pirate point in the Remagen system, hoping to catch PERCEVAL by surprise. Tsujigiri's DropShips punched through a

hastily prepared aerofighter screen and grounded without further incident. As the Hikage immediately mobilized, the *Ryuken-hachi* battalion remained behind to protect the DropShips.

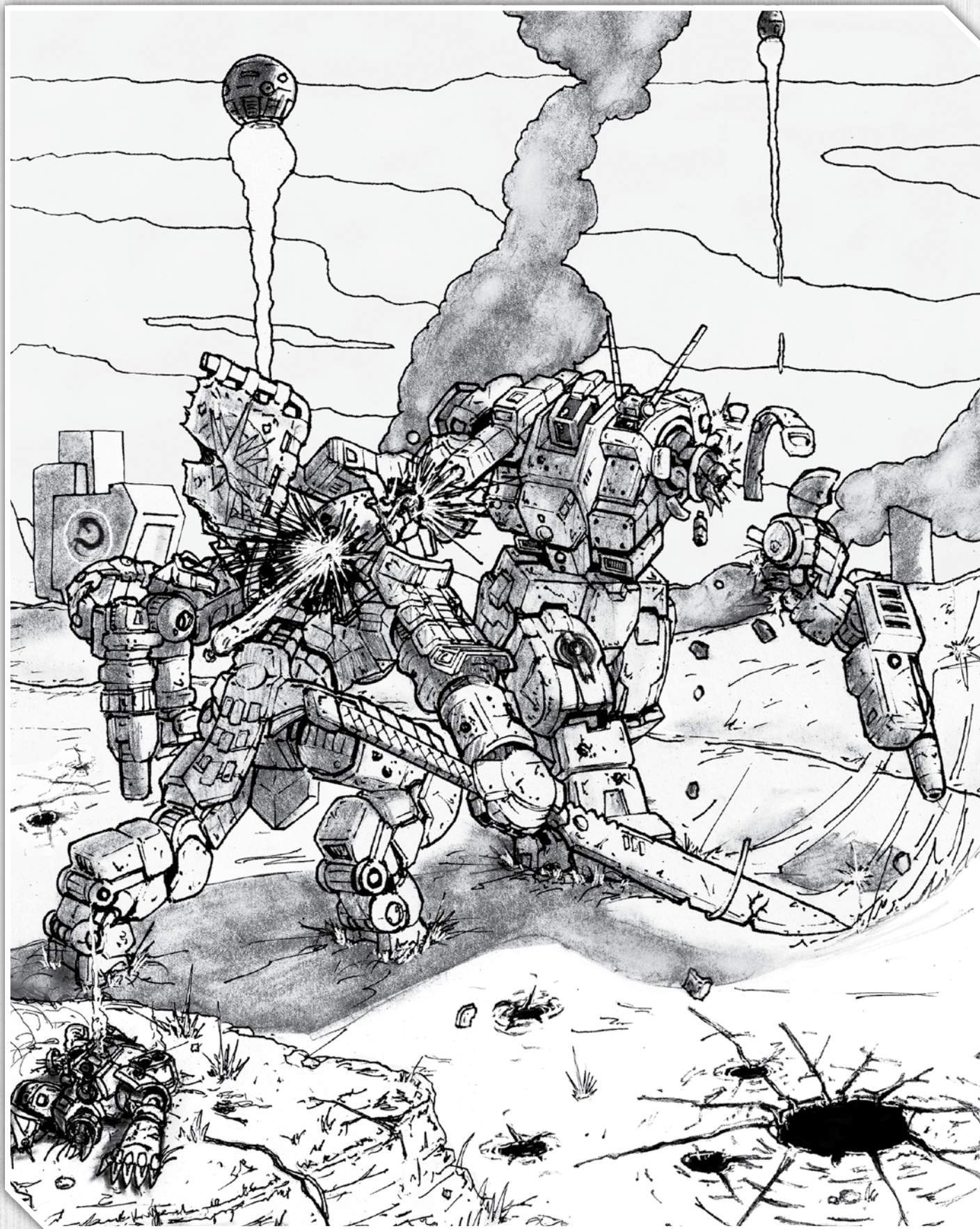
The First Kestrel Grenadiers and First Avalon Hussars were still undergoing repairs when Tsujigiri arrived. Rather than both RCTs fighting ill-equipped, the Kestrel Grenadiers volunteered to hold off the incoming troops to give the Hussars more time to rearm and allow Erik Sandoval to reach a secure location. At first, the presence of the Hikage, a wholly unknown Combine regiment, struck the AFFS defenders with uncertainty. However, instead of using reserved tactics, the Kestrel Grenadiers raced across the Rhineland Hills and threw themselves at the Hikage, hoping the sheer weight and speed of the attack would compensate for half-empty magazines, missing limbs, and suboptimal armor coverage. Ikeda took advantage of the Grenadiers' state and ordered the Hikage to destroy as much of the opposition's hardware as possible. The *kanrei's* personal unit used its mobility and unconventional tactics to cut through the Grenadiers with ease, forcing them to retreat.

The Hikage seized the advantage and pushed through to PERCEVAL's central base of operations. Just before the DCMS forces could breach the perimeter, the First Avalon Hussars stormed out of the base and forced the Hikage on the defensive. In an attempt to salvage some of the mission's objectives, *Sho-sho* Ikeda sent a reinforced company to locate Erik Sandoval while the rest of the Hikage held off the Fifth. The Prince's Champion evaded capture at every turn, however, so Ikeda cut his losses and ordered a retreat to the DropShips.

Kanrei Toranaga was hesitant to deem the operation a success. Though the Hikage had inflicted sufficient casualties on the First Kestrel Grenadiers to ensure they would likely not be raiding the border any time soon, Tsujigiri had failed to destroy PERCEVAL's base of operations or take PERCEVAL's senior commander prisoner. Still, Toranaga was proud of his new troops for accomplishing what they had so deep in enemy territory. After a period of rest and refit, the Hikage was stationed along the Draconis March border in order to dissuade future AFFS raids.

On the Federated Suns side of the border, news of the Remagen raid instilled a new sense of fear into the AFFS. A deep strike by the Combine could be prelude to another invasion, one the Federated Suns was woefully unprepared for. When word of the Remagen attack reached Julian Davion on New Syrtis, he knew it was time to bring the war to the Draconis Combine. However, his greatest ally in the coming fight remained ensconced in his impenetrable Fortress, and his silence made Julian wonder if Devlin Stone's promises of bringing down the Wall and invading the Draconis Combine were nothing more than blustering done to pull Julian's strings. Eventually, Julian decided not to wait on potentially hollow promises. After undergoing rehabilitation for his injuries, he would take matters into his own hands and secure the Federated Suns' future, regardless of whether Devlin Stone ever honored his promises.

3149: THE DAM BREAKS



3149: THE DAM BREAKS

The year 3149 was when everything changed, when the status quo in the Inner Sphere turned on its ear. Early in the year, the Federated Suns decided to go it alone rather than wait on promises that might never be kept, and the Capellan Confederation hedged all its bets on those same promises being fulfilled. The Draconis Combine tried to protect the full length of its already-stretched borders, and the Lyran Commonwealth attempted to regain the trust and goodwill of the former Buena Collective's people while attempting to hold on to the territory it had left. Clans Jade Falcon and Wolf, on the other hand, were both perched at the Wall of Fortress Republic, ready to swoop and pounce towards the heart of the human Sphere and fulfill the Founder's vision by capturing Terra and becoming the ilClan. Many wondered whether the Ghost Bears of the Rasalhague Dominion would also throw their hat into the ring. Perhaps the least prepared for the events of 3149 was the Free Worlds League, which placed its focus everywhere except toward the Republic, ratcheting up its border dispute with the Marian Hegemony while ensuring the Regular Fiefs remained in line.

The year saw alliances forged and armies mobilized. Though later years would see more dramatic changes, 3149 was a watershed moment upon which the history of the Inner Sphere pivoted.

THE CURTAIN RISES

On 8 January 3149, unknown military forces with state-of-the-art equipment landed simultaneously on three different worlds in the Free Worlds League's Augustine Alliance. These new arrivals did not identify themselves, and neither their unit insignia nor their parade scheme matched any known unit from the Capellan Confederation, the Wolf Empire, the Republic Remnant, or even other the Free Worlds provinces. However, the invaders made no aggressive moves, nor did they fire shots against the FWLM troops or planetary militia that came to investigate. After several hours of unsteady stalemate, each FWLM commander received direct orders from the Augustine Military District to stand down. Asked why these troops were here, the LCCC liaison's response was just as curt: "Insurance."

Two days later, the planetary governors of Atria and Ko in the Rasalhague Dominion's Vega Protectorate announced their intention to become independent of the Dominion. As the Dominion had annexed the Protectorate begrudgingly, the nation's leadership made no move to sway either world from its course. Within days of the declaration, more unknown troops congregated in these systems. In response, the Dominion moved several Clusters to neighboring systems to keep watch for any suspicious activity that might arise from these secessions.

On 12 January, the Mizar system declared its withdrawal from the Galatean League, but the First Galatean Defense Force remained to defend the planet. On 14 January, Clan Jade Falcon stopped receiving courier messages from Summer. When the Falcons deployed to the region to investigate, they discovered two other Falcon-held worlds had fallen victim to invasion from familiar foes—Republic troops.

The news spread like wildfire through the courier network: the Fortress Wall had come crashing down.

BLOWING THE RAM'S HORNS

According to official Republic records, Devlin Stone deactivated the Fortress Republic system at 1600 hours Terran Standard Time on 6 January 3149. While many have posited theories as to why Stone dropped the Wall at this time, the most accurate reasoning from Stone himself was that the time was right. The state of the Inner Sphere had declined to a point where he needed to act. Ideally, the Republic would have raised many more regiments before dropping the Wall; however, Stone believed if he waited any longer, he would be too late.

Among the many plans in place before the Fortress Wall came down, Operation SHOFAR began with efforts to consolidate the Republic's position. By dispatching diplomats, undercover agents, and RAF troops to the Free Worlds League, the Vega Protectorate, and the Jade Falcon Occupation Zone, Stone was able to convince, bribe, blackmail, or threaten most of these former Republic worlds into rejoining the Republic. With the Wolves, the Falcons, the Capellan Confederation, and the Draconis Combine posing the biggest threats to the Republic, Stone needed as much of a buffer as he could get without needlessly sacrificing his troops. However, creating a buffer required taking key worlds from the Clans.

On Lyons, the Third Falcon Velites faced the Eleventh Hastati Sentinels, a regiment heretofore unknown to the Falcons and thus not an RAF unit abandoned outside of the Fortress walls. The Falcon warriors were taken by complete surprise: not only were the invaders RAF troops, but the Eleventh Hastati was committed to a planetary invasion rather than a mere raid. The Falcons raised a spirited defense but departed the planet after only three days in order to inform the Chinggis Khan that the Republic of the Sphere had emerged from its thirteen-year slumber. Similar circumstances occurred on Menkent between the Sixteenth Hastati—also an unknown RAF regiment—and the Twelfth Falcon Hussars. The Twelfth had standing orders to report on any Republic activity, and after sustaining light casualties withdrew to Nusakan.

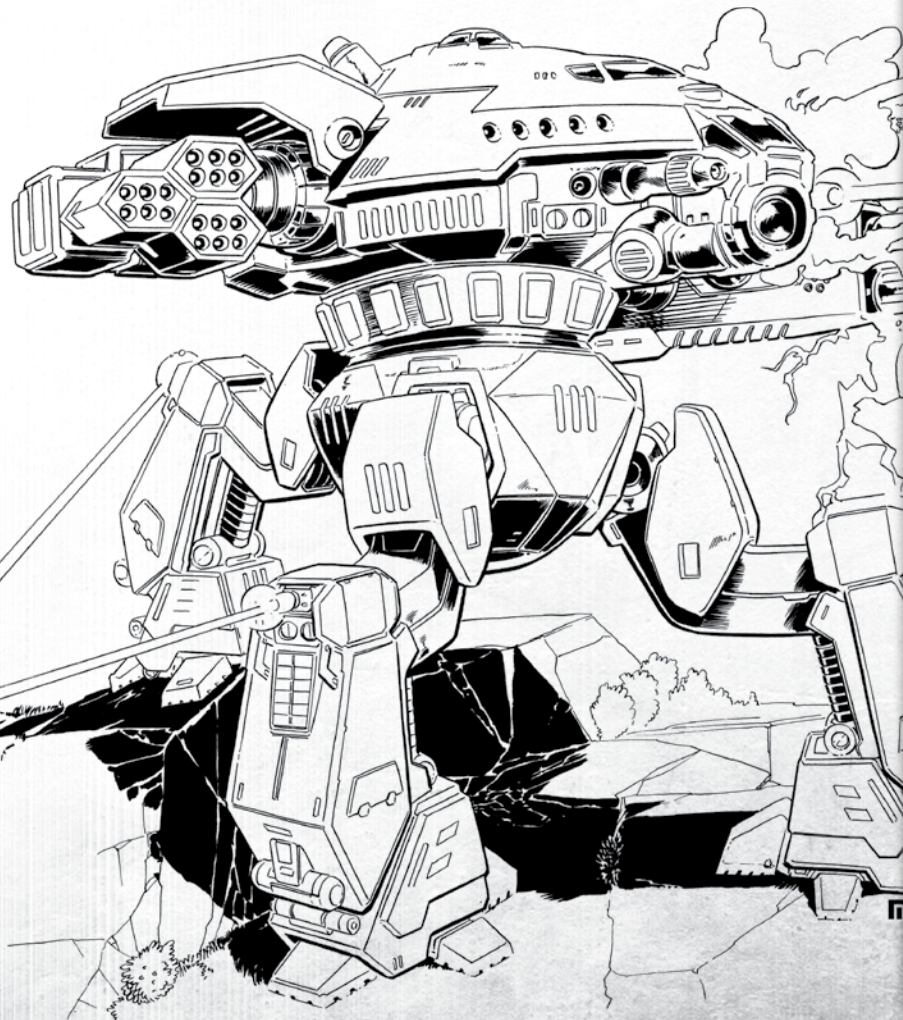


3149: THE DAM BREAKS

The final phase of SHOFAR began on 18 January. The Fifteenth Hastati performed a combat drop on Castor to dislodge the 328th Wolf Assault Cluster. As the Wolf Empire had not yet learned of the Wall's deactivation, the Fifteenth caught the Wolves flatfooted and pressed their advantage. Rather than give up the Empire world closest to Terra, the 328th hit back hard, eventually putting the Fifteenth on the defensive. Within a week, the RAF dispatched reinforcements: the mysterious troops that had been cropping up around the Republic's borders. Fielding advanced weaponry and equipment that had been the stuff of rumors in recent years, the Fifth Fides Defenders made planetfall and sent the Wolves into disarray. One of the 328th's Trinaris sacrificed itself to buy the Wolves enough time to withdraw and report to Alaric Ward that Fortress Republic was no more.

Claiming Castor allowed the Republic to reconnect with the worlds still controlled by former Exarch Damien Redburn's Republic Remnant. Although Stone made repeated attempts to reach out to the Remnant and to Redburn personally, Redburn and his troops remained aloof.

Immediately after the conclusion of Operation SHOFAR, an RAF task force began gathering at Altair to fulfill a promise long overdue. Then the rest of the RAF moved into position to brace for the inevitable attacks from the Clans and the Capellan Confederation.



A MATTER OF TIMING

[begin transcript]

Tucker Harwell: So I hear you're going to do it. You're actually going to drop the Wall.

Devlin Stone: The preliminary phases of SHOFAR have already been put into effect. Seven days from now, each system will go offline. Permanently.

Harwell: And then everyone will be gunning for us...

Stone: SHOFAR should help us out in that regard. Everything else we've done to prepare for this day'll make this all worth it.

Harwell: I only wish I could share your confidence. [pauses] But... why drop the Wall *now*? Why not earlier this year? Why not five years from now, when we'd surely have more than enough troops?

Stone: The timing's the best we're going to get. The Lyrans are stuck trying to pull themselves out of a hole. The Kuritans have stretched themselves too thin. The Free Worlds League weathered the loss of a leader and a major conflict and now has its attention focused on the Periphery. The Federated Suns' morale and economy has reached rock bottom, and the Confederation wants nothing more than to stab its bogeyman even if it means slashing around in the dark. If we delay dropping the Wall even six months, any one of these conditions might no longer hold true. And we likely don't even have six months. The Wall *will* fail—better it comes down at a time of our choosing rather than failing at an inconvenient time.

Harwell: So, in a perfect world, we would wait here until we've amassed enough troops to beat back the Clans, punish the Capellans, and push the Combine out of Davion territory?

Stone: You should know by now that there's no such thing as a perfect world.

Harwell: [laughs hollowly] *Now* who's the cynic?

Stone: You're missing the point. If we sit around waiting for better circumstances that might never arrive, it'll be too late.

Harwell: Too late for *what*? I know you say you have a plan, but I simply can't see it.

Stone: You don't see it because you've been approaching the problem from the wrong direction. You believe we've been trying to preserve the Republic all this time? What if I told you the Republic can't be restored to what it was? What if I told you that the best way forward might be to forge the Republic into something new and different?

Harwell: So you're *giving up*, is that what you're trying to tell me? You're giving up and letting all of our people die for *nothing*? [glass shatters against a wall]. [labored breathing] You *coward*. You're *nothing* like the Devlin Stone I grew up hearing stories about. I should've left you to rot in that stasis tube.

Stone: *Listen* to me, Tucker. [pauses] Think I'm a coward if you like. Run off and get yourself captured or killed by those who covet what's in your head. But know this: just because you can't see my plan doesn't mean I'm a coward or that I haven't considered every possible contingency. There's a way out of this, I promise. All I ask is a little more patience.

Harwell: I'm fresh out of patience. And don't you *dare* mention the word "faith" to me ever again.

Stone: All right. Let's go take a walk. If you must know, this will be for your ears only.

[end transcript]

—*The Stone Conversations, Transcript #F287-C, 30 Dec 3148*

DIVINE RETRIBUTION

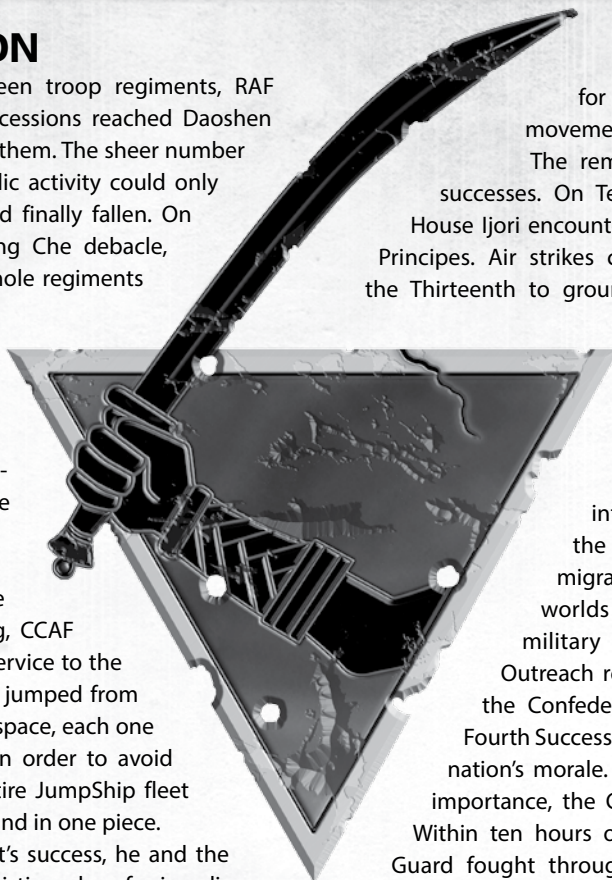
When reports of never-before-seen troop regiments, RAF attacks, and unexpected planetary secessions reached Daoshen Liao, he had half a mind to not believe them. The sheer number of sources reporting supposed Republic activity could only mean that Fortress Republic's Wall had finally fallen. On the other hand, the Task Force Chong Che debacle, which had cost the Chancellor two whole regiments of line troops, reminded him to be cautious rather than assume that the opportunity for his greatest triumph had arrived.

Daoshen quickly ordered several JumpShips equipped with lithium-fusion batteries to attempt crossing the Republic border into multiple systems. In order to prevent a repeat of the earlier disaster, these JumpShips were manned with skeleton crews of aging, CCAF retirees unafraid to give their lives in service to the Chancellor. In late January, the vessels jumped from the Tikonov Commonality to Republic space, each one plotting jump points far out-system in order to avoid detection. Within a few hours, the entire JumpShip fleet had returned to Capellan space safely and in one piece.

Once Daoshen learned of the test's success, he and the Strategios immediately refined their existing plans for invading the Republic. Operation BÀOYÍNG—Mandarin for “retribution”—involved a full-scale invasion with Terra as its ultimate goal. Amid rumors of mobilization among the Clans, Daoshen's fervent hope was that any Clan intending to become the so-called iClan by conquering Terra would have to challenge the Capellan Chancellor and the might of the CCAF, not Devlin Stone and his RAF.

The first wave of BÀOYÍNG targeted four worlds inside the Republic border. The goal of this initial stage was to establish a beachhead inside the Republic and shuffle more troops to the front. To increase the chances of the first wave's success, CCAF line regiments were paired with one of the Warrior House Orders to achieve the more difficult objectives.

On 3 February, the Second Liao Guards and Danai Centrella-Liao's Second McCarron's Armored Cavalry dropped onto Hall. Second Battalion of the previously unseen Fourteenth Principes Guards blitzkrieged the Second MAC's LZ before running off too quickly for Danai to successfully pursue. The Second MAC and the Second Liao Guards spent the next several weeks trying to hunt down the RAF troops. Upon finally cornering and destroying the Fourteenth's last company in a narrow river valley, the CCAF forces scoured the planet for additional RAF troops. Danai reported no further RAF presence on planet, so the Strategios ordered her to check again. Daoshen was convinced that Devlin Stone, the tactical mastermind behind the Jihad-era Operation SCOUR, would never defend a planet with just a single battalion. Subsequent scans came up clean: either there really were no other Republic forces in the system or Stone had laid a careful trap for the CCAF.



Daoshen decided on the latter, and the Capellan troops remained on high alert for potential reinforcements, underground movements, or anything else out of the ordinary.

The remainder of Wave One reported similar successes. On Terra Firma, the First MAC and Warrior House Ijori encountered Second Battalion of the Thirteenth Principes. Air strikes conducted by Vicker's Vampires drove the Thirteenth to ground, and House Ijori was successful in hunting down the rest of the battalion before it could cause future trouble with guerrilla attacks.

Outreach, however, presented a problem for the CCAF. The sheer destruction inflicted on the planet's infrastructure during the Jihad had left the planet a shell of its former self, and the migration of the mercenary trade to other worlds rendered the planet an insignificant military target. However, the campaign for Outreach represented a symbol of Capellan pride: the Confederation had lost the planet during the Fourth Succession War, and regaining it would boost the nation's morale. Due to Outreach's diminished strategic importance, the CCAF expected minimal RAF resistance.

Within ten hours of landing on 6 February, the Holdfast Guard fought through the Eleventh Triarii Protectors and secured the planetary capital of New Kearny. However, two days later, a Fourteenth Principes Guards battalion and several small mercenary commands that still called the planet home stormed New Kearny and attempted to root out the Holdfast Guard. Warrior House Imarra, having hidden its presence until necessary, rushed the Fourteenth from behind and caught the Republic troops in a pincer, routing them while fending off sniping attacks from the scattered mercenaries. Within four weeks, all known defenders on Outreach had either been destroyed, captured, or driven to ground.

Further compounding the Confederation's collective unease, Home Guard forces landed on Elgin and Capolla—which now lay behind CCAF lines—and both campaigns occurred without notable incident. On each planet, the Home Guard encountered no more than a handful of militia lances instead of the expected Republic Standing Guard. The Standing Guard's location became a subject of much debate among the Strategios, and the mystery lent credence to the idea that the RAF was staging a trap for the Confederation.

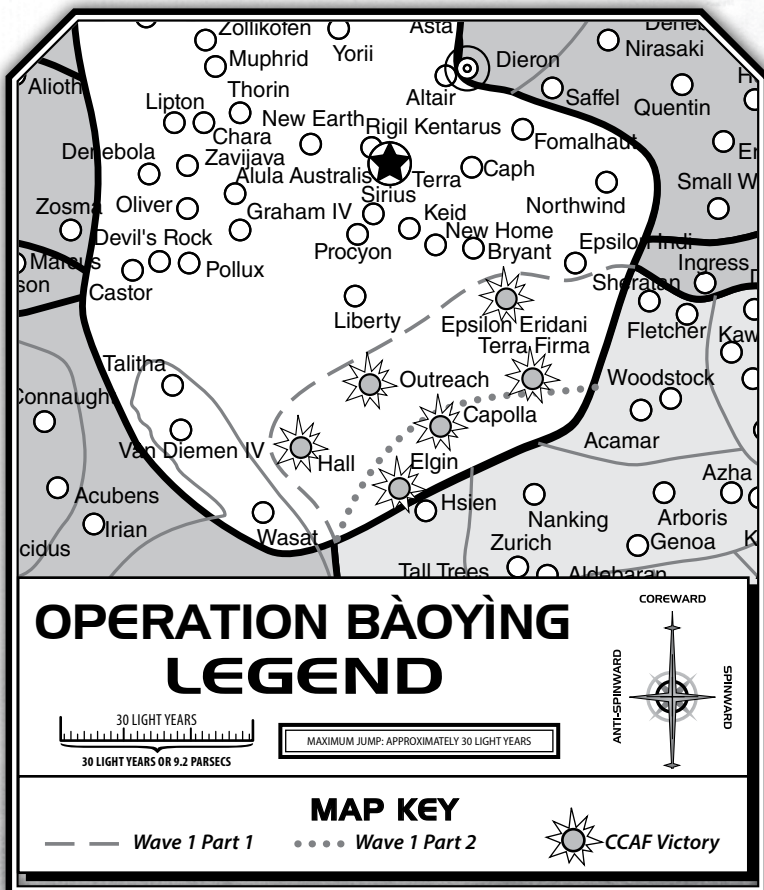
The situation on Epsilon Eridani cemented Daoshen's hunch regarding potential RAF tricks. The Fifth MAC and Warrior House Dai Da Chi landed but seemed to find a lack of any military force occupying the planet at all. For the first two weeks of the invasion, the Fifth saw no signs of Republic troops whatsoever. All bases, airstrips, cantonments, and checkpoints they encountered seemed long abandoned. The world remained quiet until the third week of occupation, when a company of the Thirteenth Principes Guards blindsided a Fifth MAC patrol at night, nearly wiping out a whole company in one fell swoop. House Dai Da Chi followed the Thirteenth's trail to a vast underground complex, excavated by

3149: THE DAM BREAKS

the RAF to supplement Epsilon Eridani's defenses after the planet's original Castle Brian was destroyed nearly a decade earlier. Once the CCAF troops gained access to these tunnels, it was only a matter of time before the Fifth and Dai Da Chi cornered and destroyed the rest of the Thirteenth's battalion.

From that point on, Capellan invaders expected RAF traps around every corner. The first wave of BÀOYÌNG had simply gone far too well. By the end of March, the Confederation had claimed four worlds with relative ease, encountering less than a regiment of troops on each planet, and no RAF reinforcements had arrived in the interim. Based on reports from the field, Daoshen concluded that Devlin Stone was either a coward or a genius. Erring on the side of genius, the Strategios studied records of all former Terran Hegemony worlds known to have Castles Brian at one time. Intelligence suggested that future BÀOYÌNG attempts to take Republic worlds with known or suspected Castles Brian would require more robust forces than previous efforts. To ensure no surprises would hinder Wave Two, the troops occupying Terra Firma gained access to the planet's Castle Brian complex. To their surprise and relief, the Brian showed no signs of being in use since the Jihad.

Rather than risk stumbling into a carefully laid RAF trap, Daoshen ordered a temporary halt to BÀOYÌNG's second wave. He moved as many reinforcements as he could spare from the cooled Federated Suns border to the frontlines, and garrisons on the newly conquered planets settled into defensive positions. After the Capellan Crusades of nearly four decades earlier, Daoshen had deemed the Republic the Confederation's greatest enemy. The paper-tiger defenses encountered in the initial wave left him worried that far worse things awaited his troops deeper beyond the border. If he was to reach Terra, he would need to seek assistance.



MEET THE NEW BOSS

Eridanians rejoice!

Guided by the strategic acumen of the Celestial Wisdom, acting with the divine mandate of House Liao, the Capellan Confederation Armed Forces have accomplished your liberation! Soon our *janshi* will advance on Terra itself and smash the vipers hiding in Geneva beneath their heels. The complete reunification of the Confederation is at hand!

For more than a century, the Capellan people have struggled to undo the aggression of their enemies. In their endurance they have outlasted many foes. The tyranny of Hanse Davion, the foolishness of his progeny, the anarchy of the Free Worlds League, and the insanity of the Word of Blake have all shattered against the pride and unity of our nation. At last, the vile Republic, having revealed its utter cowardice by retreating to its so-called Fortress, will face a reckoning with the invincible CCAF.

Military authorities have heard the desire of all true Capellans, so long-oppressed by the Republic's occupation of Epsilon Eridani, to celebrate their good fortune. Every Saturday, the curfew will be lifted until 2200 hours for true Capellans to attend municipal rallies for demonstrating their loyalty to our divine Chancellor. In larger cities, heroes of the liberation will be present to receive the thanks of the grateful people, and authentic Capellan entertainment and culture will be presented.

Citizens may consult local network portals for detailed times, locations, and programming information.

But in this time of celebration and rejoicing, we cannot forget the indignities inflicted on our Capellan nation. Rather than simply oppress the birthright of Capellan culture on Epsilon Eridani, the Republic saw fit to flood this planet with foreign squatters. Truly, this usurpation was the greatest crime of Devlin Stone—one that he will answer for in whichever hell he is sentenced to by the divine Chancellor.

For the safety and security of the Capellan people, martial law will remain in effect until these subversive and disruptive elements are fully integrated into the servitor caste. Our Chancellor is generous beyond words in allowing these aliens, brought to this world to extinguish its Capellan nature, to instead embrace the Korvin Doctrine and Greater Humanity. The worthy among these illegal settlers will show their contrition through honest service to the State and thereby earn citizenship; the unworthy will be made to suffer the consequences of their unspeakable arrogance.

Retribution against the worst Republic criminals will begin shortly. The trial of Governor McCellan for crimes against His Celestial Wisdom will be broadcast or streamed live on all planetary broadcast stations and local network portals. Other Republic officials will be held to account for their oppression of the Capellan people. *Hanjian* like McCellan will not be spared due to their Capellan descent, and will be punished more severely for their lack of filial loyalty to the Chancellor.

May His Celestial Wisdom live for ten thousand years!

—Text of a Capellan propaganda leaflet, distributed on Epsilon Eridani in March 3149

PROMISES KEPT

Devlin Stone placed the RAF task force assembled at Altair under command of Paladin Max Ergen. Ergen, a promising Knight-Errant serving with the Tenth Hastati, was the younger brother of the head researcher for the Republic Institute for Strategic Combat, and his service record came to Stone's attention shortly after the Exarch emerged from hibernation. A natural leader and a dutiful soldier, Ergen was appointed to the Council of Paladins by Stone himself in 3146, and was chosen to command and plan Operation ERUPTIO in 3147. Though Stone constructed the broader strategy behind the operation, Paladin Ergen was responsible for most of the details.

DIERON

ERUPTIO launched on 5 March 3149 with a heavy assault on Dieron. First Army Group, consisting of four RAF units, landed near San Martin. Instead of targeting customary targets of strategic significance, Paladin Ergen's troops zeroed in on every known DCMS troop concentration on the planet and attacked with full force. The First and Second Dieron Regulars were taken by complete surprise: no Republic forces had been sighted in the Dieron Military District since the Fortress was raised and Prefectures II and III returned to the Dragon's control, and the DCMS had no concrete proof that the Wall had indeed come down. Apart from AFFS intelligence-gathering raids, the system had not even seen heavy combat in nearly fifteen years. The Dieron Regulars attempted to halt the RAF advance, but First Army Group outnumbered the Regulars nearly three to one and had the advantage of momentum.

Tai-shu Kambei Okamoto, Warlord of Dieron, attempted to rally the Second Dieron Regulars from his command post at the Dragon's Roost, which had been rebuilt following its destruction during the Jihad, but the Tenth Hastati Sentinels and First Fides Defenders pushed them to the breaking point. Fearing the planet was on the verge of being lost, the surviving Second Regulars holed up in Fortress Dieron. Okamoto sent the First to their DropShips at Iznakki Interplanetary Spaceport, intending to reinforce the Second and break the siege at Fortress Dieron. Ergen saw through the Warlord's plan, however, and the Paladin's command company and the Tenth Triarii Protectors intercepted *Tai-shu* Okamoto and the First on the march. In true samurai tradition, Okamoto and his command company held the line to buy his regiment time to reach their DropShips. In the midst of the battle, Max Ergen's *Doloire* found Okamoto's *Shiro*, and the two engaged in a duel. Okamoto seemed to have the upper hand at first, but as the First Dieron's DropShips began lifting off, the Warlord of Dieron charged Ergen and managed to cleave off one of the *Doloire*'s arms before succumbing to a point-blank Gauss rifle slug to the cockpit.

During the spaceport battle, the First Fides's battle-armored infantry infiltrated Fortress Dieron and forced the Second Dieron Regulars out of the fortified complex, straight into the RAF's guns. Dieron residents expected the RAF task force to officially reclaim

the planet for the Republic. Instead, Ergen and First Army Group left the system on 29 March and headed for ERUPTIO's next target.

FEAR AND CONFUSION

While First Army Group wreaked havoc on Dieron, the Second Army Group attacked Quentin. Using tactics similar to the Dieron assault, Second Army Group delivered heavy, precise strikes on DCMS positions. While the Twelfth Principes held off the planetary militia forces, the Twelfth Triarii destroyed supply caches, communications towers, and other military infrastructure the DCMS could use to stage counterassaults against the Republic or the Federated Suns.

Advancing to Towne, Second Army Group's Eleventh Principes and Second Fides routed the planetary militia and gained control of the world's still-functioning HPG. The Republic forces used the HPG to broadcast disinformation and false intel to neighboring Combine worlds, and sowed dissension among Towne's populace. Although the RAF could not afford to leave behind a proper garrison, Towne had been a Republic world long before the Draconis Combine re-absorbed it in 3135. By promising full support from the Republic, Second Army Group turned enough of the populace against the Draconis Combine so that any DCMS attempts to reclaim the planet would be met with open hostility and insurgency efforts.

Moving on to Addicks while First Army Group remained mired on Dieron, Second Army Group encountered the Fourth Dieron Regulars. The Fourth had heard rumors of attacks on neighboring systems, and dug in with the intent of repelling a full-scale planetary invasion, rather than the unconventional raids of ERUPTIO. Second Army Group exploited the DCMS position by targeting infrastructure and logistic points rather than the prepared defenses. During the fighting, the Second Fides's special-operations battalion incited riots among the populace while the Eleventh Triarii and Eleventh Principes concentrated on the Fourth's flanks, and the Eleventh Hastati executed a headhunting mission. Once Second Army had caused sufficient damage and killed *Tai-sa* Gerald Nixon, the Republic troops withdrew from the planet, leaving the leaderless Fourth Dieron Regulars with a rioting and unhappy populace.

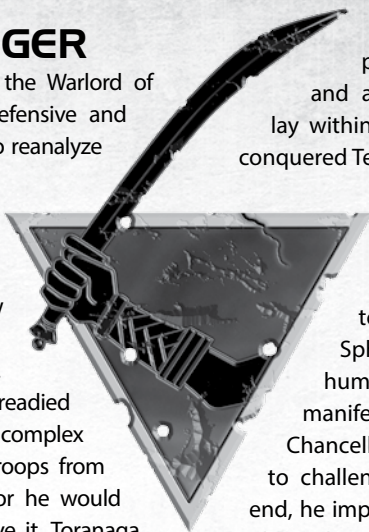
On 12 April, Second Army Group landed on Ozawa, former capital of the Republic's Prefecture III, hoping to secure a rendezvous point with First Army Group. Colonel Randolph Abasi, commander of the Eleventh Principes, had prepared for heavier on-world resistance than his previous targets, but encountered twice the expected opposition. Both *Ryuken-go* and the First Ghost Regiment had prepared a welcoming party, and the Twelfth Principes bore the brunt of the damage upon landing. When First Army Group arrived on April 19, the DCMS forces held out for another week before retreating farther spinward into the Combine.

Capturing Ozawa marked the completion of ERUPTIO's first leg. By the beginning of April, the DCMS forces in the rimward Dieron Military District were in disarray. Troops elsewhere in the district, forced to rely on rumor from courier JumpShips, were unsure what had transpired until weeks after the RAF stormed through the district. However, the Coordinator and the *kanrei* were certain of one, unmistakable fact: the Republic had awakened from its thirteen-year slumber.



THE DRAGON AND THE TIGER

The sudden RAF blitzkrieg and the death of the Warlord of Dieron devastated the Dieron Military District's defensive and offensive capabilities, but it forced *Kanrei* Toranaga to reanalyze the Draconis Combine's military situation. With the Wall down, the RAF spearhead charged along the Kurita-Davion border but was not laying claim to any worlds on which it set foot. As April wore on, the *kanrei* sought to divine the Republic's intentions. Now that the Wall was down, Toranaga believed the time to strike at the heart of the Republic itself was at hand. The main obstacle confronting him was a lack of readied troops with which to prosecute such a large and complex military campaign. Either he would need to pull troops from another front—a potentially disastrous situation—or he would need to search for outside help. As luck would have it, Toranaga would not need to decide: help came looking for him instead.

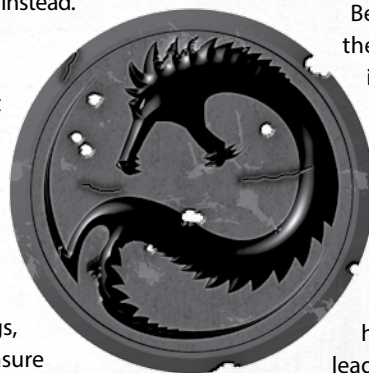


SHADES OF KAPTEYN

In early April, an ambassadorial contingent from the Capellan Confederation arrived in Combine space. The team was immediately shuttled to Luthien to meet with Coordinator Yori Kurita and *Kanrei* Toranaga. At first, the diplomats would meet only with the Coordinator and her immediate advisors; Toranaga was not permitted into the meetings until very late into the proceedings, an arrangement about which he made his displeasure subtly known. When Toranaga learned the proposed alliance was military in nature, he grew even more upset, as he felt the Coordinator was preventing him from performing his service to the Dragon—here was more proof that she was beginning to outgrow the strings he once had tied to her.

The Chancellor of the Capellan Confederation had proposed a military partnership that harkened back to the Concord of Kapteyn, which had allied the Combine, the Confederation, and the Free Worlds League against a common enemy—the Federated Commonwealth—in 3022. Although the Free Worlds League was not yet invited to join this new alliance—and never would be, given the embargo the League had imposed on the Confederation—the spirit of cooperation between the two nations for the express purpose of toppling their common enemy remained the same.

When Toranaga was finally brought into talks of a coalition of the two states, the Coordinator was still unsure whether to ally the Dragon with the Confederation. The *kanrei's* attempts to sway the Coordinator solely based on the military advantages of such an accord seemed to fall on deaf ears, regardless of the case he made. A hard-hitting CCAF assault on the Republic would surely reduce the pressure of the RAF units rampaging through the Dieron District. However, Yori Kurita's initial reason for refusing the alliance was simple, and even the *kanrei* agreed: assisting the Capellans militarily would give the CCAF a chance to claim Terra, a feat no Successor State had ever accomplished in the three-and-a-half centuries since the fall of the First Star League.

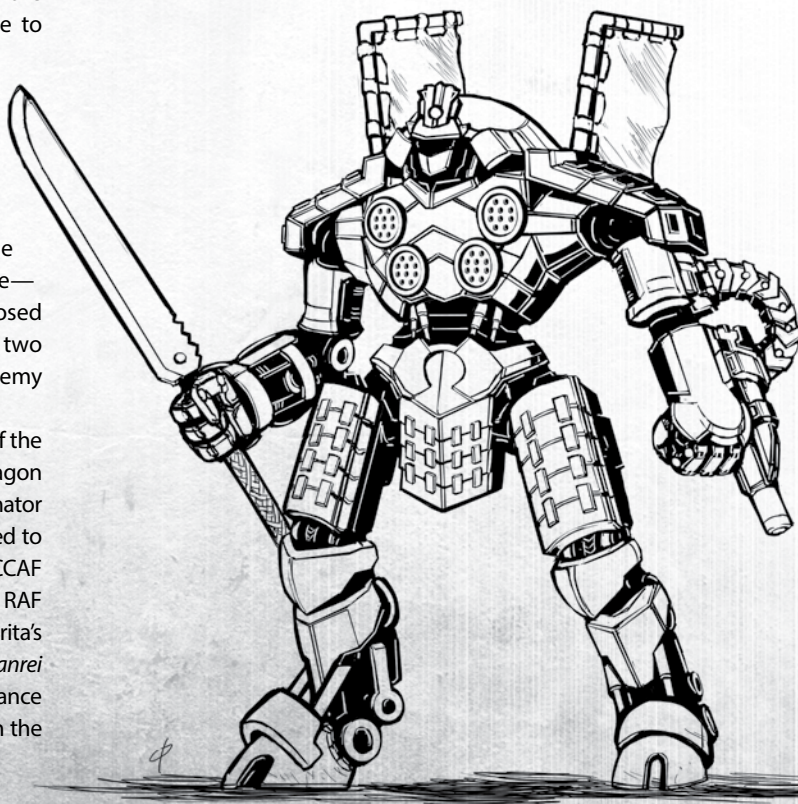


A Capellan conquest of the Republic was no pipe dream: Fortress Republic was no longer in place, and according to ISF reports, the CCAF invasion force lay within a single jump of Terra itself. If the Confederation conquered Terra, Daoshen Liao would declare himself First Lord of a new Star League, and neither the Coordinator nor the *kanrei* wanted to see that to happen. The possibility of a Fifth Succession War rising from the ashes of the Republic of the Sphere was too much to contemplate, as it would devastate the entire Inner Sphere. If anyone was meant to oversee the whole of humanity, Toranaga believed it should be the Dragon as manifested in the will of the Coordinator, not a Capellan Chancellor, a Clanner Khan, or anyone else who might dare to challenge for control of the cradle of humanity. To this end, he implored Yori to reject the call for alliance and send the ambassadors on their way with gifts for the Chancellor.

Before the Coordinator could announce her decision, the lead ambassador shared one final piece of information she was instructed to use as a last-ditch measure. As a testament to the Chancellor's goodwill and his faith in the proposed alliance with the Draconis Combine, the ambassador was authorized to share one pertinent piece of Maskirovka intelligence:

"Devlin Stone is alive and well."

The news of Stone being in cryogenic hibernation for the past two decades hit the Combine's leadership hard. If Stone was alive, that meant the RAF



KAPTEYN REVISITED

(15 August 3149)

Sian [CBS] —The Wall of the supposed Fortress Republic continues to crumble, with House Kurita having wisely heeded the call of the Chancellor to join in opposition to the legacy of the devil Stone. At a morning briefing, the Strategios revealed to the assembled press corps that the DCMS has opened an anti-Republic offensive following the Chancellor's strategic direction. The military body also confirmed that the CCAF will not rest until all the people of Capellan sphere are united under the benevolent leadership of the Celestial Wisdom.

For many readers, the announcement of the alliance with House Kurita surely comes as a surprise. The supine Hohiro Kurita proved himself in word and deed a puppet of the late and unlamented Victor Steiner-Davion. That extended to selling out the honor of House Kurita to new oppressors, the Republic of the Sphere. The Kuritas groveled before Terra for decades, while the Capellan people maintained their lonely defiance against the usurper Devlin Stone and his thuggish regime.

However, the inexhaustible patience and wisdom of Chancellor Daoshen Liao has borne fruit in lengthy diplomacy with Coordinator Yori Kurita. The wildly successful Kuritan invasion of the Federated Suns was made possible by the Chancellor's pledge of support from the invincible CCAF and a gift of strategic plans to the Kuritan leadership. Not even the most arrogant or foolish among the Combine military could deny the genius of Daoshen Liao following the supreme chastisements levied by the Capellan people on the ancient Davion foe.

Yet, while the Federated Suns was being utterly humbled, a greater foe was plotting against the Capellan people behind its supposedly impenetrable Fortress Wall. But the addled schemes of the Republic were transparent to the all-encompassing vision of the Chancellor. With Luthien finally acknowledging the superior virtue of the Capellan Confederation, the Celestial Wisdom saw fit to warn them once more of the threat posed by the inscrutable and capricious Republic. This time, the Dragon listened.

Now the Capellan *dao* and the Kuritan katana strike together as instruments of the Chancellor's will. The scheming of the criminals in Geneva will come to nothing in the face of such a powerful offensive. Already the opening assault of the CCAF has brought justice to the very doorstep of the Republic's masters while reuniting long-sundered worlds with the Capellan collective. Even now, the brilliant Daoshen Liao has laid the groundwork for the demolition of the Republic's tyranny.

And what will final victory bring? Only the Celestial Wisdom is so far-sighted to see the future clearly, but the Capellan people will bask in the glory of having achieved their total liberation. The weary subjects of the other Houses will look with envy on the leadership that made it possible. And the Confederation's destiny to bring enlightenment to a greater humanity will be within reach for the first time in centuries. Ceaseless praise is due to Chancellor Daoshen Liao for the inspired guidance that can make such a dream a reality.

thrust working its way through the Dieron District was masterminded by the leader responsible for forming the Allied Coalition and ejecting the Word of Blake from Terra after their thirteen-year reign of terror. Toranaga believed that by creating the Republic of the Sphere in 3081, Stone had essentially set himself up as First Lord over a new "Terran Hegemony." Both the Coordinator and DCMS High Command blamed Stone for the decline the Dragon had suffered at the hands of the Republic, and believed Stone's permanent removal from the equation would greatly improve the Combine's future prospects.

After consulting with the DCMS High Command, the Coordinator hammered out the terms of the Draconis Combine's alliance with the Capellan Confederation. The three key facets of the agreement were the mutual sharing of intelligence, the creation of arms deals, and the commencement of joint military operations against the Republic of the Sphere. On 21 April, the Combine and the Confederation signed the Unity Pact at Unity Palace and entered into an official alliance against the Republic.

In subsequent meetings with the DCMS High Command, the Capellan ambassadors presented Daoshen's initial proposal for a two-pronged CCAF/DCMS invasion into the Republic. The operation, codenamed TIAMAT, would involve strikes against pre-designated targets, and each nation's contribution to TIAMAT would occur on a timetable devised by their leadership. Though the targets were clearly delineated beforehand, Toranaga and the High Command worried that the presence of so many Capellan troops already in close proximity to Terra meant the CCAF was likely to complete its portion of TIAMAT first, long before Toranaga could move adequate troops into position to begin the Combine's thrust. If that occurred, little would prevent the CCAF from continuing on to Terra, and the DCMS would be in no position to stop them.

Regardless, with the Unity Pact in place and TIAMAT underway, the Dragon would be yet another interstellar power with its fangs poised to strike at the heart of the Republic.

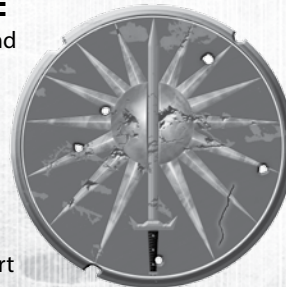
WRESTLING THE DRAGON

Though Operations SHOFAR and ERUPTIO struck a chord across the Inner Sphere, the Republic's actions in early 3149 had the most profound impact on the leadership of the Federated Suns. By midyear, the AFFS would embark on a course dictated by the RAF's movements, and the Republic's thrust into the Combine would continue as planned.



BINDING THE DRAGON'S TONGUE

News of the Republic dropping the Wall and sending a large concentration of RAF troops swarming into the Draconis Combine reached Julian Davion by early February. Though he was still hindered by the loss of a limb on New Syrtis, the knowledge of Devlin Stone having kept his promise accelerated Julian's continued recovery, pushing him to new heights in his physical therapy regimens with a state-of-the-art prosthetic leg. Within two weeks of the Wall coming down, Julian took a modified *Malice* on an ungainly test run, despite admonitions from his advisors. The First Prince would need several additional months of recovery before once again being comfortable piloting a 'Mech in combat, but his competency at the controls would let him observe and command from the field without directly endangering himself.



3149: THE DAM BREAKS

After reviewing all verified intelligence on the RAF's movements in the Dieron Military District, Julian, Erik, and the rest of the AFFS High Command agreed that Stone's forces were on a drive to assist the AFFS in the liberation of the Draconis March. The High Command was split evenly regarding whether ERUPTIO's ultimate destination was New Avalon or former Draconis March capital Robinson. Without a clear line of communication to either Stone or ERUPTIO's leadership, Julian cast the tiebreaking vote and decided to move on New Avalon. Julian argued that even if his assumption of the RAF's goal was incorrect, the action would provide an immeasurable boost to the morale of the AFFS and the Suns' citizenry. Even without direct assistance from Stone, Julian knew a campaign centered around New Avalon would show his subjects that he had not given up hope of returning the capital to House Davion control. Opponents of the decision—Erik Sandoval included—believed a campaign against New Avalon without any direct RAF support would fail, even if Julian pulled additional troops from the now-quiet Capellan border. The First Prince decided the gamble was worth the risk: the longer New Avalon remained in the Dragon's grip, the faster the Federated Suns' morale and economy would deteriorate.

By the beginning of April, Operation PERCEVAL was ready to move into the next phase. By design, the PERCEVAL task force included no mercenary units. To show a sense of national solidarity and quell rumors of Julian's disdain for mercenaries, Julian and Erik agreed to assign the mercenary Fortune regiments to garrison posts at New Syrtis and other recently liberated Capellan March worlds. Leaving the recovering First Kestrel Grenadiers to hold down the fort, Task Force PERCEVAL departed from Remagen with three regiments of AFFS troops to begin the eventual drive towards New Avalon.

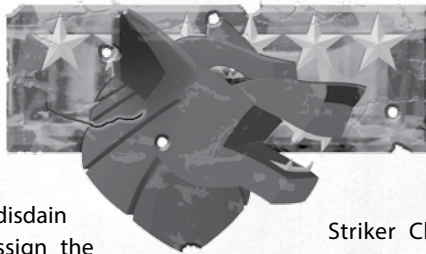
On 12 April, PERCEVAL arrived at two worlds in the coreward region of the Dragon's Tongue. After a brief and decisive battle with the Wolf's Dragoons' Wolfsbane Battalion, the Dawn Guards—again painted in RAF colors—reclaimed O'Fallon for the Federated Suns. On Coloma, the remainder of PERCEVAL attempted to drive the Fifth Sword of Light off planet. The Fifth's Scaled Angels Squadron and 301st Armor Regiment pummeled the First Avalon Hussars upon landing, but the First Davion Guards' flanking maneuver prevented the battle from turning into a rout.

Fighting on Coloma would continue for another two weeks. In the meantime, the Dawn Guards continued to Augusta, where a Combine-loyal planetary militia put up a short fight before surrendering to the alleged RAF troops. When the Fifth Sworders retreated from Coloma, the hurting First Avalon Hussars remained behind, and Erik and the First Davion Guards moved on to Saginaw. The Wolf's Dragoons' Wolf Spiders raised an effective defense against Sandoval's task force, but the mercenary battalion could not singlehandedly hold off an entire RCT indefinitely. To complicate matters for the Dragoons, the DCMS had no further troops to

spare, as any potential reinforcements were bolstering New Avalon or were being shifted toward eventual deployment for Operation TIAMAT. By 9 May, the Wolf Spiders could hold no longer and retreated farther into the Dragon's Tongue.

REUNITING WITH THE REMNANT

By mid-3149, Damien Redburn's Republic Remnant had still not responded to messages from the Republic. Also, a small task force sent in March to personally contact the Remnant never returned. To make matters worse, the Wolf Empire had begun conducting careful probes against Republic space to test whether the Wall was truly down, and find any potential weaknesses in the Republic's defenses once Alaric Ward confirmed the Wall had indeed fallen. Unfortunately, these probes also extended to Redburn's Remnant, and Devlin Stone knew the troops led by Redburn and Countess Tara Campbell would be vital in the Republic's defense should the Wolves or Falcons come knocking.



THE VANISHING REMNANT

Deeper investigation into the matter revealed the Remnant had not been idle since the Fortress was deactivated. Following the Clan Wolf probes, the Remnant had lost both Alhena and most of the Eighth Triarii Protectors when the 103rd Wolf Guard Striker Cluster invaded the world in mid-May. About two weeks later, the Ninth Wolf Assault Cluster cornered and destroyed First Battalion of the Third Principes on Chertan, despite the Third requesting *hegira* once they saw the writing on the wall.

On 9 July, when a large Wolf fleet arrived at the zenith point in the Dubhe system, it became clear that the Wolf Empire sought to destroy the Remnant one world at a time. Anticipating a heavier attack from the Wolves, Redburn had ordered the Remnant's sole WarShip, the Fidelis-crewed *Flatus*, to patrol the system. As the Fourth Wolf Guard Assault Cluster's DropShips burned for orbital insertion, a Binary of assault DropShips swarmed the *Flatus*. The *Dante*-class frigate destroyed two of the Wolf vessels with broadsides before they could close range, but the remaining ships massed their fire at the WarShip, critically damaging its K-F drive and preventing it from jumping out of the system. The *Flatus* shot down several more DropShips before losing power to its weapon systems, but the Wolves sought to capture the WarShip instead of finishing her off. With little other choice, the Fidelis crew prepared themselves for a boarding action. The close-quarters fighting across the *Flatus*'s decks was fierce, and the Wolves paid in blood for every meter they gained. When the Wolves reached the bridge, the frigate's captain broadcast a message across the ship's PA system: "You are too late!"

SHATTERED FORTRESS

Along the *Flatus's* entire length, scuttling charges blew the ship apart, killing the Wolf boarders and critically damaging many nearby Wolf DropShips with flying debris. However, Remnant DropShips discovered a group of escape pods near the debris field; the *Flatus's* crew had rigged the WarShip to blow before abandoning ship.

Meanwhile, the Remnant defenders, whom the Fourth Wolf Guard expected to find on-planet, were instead burning hard to the nadir jump point. Redburn's troops were thankful that the *Flatus's* sacrifice had bought them enough time to escape and warn their commander of the impending danger.

PROBING THE REMNANT

FROM: Knight Gustav Morgan
TO: Paladin Janella Lakewood
SUBJECT: Clan Wolf Incursion at Denebola
DATE: 5 September 3149

Paladin Lakewood,

Here is the timeline on the recent incursion by Clan Wolf. A detailed report, including dumps of all sensor readings, will be forwarded separately.

- 3149SEP010311** First emergence wave spotted by sensor platforms near nadir jump point.
- 3149SEP010312** Communications to sensor platforms lost; count of Clan Wolf flotilla inconclusive.
NOTE: Please note the time the first Wolf scouts needed to emerge and begin jamming.
- 3149SEP010317** Courier ship DEN-017 arrives at Denebola L1, transmits above findings.
- 3149SEP010403** Courier ship DEN-011 arrives at T-Point. Den-T unit prepares deployment.
- 3149SEP010427** Wolf fleet moves toward Denebola.
- 3149SEP010508** Courier ship DEN-021 receives confirmed heading and bearing of Clan Wolf flotilla.
NOTE: 41 drive flares counted, 1.13G acceleration (Denebola normal)
- 3149SEP010514** Courier ship DEN-021 arrives at T-Point with data. Den-T unit sets correct intercepts.
- 3149SEP010941** Harassment of Wolf JumpShips and escorts begins.
- 3149SEP031051** Den-T moves towards planet.
- 3149SEP031107** Clan Wolf fleet modifies course at 2G acceleration.
- 3149SEP050011** Clan Wolf fleet returns to nadir jump point.

At this point, I believe the T-plan has been effective, though we can't be certain until they jump out in a day or two. Given the size of the hostile fleet, the Den-T group shouldn't necessarily have deterred the Wolves, which could be an indication they're not looking for a serious fight at this time. If my presumption is correct, the T-Plan may be more effective than hoped at delaying the Empire.

EXTINGUISHING THE FLAME

The quick and brutal Wolf Empire attacks left the Republic Remnant with only two worlds to its name. Surviving Remnant forces regrouped on Callison, Damien Redburn's acting capital, and prepared for another assault from the Wolves. Instead, the attack came from an altogether different direction. Paladin Janella Lakewood, acting as Jonah Levin's official aide, sent another task force to make contact with the Remnant. This task force, comprised of a battalion from the Second Fides, broadcast friendly IFF transponders upon their arrival in-system and during planetfall in early August.

Instead of being met with open arms, the Second Fides were accosted at Fallosha's spaceport by armed Seventh Hastati 'Mechs. The Seventh escorted the Second's commander, Colonel Cettina Laurentis, and her senior staff to an audience with Damien Redburn and Tara Campbell while the rest of the task force remained under armed guard. The years since the raising of Fortress Republic had not been kind to the former Exarch, and he seemed in poor health and a weary state of mind.

During the meeting, Redburn impressed on Colonel Laurentis that the Republic had abandoned the Remnant for nearly fifteen years. In addition, the Republic had left the other nine prefectures of loyal Republic troops and citizens to be slaughtered or subsumed by the neighboring powers, including the Republic's current lapdog, the Federated Suns. He claimed that the Devlin Stone he knew—the friend who had given Damien his Paladin's rank pips and handpicked him to lead the Republic of the Sphere after he retired—would never have willfully abandoned 90 percent of the Republic. When Colonel Laurentis informed him that Stone was again Exarch of the Republic, albeit with Levin still acting as the nation's public figurehead, Redburn grew furious.

"The Republic is dead," he said to her. "Long live the Remnant."

Then he pulled a gun on the Fides commander and issued an ultimatum. She and her command could join him in carrying on the dream of the original Republic, the Republic of the "pre-Blackout Devlin Stone," or they could remain incarcerated indefinitely. When Laurentis inquired about the fate of the previous task force the Republic had sent, Redburn informed her that most of them had chosen to join the Remnant's crusade; the holdouts had either been killed trying to escape or were still imprisoned.

Laurentis then asked about the Fidelis, those who had survived the *Flatus's* destruction: they had sworn a blood oath to the Republic of the Sphere, but to which Republic would they answer?

3149: THE DAM BREAKS

Redburn's retort—"The Fidelis belong to me"—fell on deaf ears. Rather than submit to Redburn's demands, Laurentis chose imprisonment. The Second Fides had no wish to fight the Remnant: even if they had tried, the concentration of Remnant troops on Callison would have ensured the Second's destruction. For several weeks, Redburn attempted to convince Laurentis and other members of the Second's command staff to join his crusade to keep the original flame of the Republic alive. Though a few were swayed by Redburn's impassioned speeches, most remained in custody.

On 22 August several K-F drive signatures were detected at Callison's zenith point. Redburn ordered all of the Remnant's troops on full alert: he was determined to halt the Wolf Empire's advance here. Soon afterward, transponder signals identified the incoming DropShips as belonging to the RAF; however, Redburn did not order his troops to stand down. The number of inbound troops meant that the Republic planned to either join him in holding back the Wolves or wrest control of the Remnant from him by force.

Once the RAF DropShips reached orbit, the fleet broadcast a personal message to Redburn. To his surprise, Jonah Levin himself accompanied the task force. Levin informed Redburn that the Republic had returned and was here to restore Redburn, Campbell, and all of the Republic Remnant forces to service in the RAF and award them full military honors commensurate to their service during Fortress Republic. Redburn had heard enough. Instead of replying, he closed the connection in mid-conversation and waited with his troops for Levin to land.

Just before touching down at New Roslo's spaceport, Levin broadcast a message on a general channel and beseeched the Remnant forces to reunite with the Republic. Tara Campbell and other longtime associates of Damien Redburn ignored the message and stood ready for the tense confrontation that lay ahead.

Several 'Mechs from the Seventh Hastati, the Highlanders, and the Fidelis all stood ready on the tarmac to greet Levin's arrival. Immediately upon landing, Stone's Defenders 'Mechs paraded out of the Exarch's DropShip. Redburn grew enraged: the presence of a Stone's Brigade unit meant Stone himself—who had once been a close friend and confidant—had sanctioned this action. Levin made one last impassioned plea for the Remnant to stand down, but Redburn would have none of it. He believed Stone, the Republic, and even Levin had turned on him and betrayed the true Republic.

Without warning, Redburn's *Black Knight* launched an alpha strike on Levin's *Atlas*. The tarmac descended into chaos as Stone's Defenders moved to defend Levin and repulse the Remnant forces. During the firefight, Levin sent a broadcast to the Fidelis serving in Redburn's ranks. He appealed to their sense of duty and honor by reminding them of their blood oath to the Republic and pled with them to support Devlin Stone and the "true Republic of the Sphere" rather than a "pretender to the Republic's legacy."

At a crucial moment in the battle, the Custos, leader of the Fidelis, lashed out at Redburn's *Black Knight* and ordered the rest of the Fidelis to concentrate their fire on Redburn and fight alongside Levin. Moments later, Damien Redburn fell, and the Remnant forces hesitated. Levin, having been ordered by Stone to bring a quick end to the situation, pressed his advantage and forced the Remnant on the defensive. After Tara Campbell and Paladin Ariana Zou ejected from their 'Mechs, the remaining Remnant troops surrendered to Levin's authority. Although Redburn suffered serious injuries in the battle, the former Exarch was taken into custody to be tried on Terra for a string of offenses, including assaulting an RAF officer.

In preparation for a Wolf Empire attack that could arrive at any time, Remnant forces on Callison and Marcus were quickly reincorporated into the RAF. To appease the absorbed Remnant troops, the Seventh Hastati and the Highlanders remained under the operational command of Countess Campbell and Ariana Zou, who was reinstated in the RAF as a Knight due to the lack of an opening in the Council of Paladins.

THE SWORD OF DAMOCLES

While the events of 3148 saw the Free Worlds League finally bring Regulus to heel, the threat posed by the Marian invasion of the Duchy of Tamarind-Abbey remained unresolved. Efforts to blunt the Hegemony's advances with a series of retaliatory strikes between April and October 3148 lacked a unified direction or precise goal. On Gibraltar, a lightning strike by the rebuilt Third Battalion of the Seventh Tamarind Regulars against the entrenched Cohors of III Legio saw the overzealous Regulars lose two companies of troops to the better-prepared and well-armed Secunda Cohors, while the large Marian supply depots—the actual target of the raid—went unharmed. Only the herculean efforts of brevet-Major Eric Valenta during a valiant rearguard action allowed Third Battalion to escape the debacle.

Raids elsewhere fared little better. The one bright spot came from the mercenary unit Camacho's Caballeros, who succeeded in their attack on the reformed V Legio on Maximillian. Swooping in on the new Legio's Prima Cohors, the flamboyant Caballeros quickly sent the green Marian Hegemony Armed Forces troops into retreat, herding, trapping and effectively destroying the Legio in Maximillian's Reis Cascades. Sadly, the Caballeros' stellar performance was an exception to an otherwise dismal showing by the rest of the League's assaults, which did little damage to the invading MHAF.

On the contrary, the FWLM's poor performance prompted Emperor Kesi Aldrich to believe that the League lacked the resolve and strength to mount a real defense of its anti-spinward worlds. Spurned on by the League's failings and its ongoing Regulus operations, the Hegemony organized dozens of raids into the Duchy of Tamarind-Abbey and surrounding independent planets, with the Marians targeting worlds as far as away as Schererville.

On Kendall, the Quinta Cohors of IV Legio quickly swept aside the defenders before sacking the Brooks, Inc. factory, while on Conakry a single maniple of II Legio landed outside the planetary capital to terrify the populace for two days before leaving the planet as quickly as they arrived.

The key to their success was simple: Aldrich ordered Marian raiding forces to bypass planets with suspected FWLM troop concentrations, in order to cause as much confusion and fear as possible and derail the League's ability to respond. His decision to circumvent formal opposition put the League defenders into a state of atrophy. Unable to mount a proper response for fear of leaving their current garrisons undefended, the League's problem was further compounded by the fact that the FWLM was also focused on keeping potential incursions by the Lyrans at bay.

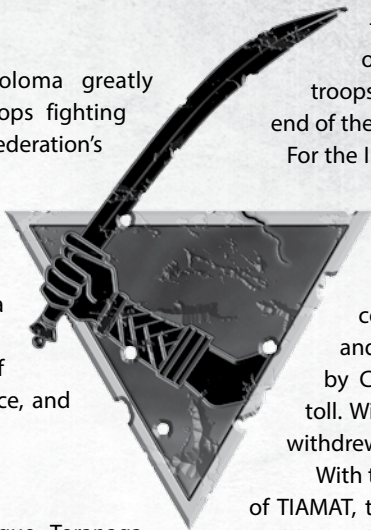
By the end of 3149, the raiding campaign was considered a major success and imbued the Marians with a sense of invincibility and confidence that lured the Hegemony into making a number of poor decisions soon thereafter. These unwise actions would have dire consequences for the Periphery nation in the coming years, which would culminate with the Duchy of Tamarind-Abbey taking its revenge.

—From *The Nova Roma Empire, Atrean Free Press, 3150*

SHATTERED FORTRESS

CEMENTING THE PACT

The Federated Suns offensive around Coloma greatly concerned *Kanrei* Toranaga. Reports of RAF troops fighting alongside AFFS forces meant the Capellan Confederation's shared intelligence was accurate: the Federated Suns and the Republic were indeed acting in concert to reclaim former Suns worlds, and this new action in the Dragon's Tongue was especially troubling. With this knowledge, Toranaga approached the joint planning of Operation TIAMAT in the hope that the campaign would strand all of the marauding RAF troops in Federated Suns space, and then cut the Suns off from the Republic entirely.



TIAMAT, WAVE ONE

Despite DCMS setbacks in the Dragon's Tongue, Toranaga began the Combine's contribution to Operation TIAMAT a full two months before the CCAF could mobilize on its own front.

Combine Thrust

The Draconis Combine's first steps toward upholding the Unity Pact began on 4 June with near-simultaneous landings on four Federated Suns planets in the Terran Corridor. Hearing news of Republic forces storming through the bordering Dieron Military District, most of the worlds targeted by the DCMS were taken completely by surprise by the unexpected swiftness of the Combine attacks.

Mallory's World, one of the first targets hit, fell after the Forty-third Benjamin Regulars fought the planetary militia to the last man.

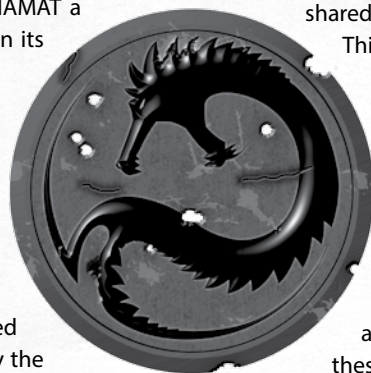
During the past several years, the late Warlord of Dieron had sent multiple probing raids to Ronel to assess the AFFS's on-planet strength and slowly whittle away at the Second Ceti Hussars' garrison. With the confusion surrounding the fall of New Avalon and liberation of New Syrtis, the Second's attrition had grown as the Department of the Quartermaster routed more and more supply shipments to vital battlegrounds such as Ingress, and the Hussars' morale began to crumble. The First Dieron Regulars and Second An Ting Legion exploited this knowledge to the fullest and descended on the Second Hussars' defenses like locusts. Maintenance issues stranded numerous armor companies and infantry squads, and the First Regulars ran them through one at a time with the Second Legionnaires performing mop-up actions. The Hussars soon broke and retreated deeper into the rapidly shrinking Draconis March.

On Deneb Kaitos, the First Genyosha and the Sixteenth Sun Zhang Cadre encountered the Third Federated Suns Armored Cavalry while marching toward the capital city of Cetus. The fighting fell in favor of the AFFS during the first several days, with the DCMS having difficulty maintaining aerial superiority. By the end of the first week of combat, however, the Third began leaving gaps in its lines, indicative of a breakdown of command or some internal issue. The Genyosha exploited this weakness by inviting

the Sixteenth Sun Zhang to share frontline duties in order to gain combat experience. Together, the DCMS troops captured the capital and ejected the Third at the end of the campaign's second week.

For the Ingress assault, the linchpin of the Combine's portion of TIAMAT, *Kanrei* Toranaga assigned his Hikage regiment and the Fourth Dieron Regulars. Despite being outnumbered, the Second Avalon Hussars raised a formidable defense. However, continual punishment from Kuritan aerospace fighters and attrition from several years of low-level raiding by Combine and Capellan forces eventually took their toll. Within three weeks of the DCMS landing, the Second withdrew from the planet.

With the successful conclusion of the Combine's first wave of TIAMAT, the Federated Suns was effectively cut off from the Republic, and the Combine and the Confederation once again shared a border for the first time since the middle of the Third Succession War.



Confederation Thrust

While the Combine focused on isolating the Suns from its primary ally, Daoshen Liao's attention in TIAMAT turned to the Republic. The success of the DCMS thrust allowed him to relocate troops from the former Federated Suns front, and by 9 August, his forces had moved into position and pushed one step farther into the Republic. For these attacks, the Strategios again paired standard line regiments with Warrior House Orders.

On Epsilon Indi, the First Liao Guards' assault on the capital of New Rhodes was met by the Thirteenth Hastati and several other formations. Initially, the First Guards couldn't pinpoint exactly how many troops constituted the defense. Only House Dai Da Chi's capture and interrogations of several RAF soldiers in the first few days of combat revealed that the Thirteenth was using false colors in many engagements, and that a lone battalion of the Thirteenth defended New Rhodes and the Kantiles Spaceport. With this knowledge, the First spent the next week pummeling the Thirteenth with aerospace sorties before overrunning the RAF positions with relative ease. Few of the Thirteenth rallied to flee off-world.

An immediate courier run to TIAMAT's other targets showed the situation on Bryant was oddly similar to what had occurred on Epsilon Indi. The Fourth MAC had encountered many different defending units while trying to secure an RAF logistics hub, and additional intelligence showed that another battalion of the Thirteenth Hastati was holding the planet. Once the Fourth concentrated its attacks on the defenders as a single unit, the Thirteenth quickly abandoned the system.

Of all the Wave One targets in the CCAF leg of TIAMAT, only Liberty showed any appreciable signs of resistance. The Fifth MAC and Warrior House Imarra grounded on 15 August and encountered a heretofore unseen RAF regiment sporting Stone's Brigade colors

3149: THE DAM BREAKS

and RISC weaponry. The Fifth soon learned they faced Stone's Fury, a regiment comprising many Knights and veteran warriors. The Fury hit the Fifth hard, and even House Imarra's flanking efforts made little difference. On 28 August, the Second MAC jumped from Hall to reinforce the Fifth. Under Danai Centrella-Liao's leadership, the Second quickly seized the capital of Dronane. Stone's Fury then abandoned the planet, which left a sour taste in Daoshen's mouth.

According to post-combat analysis, the Fury could have sustained at least three more weeks of engagement before being reduced to combat ineffectiveness. This, coupled with the weak, duplicitous defense of worlds so dangerously close to Terra further convinced Daoshen that the Republic was luring his military into a trap.

TIAMAT, WAVE TWO

Due to the success of TIAMAT's first phase, the DCMS and CCAF geared up to begin the next phase of the operation. However, both campaigns would encounter significant difficulties before the end of the year.

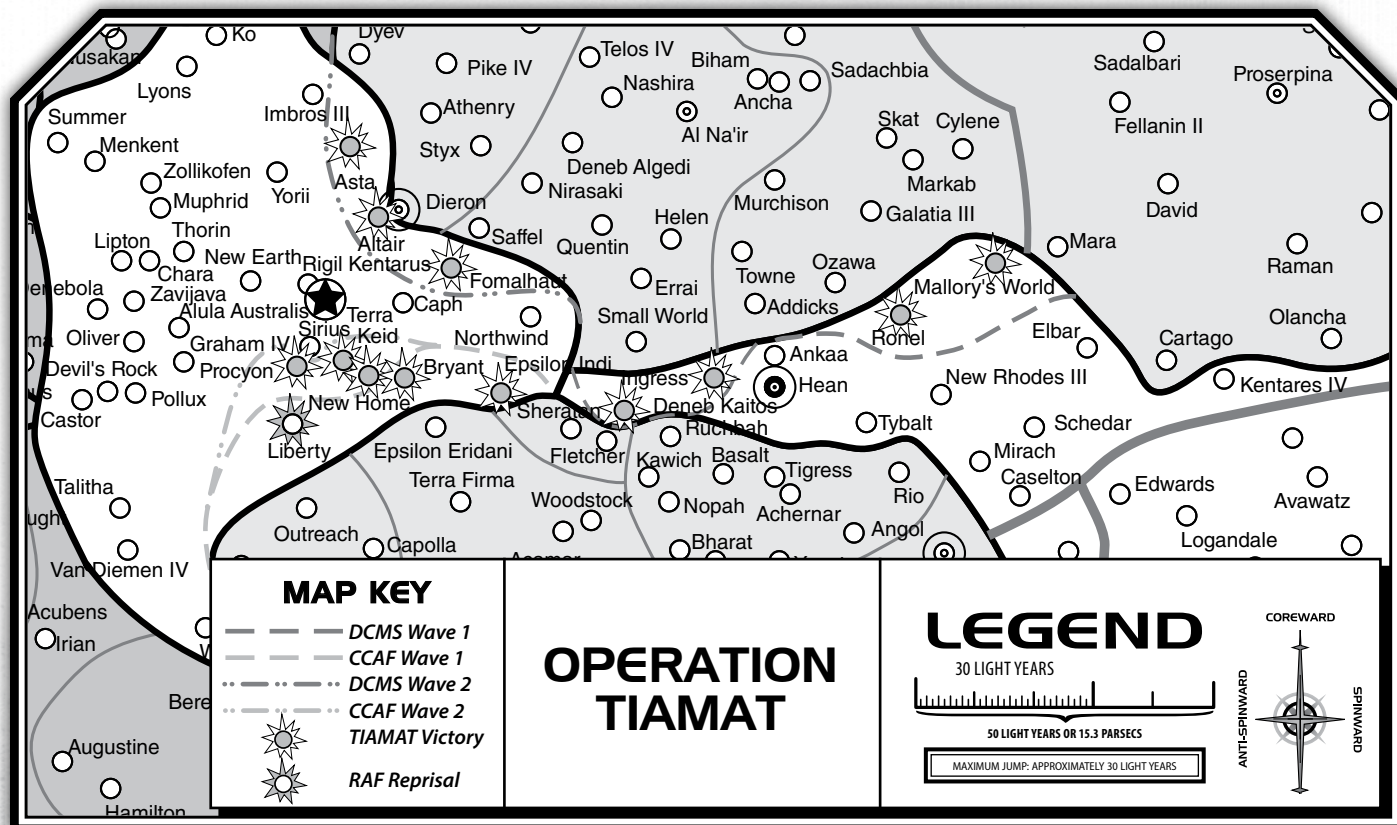
Combine Thrust: The Wave That Wasn't

Flush with recent victories over the AFFS, the DCMS was set to commence TIAMAT Wave Two in late October. Instead, incidents in early September prompted Toranaga to rethink the invasion plans. Task Force PERCEVAL launched heavy attacks on the Dragon's Tongue, hitting Numenor and Paulding. Per the terms of the Unity Pact, Toranaga placed TIAMAT on hold in order to better deal with the AFFS strikes.

By the time he could raise a worthwhile defense, the two attacked worlds had fallen, their meager DCMS garrisons routed. Toranaga, the Coordinator, and the High Command agreed that the defense of New Avalon and environs took higher precedence over claiming more worlds in the Federated Suns' Terran Corridor.

Toranaga and the new Warlord of New Samarkand, *Tai-shu* Takutaro Inada, spent the next two months rearranging their troops in the region to halt PERCEVAL's actions. On 11 November, the Twenty-second New Samarkand Regulars and the Alpha Regiment of Wolf Dragoons landed on Coloma. The AFFS raiding force had been using Coloma as a forward operating base for its Dragon's Tongue attacks, and the DCMS sought to deprive them of the world. The First Avalon Hussars, still recuperating from the liberation of Coloma in April, engaged the invasion force but soon became stretched too thin to hold onto any ground they gained. By the second week, the Dragoons surrounded and captured the First's field command post. General Thomas Brubaker accepted the First's surrender and allowed them to retreat from the planet without repercussion.

Toranaga was unhappy to learn of the Dragoons' decision to let so many surrendering AFFS troops flee the system. However, Brubaker reminded the DCMS's Professional Soldiery Liaison officer of the clause in the Dragoons' contract regarding the treatment of surrendering combatants. Brubaker's final comment on Toranaga's complaint was that the DCMS was "free to renegotiate our contract at any time."



SHATTERED FORTRESS

The Capellan Thrust

The suspiciously light resistance to the CCAF's first wave of TIAMAT resulted in a guarded approach to the second wave assaults. Operational commanders were advised to use extreme caution even in the face of assured victory.

The CCAF's Wave Two invaded four systems, with two planets in each staggered phase. The first phase launched on 16 October with landings on Procyon and New Home.

On Procyon, the Holdfast Guard attempted to secure the spaceport at Guided Halls to pave the way for more CCAF troops to land in phase two. The Strategios had expected heavier resistance on the resource-rich world, but only the Thirteenth Triarii met the Holdfast Guard's attacks. The Capellan troops encountered little trouble capturing the spaceport and capital. Much to Daoshen's dismay, a thorough scouring of the planet's long-dead Castle Brian uncovered no hidden defenders.

On New Home, Laurel's Legion encountered the remainder of the Thirteenth Hastati. Though numbering only a battalion, the Thirteenth had dug in deep around the city of Mann and fended off most of the Legion's probes by taking advantage of RISC technology. The CCAF countered the Thirteenth's defenses and advanced weaponry with liberal use of aerospace bombardment and Laurel's Armor Legion. What remained of the RAF troops limped off-planet during the final week of October.

According to Laurel's Legion senior staff, the Thirteenth's conduct during the battle for New Home made it appear as if they were stalling for reinforcements that never arrived. However, the purpose of the Thirteenth's holding action became clear on 28 October: the distraction allowed the Fifth Fides and the Eleventh Triarii to arrive at a pirate point in the Liberty system. The Fifth MAC, the sole CCAF unit remaining on-planet, was undergoing repairs and refits on the island of Quantico for the next leg of TIAMAT.

COMSTAR LIQUIDATION COMPLETED

(5 July 3149)

Atreus [AAP] – With the liquidation of ComStar Monorails, Clan Sea Fox has announced that it has completed the acquisition of all ComStar assets within the Free Worlds League. ComStar Holdings now exists as a receptacle for all lawsuits and claims on ComStar that will not be honored and fulfilled by the Sea Foxes. Nonetheless, numerous lawsuits and claims have been filed with both the Sea Foxes and Clan Protectorate, and in a few instances, the Sea Foxes have immediately paid out settlements. This curious tactic has substantially increased the number of claims, but the Sea Foxes have indicated a willingness to shoulder this burden, as all legitimate claims on their new holdings will be paid promptly.

It has become clear in recent weeks that the acquisition of ComStar's holdings within the League was precipitated by many years of planning by the Sea Foxes. Their extensive knowledge of ComStar personnel, assets, and liabilities goes further than what can be researched from public records, suggesting comprehensive infiltration of ComStar's corporate ranks prior to moving to full-scale acquisition. Many protective laws that date back to the Exclusion of 2837 have been overturned in the years since the Jihad, setting the stage for a sequence of hostile takeovers by the Sea Foxes. They have acted swiftly, hiring and firing large numbers of personnel, while also promoting from within. In one extreme instance, a mailroom supervisor was promoted to marketing VP of Abadan Telecommunications, formerly ComStar League Cellular. Stagnant assets are being liquidated at a rapid rate, which is causing some market disruption as the Sea Foxes dispense with items such as unused office furniture, LoaderMechs, and private *Monarch*-class DropShips.

Overall response to the Clan's moves has been positive and upbeat, with many analysts predicting that the Foxes will continue to trim the fat and waste that accumulated in a company that had never had to worry about its bottom line.

Though the central headquarters of ComStar in the Republic of the Sphere remains in an unknown state due to the lack of communications from Terra, the remaining ComStar holdings in other nations continue to operate without Republic guidance or oversight. The continuing effects of the HPG Blackout and the decentralization of ComStar operations due to the Fortress Wall lead many economists to believe that Clan Sea Fox will also attempt to acquire ComStar assets from other nations, by force if necessary.

However, the ultimate fate of ComStar will depend on what has transpired within the Wall of Fortress Republic these past fourteen years.

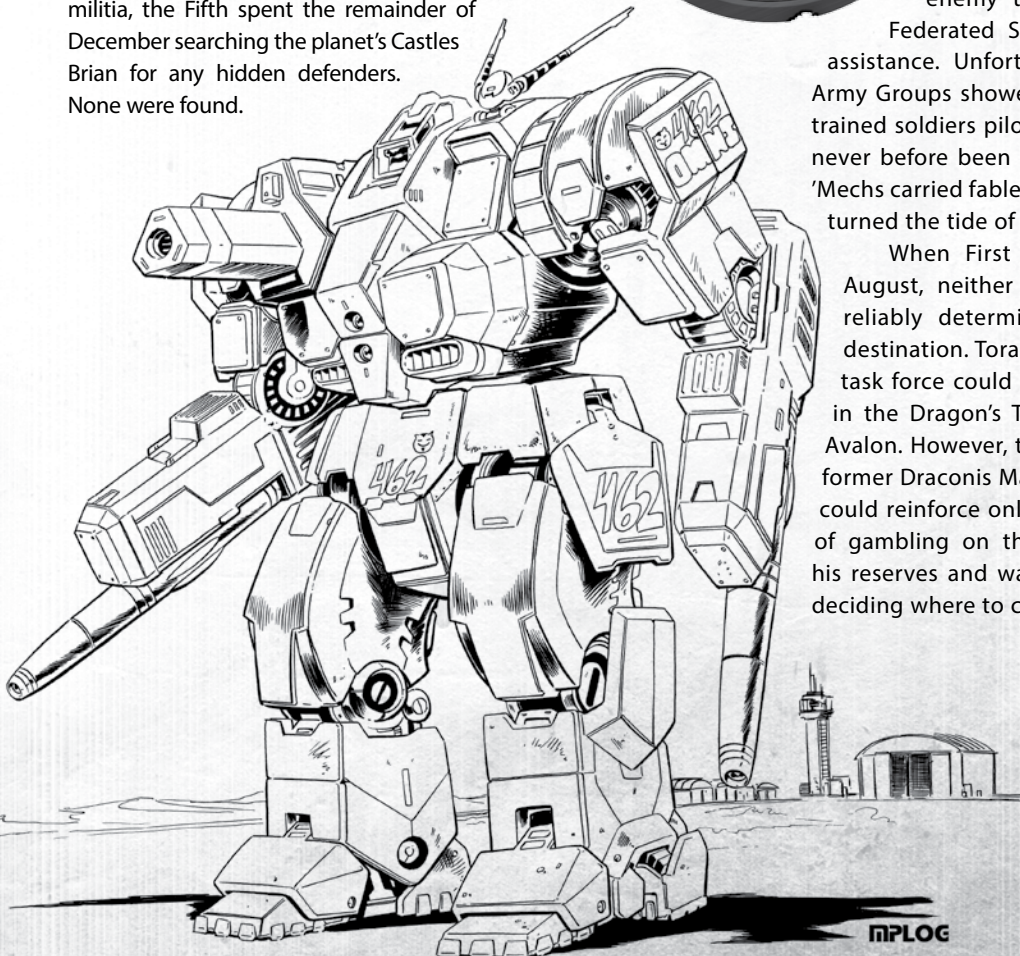
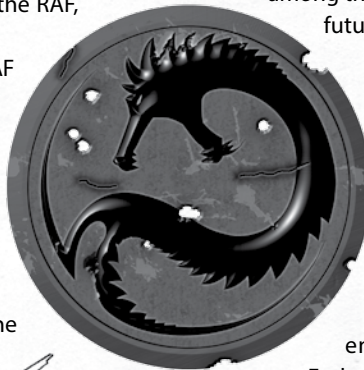


3149: THE DAM BREAKS

Considering the dearth of appreciable Republic military strength within the former Fortress, the attack took the Fifth MAC and other CCAF units in the vicinity by surprise. Approaching from the sea floor, the Fifth Fides swarmed the island. Within days, the Fifth MAC had nowhere left to withdraw and were forced to abandon the planet.

The reclaiming of Liberty made Daoshen reanalyze the final phase of TIAMAT's second wave, which was intended to target both Sirius and Keid. To mass enough troops to mount an assault on Terra itself, the CCAF needed to secure an unobstructed invasion corridor. However, Daoshen determined that slow and steady would win the race. To minimize the chance for additional surprises from the RAF, Daoshen limited the next phase to a single world.

TIAMAT continued in early December with a CCAF assault on Keid, considered a much softer target than Sirius. Fresh from the Tikonov Commonality, the Fifth Sian Dragoons landed on 4 December and found the planet defended solely by militia forces. To the Fifth's astonishment, instead of fighting Republic Standing Guard, the Fifth traded shots with a volunteer militia composed of tankers and conventional infantry. After neutralizing the militia, the Fifth spent the remainder of December searching the planet's Castles Brian for any hidden defenders. None were found.



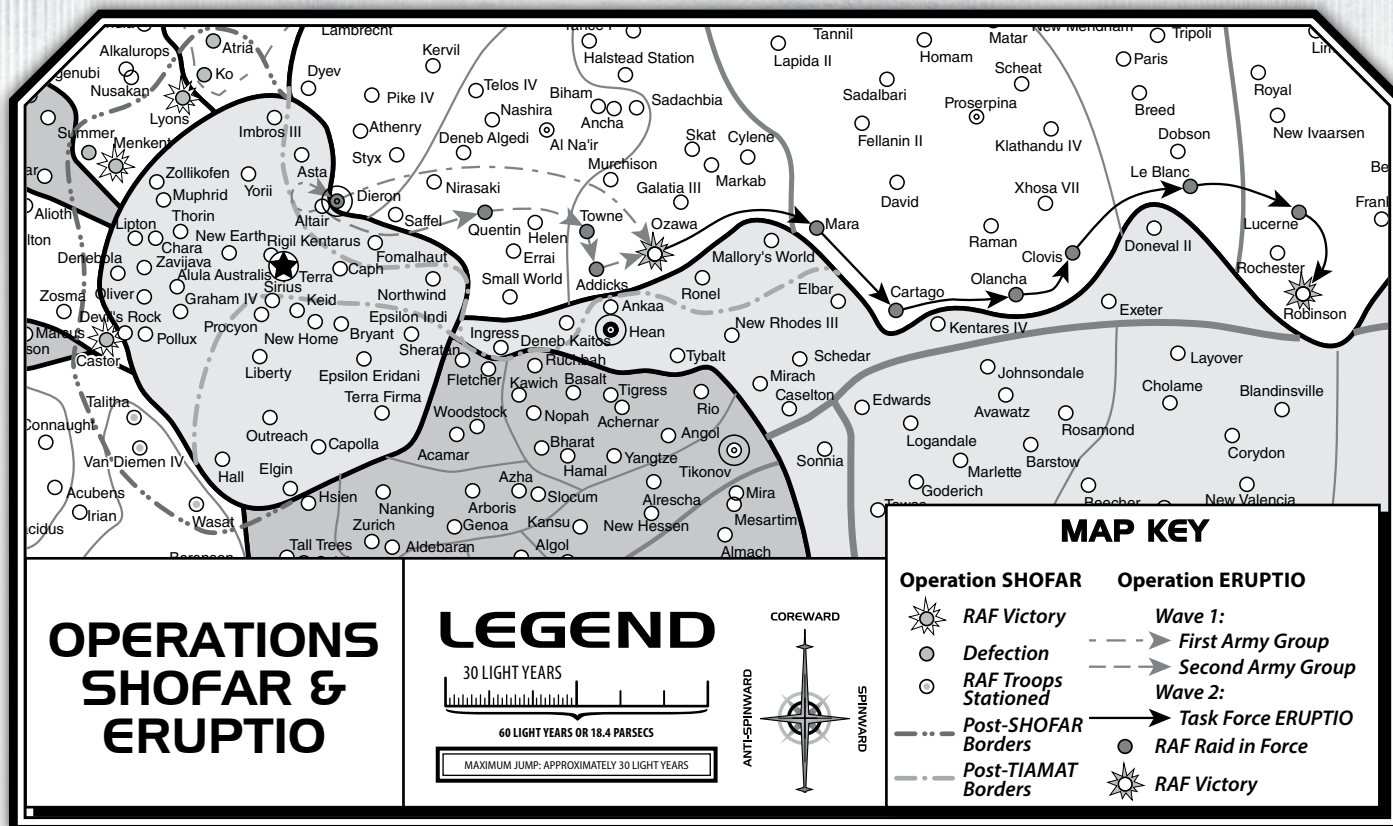
THE REPUBLIC RAMPAGE

While the DCMS prosecuted TIAMAT against the Federated Suns, Task Force ERUPTIO continued rampaging along the Draconis Combine's rimward border. After departing Ozawa in early May, First and Second Army Groups proceeded to the Benjamin Military District, striking designated targets on Mara, Cartago, and Olanca by mid-July. Paladin Ergen continued to target logistical infrastructure and concentrations of DCMS troops and planetary militia—inflicting as much damage on the Dragon's war machine as possible. On lightly defended planets, Ergen's soldiers attempted to incite unrest among the populace to make these worlds more susceptible to future AFFS liberation attempts.

With so many regiments committed to the TIAMAT campaign, *Kanrei* Toranaga could ill afford to send troops to stall Ergen's spearhead. Toranaga's fervent hope was that the RAF regiments would solve the problem for him by exhausting themselves on such an extended raiding operation. If the task force ran out of supplies, suffered too many casualties, or lost momentum, it would effectively strand itself in enemy territory far from the Republic, and the Federated Suns would be in no position to provide assistance. Unfortunately for the DCMS, First and Second Army Groups showed no signs of slowing. They boasted well-trained soldiers piloting advanced 'Mechs and vehicles—some never before been seen in Combine space—and some of the 'Mechs carried fabled RISC-technology weapons that frequently turned the tide of one-on-one engagements.

When First Army Group jumped to Clovis in early August, neither Toranaga nor the High Command could reliably determine the marauding RAF force's ultimate destination. Toranaga worried that at any moment the large task force could head rimward toward the AFFS operations in the Dragon's Tongue theater, and make a play for New Avalon. However, the RAF could very well have Robinson, the former Draconis March capital, in its sights. Toranaga knew he could reinforce only one of the two potential targets. Instead of gambling on the wrong target and risk losing, he held his reserves and waited until the RAF played its hand before deciding where to commit.

SHATTERED FORTRESS



THE HEART OF THE DRACONIS MARCH

When Second Army Group jumped to Lucerne in early October, the DCMS finally discerned the RAF task force's final destination. The Warlord of New Samarkand, *Tai-shu* Angmar Kyuzu, immediately followed Toranaga's orders to reinforce Robinson instead of New Avalon, and the DCMS regiments already on-planet prepared their defenses for a heavy assault.

On 18 October, Task Force ERUPTIO jumped to Robinson, with the two army groups arriving at opposite jump points. Combine aerospace concentrated its efforts on Second Army Group during planetfall, which claimed one of the Second Fides's primary DropShips. Upon landing, the task force divided up into army groups, each with separate objectives.

First Army Group landed on the continent of Canaan and headed toward the sprawling city of Tiberias, home to the Robinson Battle Academy and the nearby Robinson Standard BattleWorks industriplex.

The First Fides Defenders were assigned the academy grounds, and discovered the past five years of DCMS control had transformed the campus into a breeding ground of young and impressionable Combine sympathizers. In addition to the school's training cadre, *Ryuken-nana* guarded the area. Instead of conducting a head-on assault, the First Fides's special-ops battalion infiltrated the school and convinced many Federated Suns sympathizers to stage a riot. Once the *Ryuken* turned its

attention on the mass disturbances across the campus, the First descended on the school and sent *Ryuken-nana* into a rout.

The core of First Army Group—the Tenth Hastati, Principes, and Triarii—spent two weeks carefully maneuvering into position around the RSBW industriplex while fending off probing attacks by *Ryuken-ni*. After three days of continuous airstrikes on the Eighth Sword of Light's defenses outside the industriplex, Max Ergen ordered his troops to engage. When the *Ryuken-ni* saw themselves under attack from all sides, they quickly wilted beneath the pressure and fell back. The Eighth Sworders, however, fought like the Coordinator herself was watching and held out until Paladin Ergen downed *Tai-sa* Lincoln Marovitch's *Tenshi*. The Eighth initiated a fighting withdrawal and managed to inflict considerable damage on the Tenth Principes when accurate fire caused several RISC weapons to backfire due to critical malfunctions.

Second Army Group's primary task was capturing Beuller, Robinson's capital. The Eleventh and Twelfth Principes tried to contain the Seventh Sword of Light during their drive toward the city, while the Second Fides infiltrated the city itself. In hopes of forcing a quick end to the campaign for Beuller, a team of twelve Fides operatives spent six days planning to abduct *Daimyo* Adam Ogata, the planetary governor installed by Yori Kurita. Each opportunity fell through, and a last-ditch attack on the *daimyo's* personal guard resulted in only two of the Fides operatives escaping with their lives.

3149: THE DAM BREAKS

The Seventh Sword of Light, reportedly being led from the field by the Warlord of New Samarkand himself, held their ground in several desperate battles against Second Army. Shortly after the ill-fated Fides operation, Toranaga's reserve troops made planetfall. RAF aerospace sorties against the incoming DropShips of the Ryuken-go and the First Ghost Regiment had little effect, and soon the two arriving DCMS regiments bore down on Second Army to assist the Seventh Sworders. Although neither of the two reserve regiments had completely recovered from their earlier run-ins with Task Force ERUPTIO, the rested and refitted troops made an appreciable addition to the Combine's defense.

The First Ghost approached the Eleventh Principes with a flanking maneuver while the Seventh Sword held them in place. The Twelfth Principes and Triarii used their mobility to circumvent the First and drive them back while the Second Fides's standard battalions slipped into the city. Within two hours, the Second claimed the government building, but *Daimyo* Ogata had already fled to a secure location. With the city now in RAF hands, the Seventh Sword and Ryuken-go surged forward into the Eleventh. Relief elements from First Army Group broke through the Combine troops' offensive, and the Second Fides crushed the Seventh Sword in a pincer attack just within city limits.

Rather than being forced to admit his defeat to the Coordinator in person, *Tai-shu* Kyuzu chose to hold off the Republic forces as long as he could before being taken captive. After the Seventh Sworders broke, the remainder of Robinson's defenders limped from the city and boarded any DropShip they could find.

On 25 November, Max Ergen declared the capital of the Draconis March liberated in the name of the First Prince of the Federated Suns. Even after the Republic formally planted the Suns' flag on Robinson, *Daimyo* Ogata began waging an underground war against the victorious Republic soldiers. Covert operatives targeted several key RAF battalion and regimental command staff members, including Ergen. Most of the attacks were unsuccessful, but an assassin's bullet put the Paladin in hospital care for three weeks. Upon returning to active duty, Ergen scoured the planet for Ogata's hiding spot. The First Fides ferreted out the *daimyo* in a hidden bunker several hundred kilometers from Bueller and put an end to Kuritan resistance on Robinson.

Paladin Ergen allowed the Warlord of New Samarkand to send a formal request to Yori Kurita, in which Kyuzu humbly petitioned the Coordinator for the privilege of committing *seppuku*. Well into 3150, no response was forthcoming from Luthien, dooming the *tai-shu* to rot in a secure Robinson prison for the foreseeable future.

At the end of the year, Ergen departed Robinson, taking all of First Army Group with him. Until AFFS troops could arrive and formally assume garrison duties, Second Army Group remained to hold the liberated March capital for the Federated Suns.

THE SUN SHINES OVER ROBINSON

[The vid opens on a paramilitary-attired man standing dramatically on a pile of rubble. Behind him are several blocks of flattened buildings and torn-up roadways.]

Clive Pearson: The scenes of devastation are little changed from what they were only two weeks ago. Whole portions of the Robinson's capital city remain wastelands of bombed-out structures and decaying infrastructure. And yet there is a sense of renewal and hope among the deep scars that blanket this world.

[The camera pans left and zooms in on a building in the distance, beyond the blasted-out buildings. A Federated Suns flag can be seen blowing in the afternoon breeze.]

Pearson: Two weeks ago, Devlin Stone's Republic Armed Forces hit Robinson like a tsunami. Appearing at both primary jump points, the lightning-fast attack overwhelmed the DCMS defenders. Already dealing with a belligerent and effective Robinson resistance movement, the Dracs were already spread thin.

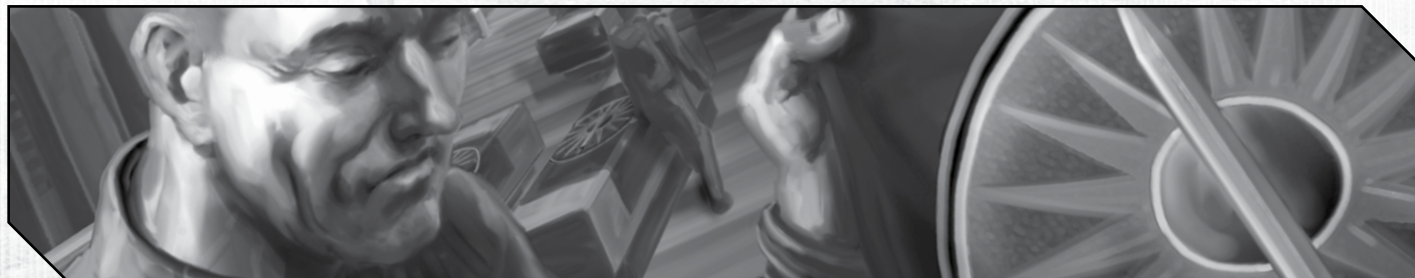
[The image shifts to a montage of short video clips: a blasted-out Dragon, the Kurita insignia barely recognizable on the remains of its smoking torso; a pair of RAF Ospreys striding down a torn-up street, cheering crowds waving from the sidewalks; unarmed Combine infantry being marched through the gates of a prison camp by patchwork Robinson militia.]

Pearson: The RAF steadily gained ground against the DCMS defenders outside Bueller, driving a wave of Combine soldiers and civilian administrators to the capital. Fighting intensified as the Dracs were pushed against their own supply lines. Their decision to punish all of Robinson by refusing to rebuild our shattered capital was turned against them as the RAF punished them at every debris-strewn intersection and open piece of ground.

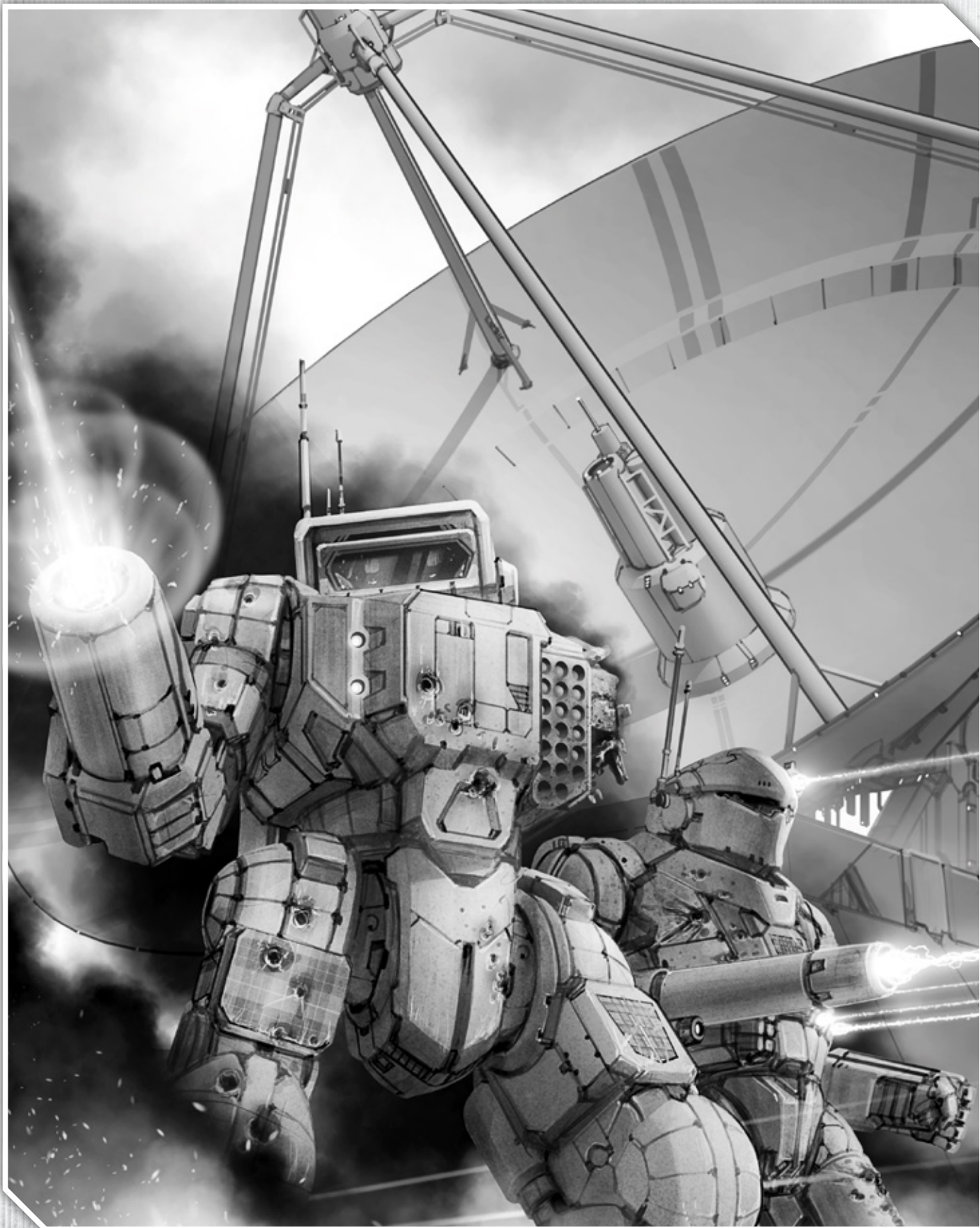
In just over a month, the RAF pushed the Combine from this world and turned over civilian administration to the local resistance members. With reports of the last Combine JumpShip departing the system, we expect the RAF forces will soon depart Robinson to chase them the rest of the way out of the Draconis March.

[The vid switches back to Pearson, hand dramatically draped over his holstered pistol.]

Pearson: Robinson is finally free of the Kurita threat.
—Free Robinson News Report, 27 November 3149



SHATTERED FORTRESS



3150: THE PREDATORS STRIKE

At the beginning of 3150, several nations stood one step away from crashing down the front door of the Republic and completely shifting the balance of power across the Inner Sphere.

Of these aggressors, the Capellan Confederation was closest to the shining prize of humanity's birthplace. While the Confederation's troops waited mere light years from Terra's doorstep, the Chancellor hesitated to take the final step until he had a better picture of what awaited on the other side. Confederation citizens believed they were a heartbeat away from realizing the Confederation's true place in human history. Some onlookers feared what a Capellan-controlled Terra would mean; many, however, felt Daoshen Liao lacked the resources to succeed in that final step and threaten the heart of Devlin Stone's Republic.

Clan Jade Falcon and the Wolf Empire, on the other hand, worried far more Republic citizens than did the Confederation. Many, especially those living on Republic worlds newly exposed to the Clan threat now that the Wall was down, agonized over when the Clans would strike. These people knew a Clan attack—either from the Falcons, the Wolves, or even the relatively quiet Ghost Bears in the Rasalhague Dominion—was an inevitability.

Those living on the spinward side of Fortress Republic saw an equally exigent threat from the Draconis Combine. Though the Combine Coordinator and the Capellan Chancellor had brokered an alliance, House Kurita believed the Dragon's destiny was to preside over all humankind. A Terra under Combine rule would be the first major step in bringing that dream to fruition, and no treaty with the Confederation would prevent the Coordinator from authorizing such a campaign against the Republic.

In 3150, two types of predators prowled the Inner Sphere. The obvious ones—the Wolves, Falcons, and Bears—made no attempt to obfuscate their true goals or hide their real strength. The not-so-obvious ones, however, prowled in the shadows, waiting for the right moment to strike their unwary prey.

WALKING ON EGGHELLS

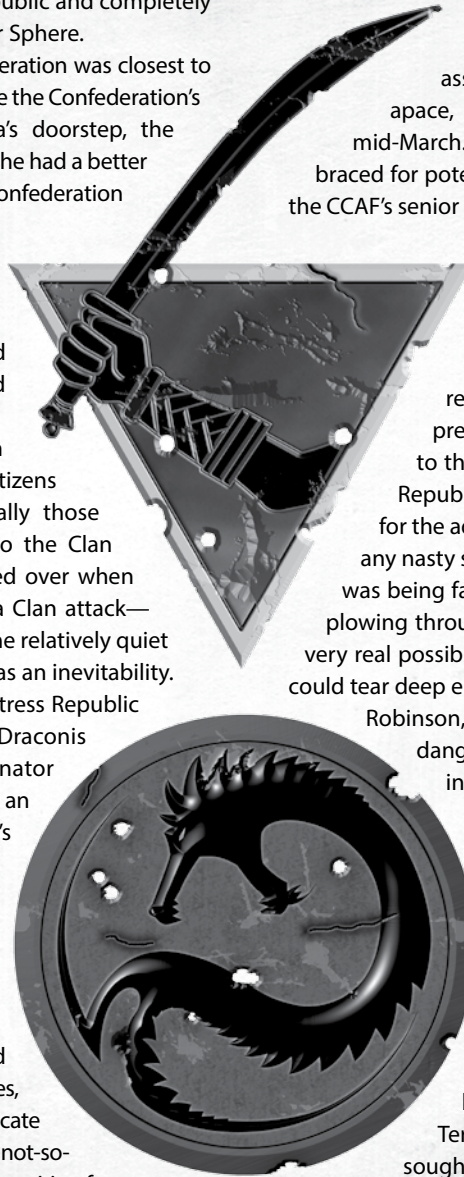
After the conquest of Keid, Daoshen Liao continued to rotate as many CCAF regiments to the front lines as possible without denuding the Confederation's other borders. By this point, the Chancellor, his top military advisors, the Red Lancers, and the Death Commandos had all relocated to Liao to be closer to the war front in order to reduce communication lag at such a critical moment. Once the CCAF was ready to execute the next phase of their invasion of the Republic, Daoshen wanted to ensure he had a front-row seat to the fall of Terra.

THE BLUEPRINTS OF INVASION

As CCAF troops gathered at the post-BÀOYÍNG border in anticipation of an eventual assault on Terra, logistical preparations continued apace, with more regiments moving into position by mid-March. Once most of the forces were in place and braced for potential retaliation from the Republic, Daoshen and the CCAF's senior military staff held a conference to determine their next move.

On each former Republic planet taken in Operation BÀOYÍNG, Daoshen had stationed a small contingent of advance-warning troops. The bulk of his available reserves, however, assembled on worlds along the pre-BÀOYÍNG border—planets that had belonged to the Confederation before the CCAF's drive into the Republic. This arrangement established a fallback point for the advance-warning troops, should the Republic have any nasty surprises in store. The Strategios insisted Daoshen was being far too cautious, but the threat of Republic troops plowing through the Confederation's hard-earned gains was a very real possibility in the Chancellor's mind. If an RAF blitzkrieg could tear deep enough through Combine space to reach and take Robinson, then Daoshen's base on Liao could very well be in danger of a Republic strike. Though some Maskirovka intelligence pointed to the RAF being unable to duplicate Operation ERUPTIO's effect within the Confederation's borders, other reports indicated potential RAF military action against the CCAF but could not determine its scope. To further complicate matters, Maskirovka reports from the Free Worlds League and shared-intelligence briefs from the Draconis Combine warned of rumblings from the Wolf Empire and the Jade Falcon Occupation Zone. One or both Clans were gearing up for a charge toward Terra. Faced with this knowledge, the Strategios sought additional measures to ensure that the CCAF's own invasion of Terra could withstand both the might of the RAF and the incoming Clans. Wheels were set into motion, and Daoshen's plans for the invasion of Terra continued.

During this planning phase, a rash of equipment failures plagued Capellan troops holding station on Procyon, Keid, and Epsilon Indi. Within the span of three weeks, the First and Fourth Liao Guards, the Second Canopian Lancers, the Fifth Sian Dragoons, and Warrior House Dai Da Chi all suffered debilitating acts of sabotage that destroyed ammunition stores, rendered aerofighters and whole lances of 'Mechs inoperable, and left various DropShips needing several weeks of repairs to return to spaceworthiness. It was no accident that the affected formations were earmarked to participate in the initial wave of the Confederation's invasion of



SHATTERED FORTRESS

Terra. Security measures increased on all worlds taken in BÀOYǪNG and TIAMAT, but no further acts of overt sabotage were reported. Rather than continue as planned, Daoshen and the Strategios reevaluated their invasion. First and foremost, they needed some indication of what awaited them at their final destination.

On 16 April, a Capellan exploratory force consisting of two merchant JumpShips equipped with Clan transponders jumped from Procyon to Terra to glean intelligence on the system. If the vessels were accosted by overwhelming naval force, their ostensible status as merchants would keep them from being attacked. About two hours after the jump to Terra, emergence waves were detected at the standard jump points in the Procyon system. Both civilian vessels were located shortly thereafter: the hull of each JumpShip had been torn apart and fused back together, with no survivors.

The Wall around Terra was still operational.

THE SILENT FRONT

In February 3150, the DCMS geared up to execute its second wave of Operation TIAMAT, targeting at least three Republic worlds immediately across the border.

Due to the CCAF having operational knowledge of TIAMAT, Capellan intelligence alerted *Tai-shu* Mineo Tadashige, the new Warlord of Dieron, of the Republic's successful sabotage on Capellan units intending to invade the Republic. The communiqués advised caution, as the full extent of the Republic's capabilities was unknown. Tadashige took these reports with a pinch of salt and proceeded to test the waters of Asta, Altair, and Fomalhaut with small intelligence-gathering raids before committing troops to invading these worlds. Each scouting force returned without incident and gave reports of a disturbing quiet on the Republic front. All of the RAF's attention was seemingly turned toward the anti-spinward and coreward Clan threats instead of on the Draconis Combine. Tadashige, determined to prove his elevation to Warlord of Dieron was not without merit, intended to exploit the Republic's distraction to the fullest. To see such advantage and not take it would be foolhardy.

In late March, elements of the Second Dieron Regulars and the Sixteenth Sun Zhang Cadre took up position on all three worlds. On Asta, the Sixteenth Sun Zhang tore through the Republic militia, though underground insurgency campaigns sprouted up shortly thereafter. On Altair, the Second Dieron's First Battalion and its support elements overwhelmed the conventional garrison troops and took few prisoners. On Fomalhaut, however, the remaining two Second Dieron battalions encountered stiffer resistance in the form of the Aquamarines, a local combined-arms mercenary battalion that fought alongside the planet's standing militia forces. The mercenaries' tendency toward dirty, dishonorable tactics and their proficiency in coastal maneuvers led the DCMS troops to offer no quarter, which only spurred the defenders to target officers and attack the Second's seaside cantonments directly. The eventual capture and public execution of the Aquamarines' commander blasted the wind out of the defense's sails, and the unit broke, disappearing into the populace. Though no major resistance campaigns against the Combine occupiers took shape, the Second was unable to locate any of the missing mercs.

Due to the paper-thin defenses on all three worlds, Tadashige proposed that the High Command consider a strike on Terra, so that House Kurita could claim the immortal glory of putting the Republic to the sword before the Clans were in position to invade. However, much to the Warlord of Dieron's dismay, the Coordinator ordered an indefinite halt to TIAMAT operations, and for good reason. News from Capellan intelligence told of Terra's Wall still being active, which gave pause to Tadashige's ambition—at least for the moment.

THE HARRIED DRAGON

Now that the Combine no longer eyed Republic worlds, Toranaga sought to normalize the situation brewing in the swiftly narrowing Dragon's Tongue and the destabilizing region of former Draconis March worlds. Unfortunately for the Combine, the retaking of Coloma from the Federated Suns had not seemed to hinder the AFFS task force from raiding Tongue worlds. With the loss of Coloma's logistics hub, Task Force PERCEVAL had been forced to return to Remagen for rest and resupply. This increased the intervals between raids and gave the Tongue garrisons a moment to catch their breath. The loss of Robinson had dealt a significant blow to the New Samarkand District's morale, and with the planet no longer in the Dragon's control, the AFFS throughout the entire Draconis March had grown bolder.

Even the Coordinator took notice of the turmoil in the rimward half of her realm. She met with the *kanrei* one-on-one and delivered an ultimatum: control the situation in the Dragon's Tongue and the former Draconis March or she would find him a quiet world in the Combine's backwater on which to retire and contemplate his mistakes.

With that threat hanging over him, Toranaga knew that his puppet had finally cut her strings. His fervent hope was that he and his Warlords could maintain the stability of the rimward border.

SECURING THE DRACONIS MARCH

For the next several months, Toranaga funneled his attention toward the Draconis March. Although the RAF task force that fought its way toward Robinson did not claim any worlds apart from Robinson itself, several systems in the rimward Dieron and Benjamin Military Districts had become unstable, both politically and militarily. The region had devolved due to the use of Dieron and Benjamin troops for the TIAMAT offensive, and the abandonment of the operation freed up a portion of troops to reassert the Dragon's control over these conflicted worlds. Toranaga tasked the Warlords of Dieron and Benjamin with handling the situation in any way possible.

Tai-shus Tadashige and Hayashida agreed that the best course of action for solidifying the region was to retake Robinson from the Republic forces. The RAF's conquest of Robinson had emboldened not only the AFFS in the region, but also former Federated Suns civilians living on every Combine world the RAF had touched. A conference with the Warlord of New Samarkand, *Tai-shu* Takutaro Inada, showed all three Warlords in agreement. Toranaga vehemently disagreed with them, however. Recent intelligence-gathering raids on Robinson revealed that the RAF presence there was still strong, but undergoing the process of handing over the

3150: THE PREDATORS STRIKE

keys to the AFFS. If the DCMS committed enough forces to retake the planet, the Combine risked regaining Robinson but losing its grip on a number of other March worlds. This would weaken the Combine's position as a whole and further anger the Coordinator. Plus, Yori Kurita had clearly instructed Toranaga to "control the situation," not to explicitly retake the march capital. The *kanrei* waged an uphill battle in convincing his Warlords that Robinson was a larger problem demanding a long-term solution, but they finally acquiesced to his leadership.

Beginning in mid-March, the Warlords of Dieron, Benjamin, and New Samarkand redistributed their districts' forward lines in an effort to mop up the damage that Operation ERUPTIO had inflicted on the Dragon. As TIAMAT forces were already concentrated in the portion of the Dieron District closest to the Republic and the Federated Suns, that region required the least extensive repairs. The systems immediately along the Suns' border, however, were another matter altogether. By redeploying the TIAMAT troops to the Benjamin and New Samarkand Districts, the Warlords hoped to arrest and eventually repair the damage.

Toranaga quickly learned that the systems raided by PERCEVAL and ERUPTIO would not be the problem: the neighboring worlds posed the real threat. Commerce and courier communication between these systems precipitated a groundswell of support

for the Federated Suns, and local Civilian Guidance Corps and planetary militia had difficulty containing riots and anti-Kurita demonstrations. Martial law and strict curfews were enacted in the worst cases, such as Rochester and Xhosa VII, but this only served to drive rebellion to greater heights.

Federated Suns Counterattacks

In early February, several of these worlds were targeted by the AFFS. Many of the attackers were small, combined-arms battalions with never-before-seen insignia and camo schemes, and their arrangement and tactical quality suggested they were recently raised AFFS formations rather than longstanding units. On Le Blanc, an assault by the Third Davion Irregulars and a combination of riots, partisan action, and the added bonus of the mercenary-led resistance movement pushed the already struggling Nineteenth Galedon Regulars off-planet. On Clovis, the beleaguered Second Battalion of the First Avalon Hussars greeted the Fifth Davion Irregulars with open arms. For the previous three years, Second Battalion had been slowly chipping away at the Forty-fifth Benjamin Regulars, and the Hussars were elated that Erik Sandoval had kept his promise to return. Together, the two battalions of AFFS troops claimed the planet and sent the Forty-fifth limping back to the Combine.

Similar situations occurred on other former Draconis March worlds. Rochester fell to the Seventh Davion Irregulars on 28 February, the Sixth Davion Irregulars claimed Cartago two days later, and Franklin changed its allegiance on 5 March after civilians overthrew the planetary government and raised a Suns-loyal militia. All told, a total of nine systems either defected to Draconis March control or were reclaimed by AFFS troops.

The Robinson Situation

Against Toranaga's advice, *Tai-shu* Inada ordered the Sixteenth Galedon Regulars to Robinson. Though Inada later claimed to Toranaga that his objective was solely intelligence gathering, he committed the whole of the Sixteenth and its support elements to the attack.

The Sixteenth Regulars landed on Robinson on 12 February. Much to *Tai-sa* Nanami Kamata's surprise, initial reconnaissance probes showed the RAF garrison had departed, which led him to believe that Robinson was poorly defended. Kamata concluded that the RAF had claimed Robinson on the Federated Suns' behalf but were called away before AFFS troops could arrive. Kamata sought to capitalize on this strategic mistake and landed his troops in force.

The Sixteenth charged towards Beuller and the RSBW industriplex with the intent of claiming both objectives before the Federated Suns could drum up defenders. While the Sixteenth's Second Battalion was en route to Beuller, the First Davion Irregulars emerged from hiding and plowed through the DCMS troops' flank and rearguard. Initially, the First Irregulars were outnumbered and outgunned: the cobbled-together combined-arms battalion found itself facing a well-equipped DCMS 'Mech battalion with conventional and aerospace support. Instead of wilting beneath Second Battalion's strong defensive maneuvers, artillery, and aerospace flyovers, the First Davion Irregulars channeled their deep-seated hatred of the Combine and continued on long after most troops would have retreated.



SHATTERED FORTRESS

THE AFFS STRIKES BACK

[The vid fades onto a trampled plain nestled between two ranges of rolling hills. A shattered Union DropShip can be seen in the mid-ground. One side is completely caved in and black smoke pours out of the gaping wound, while on the other side, the scorched hull still clearly shows the Kurita crest. A handful of destroyed tanks and two BattleMechs, recognizable as Combine Rokurokubi, dot the battle-strewn plain. Just visible on the right side of the screen is a large black scar across the nearby hills. The remains of an unidentified DropShip are scattered across the hillside, smoke and flames still rising from the wreckage.]

[off camera]: "You see that, *kanrei*? You thought we were bluffing? You thought when the Republic was gone we'd be defenseless? You thought you'd just be able to just waltz back onto Robinson without a 'by your leave'?"

[The image switches to the familiar figure of Clive Pearson. He is sitting on the front glacis of a Kruger Combat Car.]

"We were waiting for you, *kanrei*. The AFFS is back and we're not a bunch of skirt-wearing pushovers like the 'samurai' you sent to teach us a lesson. Last month, AFFS forces took over the protection of at least a half-dozen of our worlds from the RAF. Some of those units may be filled with half-trained recruits and number barely a third of an LCT in force. But what they lack in skill or numbers, they make up for in passion and fire."

[Pearson waves out at the battleground in front of him.]

"You can see what that fire achieved right here on Robinson. You sent your best to see what resistance a bunch of 'pups' could put up. Well, we put up a damned fine resistance. Your shiny battle armor was like clay pigeons against the reengineered lasers on our new *Prey Seekers*. And you should've known better than to send 'Mechs with knives to a real gun fight. Your Galedon babies were no match for our real 'Mechs. And lest you think our pilots have lost their edge, we've got two DropShips here that beg to differ.

"My sources tell me you'll find the same welcome on many more worlds very soon. Plus, the AFFS is deploying across your border as we speak. You see, you could knock us down. You could grind us under your boot. You could make us cry out in pain. But you couldn't break us, you couldn't kill us. We're the Draconis March, and we are the cockroaches of the bloody galaxy. We're going to retake our worlds, we're going to rebuild. And when we are done..."

[The camera zooms in on Pearson's face.]

"We're coming for you, *Kanrei*. We're coming and we won't miss."

—Free Robinson News Vid Report, 15 February 3150

Within an hour, Second Battalion retreated to link up with the rest of the Sixteenth en route to the RSBW complex. Upon regrouping, the Sixteenth found itself pinned between the Second Davion Irregulars and the Twentieth Avalon Hussars' two understrength battalions. The Sixteenth's First Battalion was still more than five kilometers from the RSBW grounds when the three AFFS battalions intercepted them. Second Battalion's arrival from Beuller offset some of the pressure, but the determined Davion Irregulars refused to give ground and dogged the embarrassed survivors of the Sixteenth all the way back to their DropShips. Only an understrength battalion of the Sixteenth Galedon Regulars survived to report to Warlord Inada. Due to the hasty manner in which the Sixteenth retreated, the intelligence reports given to Inada varied widely. Accounts reported anywhere from as little as one battalion of green troops to several regiments of hardened veterans in defense of the planet.

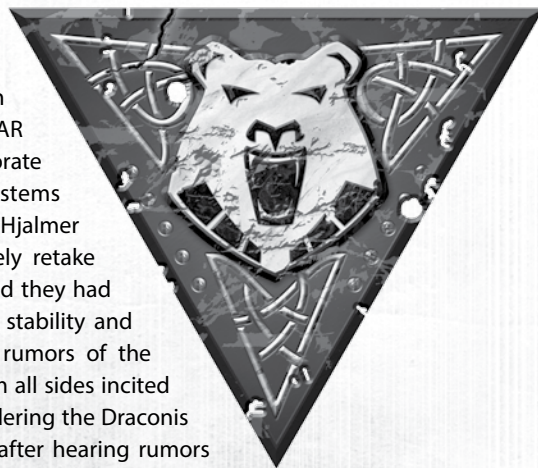
Because of Inada's decision to probe Robinson against Toranaga's express wishes and the subsequent loss of more than a battalion of troops when the Combine military was already stretched too thin, Toranaga ordered Inada's censure and immediate dismissal from service. The Coordinator countermanded the *kanrei*'s directive, however, and Inada remained as Warlord of New Samarkand. At the next meeting of the High Command, Toranaga explicitly declared Robinson off limits: if the DCMS committed the troops necessary to retake the world, an AFFS counterattack elsewhere along the front could spell disaster.

Regardless, Inada's ill-advised raid on Robinson had not been entirely without merit. The knowledge that the RAF garrison was no longer present raised an important question: where had the Republic troops gone? Toranaga had no way to determine if Second Army Group was poised to make further spoiling strikes on the Combine, if it had moved to assist Task Force PERCEVAL in the vicinity of New Avalon, or if it had simply returned to the Republic. These questions would plague the High Command for months, but Toranaga held true to his mandate from the Coordinator. Though the Dragon had lost Robinson and a few less-significant worlds, the Combine's border with the Federated Suns had stabilized to acceptable levels. By mid-year, cross-border raids perpetrated by either side trickled down to almost nothing, and a tentative status quo returned to the Draconis March.

THE SLEEPING BEAR

Throughout Operations SHOFAR and ERUPTIO, the Rasalhague Dominion watched and waited. After SHOFAR cost the Dominion two Vega Protectorate worlds, the civilians of nearby systems protested Khan Dalia Bekker and Prince Hjalmer Miraborg's decision to not immediately retake the planets. The Vegan peoples claimed they had joined the Dominion in order to gain stability and protection from nearby threats, and rumors of the reopened Republic being invaded from all sides incited further panic. Protectorate worlds bordering the Draconis Combine also feared a DCMS assault after hearing rumors of military action within the Dieron Military District. Many systems threatened to secede from the Dominion if neither Khan nor prince would take action and fulfill the Dominion's promise to protect the Vegan worlds.

Unbeknownst to the Vegan civilians, Bekker and Miraborg had not taken the situation lightly. Upon the first reports of Atria and Ko defecting to the Republic, the Dominion Council debated how to approach the shifting border. On one hand, the Vega Protectorate was formed by former Republic worlds abandoned when



3150: THE PREDATORS STRIKE

Fortress Republic was raised; on the other, the Dominion had promised defense to the Protectorate, and Fortress Republic was an unknown that gave even the Dominion leadership pause. Dominion Watch agents monitored the situation on both Atria and Ko, and determined the civilian castes were not being treated unfairly; thus, there was no need for military intervention. In essence, the two former Vegan worlds had returned “home.” Regardless, the rest of the Protectorate pushed the Dominion Council to act. Reluctant to test the Dominion’s *touman* against an opponent of unknown strength, Bekker and Miraborg sought other options.

In April 3150, the Dominion made its move—into the Draconis Combine. After a successful diversionary raid on Shionoha, three Clusters hit Lambrecht and encountered a sizable contingent of militia and mercenaries rather than DCMS regulars. After an intense fight, the battered mercenaries departed deeper into the Combine and a single Dominion Cluster moved on to seize Dyev from the planetary militia. Although these decisive victories quieted the Vegans’ clamoring for protection from the Combine, the unrest regarding the Republic potentially invading the Vega Protectorate grew to a steady simmer.

DOMINION DOMINATES COMBINE

Department of Military Intelligence Brief

Date: 29 July 3150

Region: RasDom/DC

Filed By: Agent 921-386-712

The Bears have finally been provoked into action against the Combine. If border actions like these continue, they may adversely affect the RAF’s defensive plans.

The Combine’s atypically passive response to Rasalhague Dominion raids on their border worlds confirmed what my team’s intelligence gathering had already suspected: the DCMS is focused on the war with the Federated Suns to the exclusion of all else. Because of this, and due to unrest within the Vega Protectorate, the Dominion seized on this opportunity to create a buffer for the Protectorate and to enlarge the Dominion’s corridor to the Republic.

While the Jade Falcons were busy with their own invasion, the Dominion leadership accepted the risk of temporarily reducing the defenses on Vega Protectorate worlds bordering Falcon territory. Preparatory measures for the planned border actions included relocating the Fifth Bear Guards and Third Bear Regulars to join the 357th Assault Cluster on Moore. Once the Dominion’s forces were in place, offensive operations commenced as follows.

Shionoha: With slightly different timing, the Third Vegan Regulars’ diversionary strike on Shionoha might have found that world all but undefended. The on-planet Seventh Legion of Vega was in the middle of rotating closer to the Federated Suns to garrison newly acquired worlds there, and the Regulars arrived as the Seventh were boarding their DropShips. The Regulars savaged the spaceport and severely damaged the DropShip fleet assembled there, forcing the Seventh back to the field. The Seventh, superior in both numbers and experience to the Regulars, slaughtered the Third. Less than a quarter of those who ventured to Shionoha returned to the Vega Protectorate.

Lambrecht: While the distracted Combine failed to note the heavy raid on Shionoha, the true Dominion invasion took place. The Bears sent the forces assembled at Moore against Lambrecht’s planetary militia and a mercenary battalion. The defenders held out for three weeks, but the superior numbers of Omega Galaxy won out. The mercenaries retreated to their DropShips with heavy casualties, and their aerospace wing sacrificed itself to clear a path free of Dominion opposition, allowing the mercenaries to escape the system.

The sudden onslaught caught the DCMS off-balance. The closest formation was the Third An Ting Legion, stationed on Ascella. The Third quickly loaded up and combat-dropped onto Lambrecht, but the Dominion’s warriors executed effective defensive maneuvers. The remains of the Third tried desperately to retreat off-world, but the Dominion aerospace had crippled or destroyed many of the DCMS DropShips during the initial combat drop. The Legion fled to the southern continents and went to ground. Our agents have not confirmed their destruction, but it is unlikely they held out very long.

Dyev: The 357th Assault Cluster easily claimed Dyev by slaughtering the local militia, who refused to surrender.

Conclusion: Across the three offensive campaigns, the Dominion sustained only 40 percent casualties. The DCMS, however, lost an entire regiment, and another was rendered combat-ineffective for the next fourteen months. Analysis believes the Dominion’s *touman* remains in a position to threaten Republic systems, but we should not expect any attack from the overextended DCMS along the Combine border.

WOLVES ON THE HUNT

Following the Wolf Empire assaults on the Republic Remnant in mid-3149, many eyes remained focused on Clan Wolf to ascertain what Khan Alaric Ward's next actions would be. Operatives from Republic DMI, LIC, SAFE, and the respective Watches of Clan Jade Falcon and the Rasalhague Dominion all kept tabs on the Wolves' movements. Initial intelligence analyses concluded that Alaric would drive straight to the heart of the Republic. However, the Empire's own Watch planted many false leads in order to obfuscate the Wolves' ultimate objectives.

From mid-3149 to early 3150, the Wolf Empire planned a campaign to take full advantage of the deactivation of the Fortress Wall and the continuing confusion propagated by the HPG blackout. Several different targets were discussed publicly, but only Alaric's most trusted commanders knew his true goals.

THE ASSAULT OF SKYE

On 2 March 3150, the Wolf Empire surprised all observers by arriving in the Falcon-controlled system of Skye. Three frontline Clusters from Beta Galaxy burned toward the planet while broadcasting a personal *batchall* from Alaric Ward himself. Falcon saKhan Ryan Pryde answered the challenge and committed his Turkina Keshik and the 124th Falcon Striker Cluster to Skye's defense.

The 124th moved into position to curb the Wolf advance toward the New London Spaceport while Turkina Keshik elements moved in for a strike-and-fade maneuver. Instead of approaching head-on, the Thirteenth Wolf Guard Striker Cluster performed a combat drop on New London itself, landing in the razed quarter of the city. The Thirteenth pushed toward capturing the New London Capital House while the Nineteenth Wolf Striker Cluster targeted the former Sanglamore Military Academy campus.

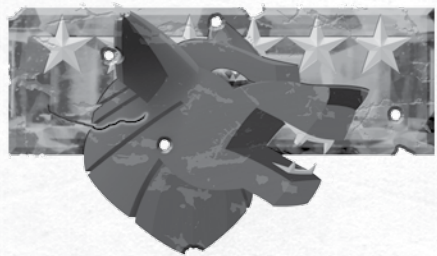
The 124th's forward elements clashed with the Thirteenth on the streets of New London, and Galaxy Commander Noritomo Helmer used his familiarity with the city's layout to repulse the Wolves. The Falcons held nothing back, often demolishing whole city blocks just to inflict damage on the Wolves. The tactic backfired when the Ninth Wolf Guard Striker Cluster caught most of the 124th in a pincer, and a collapsing building buried Noritomo Helmer's *Gyrfalcon* beneath untold rubble. The remainder of the 124th withdrew toward Norfolk with the intent of reinforcing saKhan Pryde's command post at Sanglamore.

Scattered reports indicated Alaric's Silver Keshik was also on-planet. This led to uncertainty among the Falcon ranks: Alaric had only ever been beaten in combat once, and his victorious opponent, Anastasia Kerensky, was now his saKhan. Based on the reports, the Turkina Keshik pushed its ferocity to a higher level and poured overwhelming firepower into the Nineteenth's incoming formations, in hopes Alaric would reveal himself.

To defend saKhan Pryde's base, two Turkina Keshik Trinaries hit the Wolves with bait-and-switch maneuvers until the rest of the Keshik could flank the Nineteenth. Chatter on the Wolves' frequency made remarks to Alaric and the Silver Keshik's impending arrival, which prompted Turkina Keshik to surge forward into the Nineteenth. The Ninth Wolf Guard Strikers then blindsided the Falcons from the rear, crushing them against the Nineteenth's anvil. Several determined Falcons refused to fall back in hopes of getting Alaric Ward in their sights and dealing him a second defeat, but Alaric did not appear, and the Falcon warriors who fought on were destroyed.

After the rout of Turkina Keshik, further analysis of the *batchall* transmission revealed Alaric was not even in the system. His challenge was in fact a carefully recorded message designed to lure the Falcons into overcommitting their assets in hopes of challenging Alaric personally. Ryan Pryde cursed Alaric Ward for using such a deceitful tactic. With Malvina Hazen and the bulk of the Clan's frontline Clusters maneuvering around the Coventry, Tharkad, and Donegal fronts, Pryde knew holding out for backup would spell his destruction. Rather than risk reinforcements not arriving in time, he ordered a full withdrawal from Skye on 12 March.

After the Turkina Keshik and the 124th abandoned Skye, Galaxy Commander Helmer was found alive among the wreckage in New London, and Star Colonel Don Cooper of the Thirteenth Wolf Guard Battle Cluster claimed him as a bondsman. At first, Helmer chafed at the bondcord of the Falcons' greatest rival Clan. But he soon realized the Wolf Empire's *touman* might be his only means of destroying Malvina Hazen, whom he believed was leading his former Clan—and possibly the entire Inner Sphere—into utter ruin. If allying with Clan Wolf was what it took to prevent Malvina Hazen from ever setting foot on Terra, Helmer resolved to ingratiate himself with Alaric Ward. Within two weeks, Star Colonel Cooper had cut Noritomo Helmer's bondcord.



3150: THE PREDATORS STRIKE

CHASING DOWN THE HERD

Within days of Skye falling to the Wolf Empire, another Wolf force dropped on Zebebelgenubi. The Ninety-third Wolf Striker Cluster quickly eradicated the Falcons' *solahma* garrison, and the Falcons moved to reinforce the systems around Skye. Devlin Stone and the RAF watched the Skye region with interest, as the Wolves only needed to claim a few more worlds to deny the Falcons their direct avenue to Terra.

By the time elements of the Seventh Falcon Striker Cluster arrived on Zebebelgenubi, Star Colonel Randy Buhallin was surprised to learn that the Ninety-third had already departed the planet. The Falcons repositioned to prepare for Wolf assaults on Nusakan, Alkalurops, Skondia, and Alphecca, but the attacks never came.

Collapse of the Remnant

Instead of further action against the Falcons, Alaric Ward sent Wolf Empire forces to seize the final two worlds of the former Republic Remnant.

On 25 March, the Fifth and Ninth Wolf Battle Clusters descended on Callison. Under the command of Knight Ariana Zou, the Seventh Hastati diverted the Ninth from New Rolso's spaceport and prevented the Fifth from reaching Fallosa, but the Wolves rallied and the RAF forces began giving ground. During the Seventh's strategic withdrawal, Star Colonel Krystal Vickers of the Fifth Wolf Battle Cluster faced Ariana Zou in single combat. Though Zou's *Griffin* was already damaged, she attempted to halt Vickers's advance. After a fierce battle, Vickers downed the former Paladin's 'Mech and claimed Zou as a bondswoman. Once Zou was defeated, the Seventh held on as long as they could before withdrawing from the planet with heavy losses.

While fighting raged on Callison, the Ninth and 328th Wolf Assault Clusters landed on Marcus. As other RAF troops had moved deeper into the Republic's core to reinforce vital systems, only the remnants of the Eighth Triarii and the lone remaining Third Principes battalion defended the system. Still bitter about being ejected from Castor by Operation SHOFAR, the 328th came at the Eighth Triarii hard and fast, nearly shattering them in the initial charge. The Ninth Wolf Assault drove toward the capital city of Zotikos and broke the Third Principes within three hours. Forty-five hours after the Wolves landed, the RAF abandoned the last of the former Remnant worlds to the Wolf Empire.

The Wolf Pounces

Many Republic intelligence analysts assumed the Wolves would either stop and consolidate their gains or work their way through the Jade Falcon OZ, but Alaric Ward had different plans. While his warriors were mopping up the Remnant worlds, elements of Alpha and Beta Galaxies stormed across the Republic's anti-spinward border.

The two primary Wolf Empire thrusts targeted Denebola and Castor. On Denebola, rumors of Alaric Ward's presence among the Clan Wolf warriors proved true this time. Alaric's Silver Keshik led the Ninth Wolf Guard Striker and Seventy-ninth Wolf Battle Clusters into battle against the Fifteenth Principes Guards. Since the Wolves arrived at a pirate point, the Fifteenth's conventional assets had little time to properly dig in along the lone approach to St. Cameron, so the RAF defenders were forced to fight on the move or risk being scattered. Alaric cast his net wide and surrounded the Fifteenth and its support elements. As he marched toward St. Cameron, his Wolves systematically destroyed the disorganized defenders. Depending on which Cluster or Trinary commander was on the scene, those RAF soldiers who surrendered were absorbed into the Wolf Empire's *touman*, assimilated into the civilian castes, or executed.

On Castor, the Wolf Empire faced its toughest challenge of the invasion into the Republic. Elements of the Fifteenth Hastati and Fifth Fides held the planet, and Anastasia Kerensky ordered the Golden Keshik, the Fourth Wolf Guard, and Third Wolf Guard Battle Clusters to take the planet at all costs. The Fifteenth Hastati and its support elements proved a sizable obstacle, but the swiftness and ferocity of Kerensky's unexpected assault found the defenders ill-prepared to counter the Wolves'

THE SKYE IS FALLING

New London—Thank you for tuning into WolfCom, your only source of information inside the Wolf Empire. Our forces have triumphantly freed the system of Skye, both from the uncaring nobles who ruled it for centuries and Clan Jade Falcon, which captured it a decade ago. Here in New London, you can see local citizens lining the streets with signs reading "Thank Kerensky for the Wolves" and "Finally an End to Unrest." The ruins in the background are evidence of damage still lingering from fighting between the Successor Lords as well as the Falcons' careless disregard of civilian structures. Engineering and construction teams have already begun rebuilding here on Skye, the newest planet under the protection of Clan Wolf.

To achieve this historic victory, the Thirteenth Wolf Guard Striker Cluster performed a combat drop on New London, bypassing the Jade Falcon forces expecting an attack on the New London Spaceport. The Thirteenth secured the ravaged quarter of the city—an area which the Jade Falcons had deliberately set to the torch after first conquering Skye—and fought the Falcon defenders in the city streets while Ninth Wolf Guard Striker Cluster and the Nineteenth Wolf Striker Cluster pursued their own objectives.

The 124th Falcon Striker Cluster hit the Thirteenth hard and looked for weak points, but none were to be found. Soon the ill-fated Falcons found themselves trapped in a pincer caused by their own lack of foresight. The Ninth made quick work of the outnumbered Falcons, valiantly dispatching the Falcon commander. The cowardly Falcons lost even more warriors in the retreat. Khan Malvina Hazen will doubtless have dire consequences waiting for those who fled this battle, while ignoring her Clan's failure to defeat challenges by the Wolf Empire.

The decision by Khan Ward to strike at Skye has goaded the Jade Falcons to divert forces to cover other possible assaults. The Falcons are now on the defensive; their inability to know where the Wolf Empire will strike next gives our great Khan, Alaric Ward, the upper hand for the near future. Additionally, Republic representatives have made contact with Khan Ward and requested he return Skye to them. Our illustrious Khan replied: "If the Republic wishes to reclaim Skye from the Wolf Empire, they are welcome to challenge me."

—WolfCom broadcast, 17 March 3150

SHATTERED FORTRESS

drive towards the RAF's forward bases. At first, the Fifth Fides's RISC weapons inflicted considerable damage on the Third Wolf Guard, but Kerensky's Keshik and the Fourth hunted down and destroyed any RISC-equipped 'Mechs with extreme prejudice. The few she managed to salvage were turned against their original owners at great expense: more often than not, the former Fides 'Mechs would violently explode after only a few 'Mech-killing shots, destroying the attacker and damaging anyone nearby. After continuous pressure, Kerensky's assault force drove the Republic troops from the planet. In addition to claiming Castor, the saKhan had chosen to preserve a few intact RISC weapons. These she had shipped to Gienah for the scientist caste to study, with a note warning them to exercise extreme caution.

Shortly after the Wolves claimed Denebola and Castor, five more poorly defended Republic worlds fell to the Wolf Empire, putting the Clan within pouncing distance of Terra. The RAF and the Jade Falcons scrambled to address the Wolf assault, but nothing seemed able to stop Alaric's momentum.

The Rear of the Pack

During the last stages of the Wolves' invasion into the Republic, a sizeable task force jumped to the Empire's Shiloh system in late March and burned planetside. Located behind the Wolves' active borders, Shiloh was poorly defended. Under the command of Paladin Max Ergen, the RAF's First Army Group claimed the planet after a short skirmish with a *solahma* garrison.

Upon returning from combat on Robinson in late 3149, Ergen and First Army had briefly stopped on Terra to rearm and fill as many empty billets as Terra's training centers and academies could allow. Then, using uninhabited systems, Ergen's task force had headed for Shiloh. Once Shiloh was under Republic control, Ergen used the system as First Army's base of operations and as a bridgehead into the Wolves' vulnerable rear areas.

First Army Group then struck Gacrux, quickly overwhelming the Bronze Keshik and 271st Wolf Guard Assault Cluster with swarm tactics and advanced Republic equipment. In mid-April, the refitted Second Army Group linked up with Ergen on Shiloh and used the Republic staging point to attack Phecda on 18 April. After a brutal running battle that lasted four days, the Eleventh Battle Cluster retreated to Wyatt. Two days later, Ergen led First Army to Wing and pushed the Steel Keshik and Nineteenth Wolf Guard Battle Cluster into the Wolf Empire's spinward reaches. By seizing these four worlds, Paladin Ergen successfully cut off most of the Wolves' supply lines to the Republic front.

Denied logistical support from the main body of the Wolf Empire, Alaric had little choice but to halt his push into the Republic. He and Anastasia immediately repositioned their warriors, reassigning Clusters intended for subsequent invasion waves or tapping second-line Clusters deeper within the Empire.

Alaric's first order of business was to deny the RAF its staging base. In late April, Wolf forces from rear areas arrived at Shiloh. Before ground troops made planetfall, Wolf DropShips and aerofighters bombarded every barracks, cantonment, forward base, and supply dump on the planet. This bombardment continued for two weeks; afterward, the Seventh Wolf Guard Battle Cluster and two Theta

Galaxy Clusters dropped onto the planet to confront what remained of the First Army Group detachment. The Ninth Wolf Cavalry tore through the limping Tenth Principes and drove them into the Consecrated Desert. Instead of engaging the Tenth, the Ninth Cavalry left what remained of the Tenth Principes to the mercy of a vicious sandstorm; subsequent reports indicated that the last of the Tenth died from exposure or dehydration. The Seventh Wolf Guard Battle and Twenty-third Wolf Garrison Clusters then chased the First Fides Defenders to the outskirts of Randersville, hobbling the RAF troops and forcing them into retreat.

On Gacrux, the Bronze Keshik and 271st Wolf Guard Assault Cluster returned to seek vengeance on the Republic interlopers. This time accompanied by the Green Keshik and the Ninety-third Wolf Striker Cluster, the Wolf force faced an easier task against the Twelfth Triarii. During a nighttime strike, the Wolves overran the RAF positions, and the death of Colonel Norishige Shiroyama turned the Twelfth's retreat into a rout. The Wolves then trapped the Republic troops, and Galaxy Commander Elise Ward ordered them destroyed to the last man.

The May counterattack on Phecda was a foregone conclusion before the Wolf task force even landed. Loyal Wolf civilians left behind when the Republic attacked had taken the initiative to sabotage the RAF's war effort while remaining true to their caste lines. Laborers and merchants ensured logistical shipments went "missing" while techs vandalized repair facilities and tampered with weaponry. When the Wolves arrived, the Twelfth Principes and Second Fides were in such disarray they could barely raise a defense against three frontline Wolf Clusters. The RAF troops held out as long as possible before withdrawing back to the Republic.

The Battle of Port Wyvern

The Wolves saw no sign of Paladin Max Ergen on any of these recaptured worlds. When Alaric planned to retake Wing, Anastasia Kerensky won a fierce round of bidding between Wolf commanders to lead the attack. If the RAF commander was still in Wolf space, he and his Tenth Hastati Sentinels had to be located on this planet, and Anastasia craved the honor of removing this thorn in the Wolf Empire's paw.

The Golden Keshik, the Third Wolf Guard Battle Cluster, and 103rd Wolf Guard Striker Cluster arrived on 12 June. Rather than taking the planet by storm, Anastasia issued a *batchall* to the defending RAF force, bidding only herself and personally challenging Paladin Ergen to defend her Trial of Possession. Being well-versed in Clan tactics, Ergen chose as his battlefield the Drake Rimelands on the outskirts of the Port Wyvern Spaceport complex. The Golden Keshik and Ergen's command company formed a large Circle of Equals in the snow.

Ergen's *Doloire* scored the first critical hit on Anastasia's *Savage Wolf*, and within minutes, the battle swung in the Paladin's favor. Limping from actuator damage, the Wolf saKhan maneuvered to place Ergen directly in her sights. Ergen dove in to take advantage of Anastasia's impairment only to find she had faked the limp to throw him off guard. Anastasia kicked into full throttle, circled around the Paladin, and hammered him with missiles to the rear, sending his 'Mech tumbling into the snow. The *Doloire* made no move to rise.

3150: THE PREDATORS STRIKE

Infuriated at the defeat of their commander, the Tenth Hastati company lashed out at the Golden Keshik in an attempt to kill the Wolf saKhan. The Golden Keshik repelled the RAF troops, and within an hour, the rest of Anastasia's troops in orbit landed at Port Wyvern and spilled out into the tundra. The ensuing battle saw the Wolves overrun the Tenth Triarii and leave few survivors. The Tenth Hastati held out slightly longer, but ultimately fled before the day was out.

After the Republic forces burned for orbit, Anastasia found no sign of Paladin Ergen's downed 'Mech.

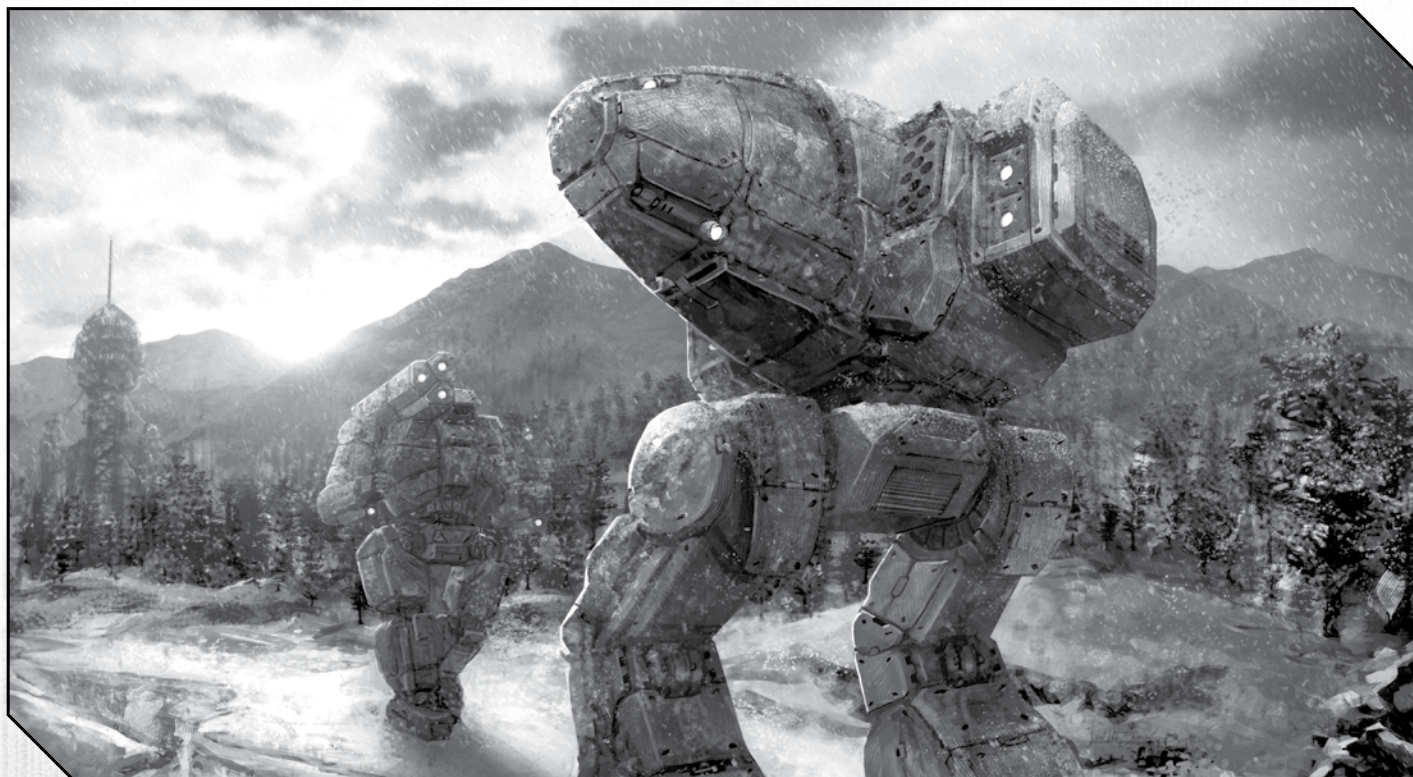
THE MARIAN PROBLEM

The Free Worlds League weathered persistent raids by the Marian Hegemony throughout 3149. Although the raids were not terribly damaging to the infrastructure of the rechristened Tamarind Military District, the raids themselves were beginning to strain the district's soldiers, and the ongoing peacekeeping efforts within the Regular Fiefs limited the number of troops Parliament could authorize for the Duchy of Tamarind-Abbey's defense. By the beginning of 3150, Fontaine Marik was growing desperate.

MARIAN BLITZKRIEG

By February 3150, Marian Hegemony raids into Tamarind-Abbey had subsided long enough for the Tamarind Military District to attempt recovering from more than a year's worth of steady military losses. Shortly after the lapse in raids, Fontaine Marik learned why the Marians had stopped plaguing his duchy.

On 10 February, three MHAF cohorts landed on the Rim Commonality world of Campoleone, quickly eliminating the planetary militia. Soon thereafter, the First and Fourth Rim Commonality Guards arrived. The Guards had better operational knowledge of the landscape and thwarted the Marians at every turn. After three weeks of combat, the frustrated Marian invaders packed up and left.



SHATTERED FORTRESS

BLOCK WAR

Barbara Huffington: We're back with Dr. Geoffrey Fleck, resident expert on all things Periphery. So, Dr. Fleck, what do you think about the Marian Hegemony's latest moves in the Magistracy of Canopus and Free Worlds League?

Dr. Geoffrey Fleck: Well, Barbara, to put it plainly, the Marians bit off more than they could chew. Before the debacle on Astrokaszy, the Marian expansion was aimed at subjugating worlds within the Duchy of Tamarind-Abbey. This was, in effect, a private war between the Hegemony and a single province of the Free Worlds League, far removed from the affairs of any other Periphery nation or Great House.

Huffington: So what changed?

Fleck: The MHAF began a drive outside of the duchy's borders. As you can see on this map of the sector, the Marian invasion of worlds lying rimward of the duchy brought them into direct conflict with the Magistracy of Canopus.

Huffington: Looking at this map, it would seem like the Marian invasion to that point had only involved the Free Worlds League. Why would they expand their attacks to the Magistracy?

Fleck: You have to have a firm understanding of the geopolitical setup of the region to understand the change. The Marian's drive into territory "south" of the duchy is a direct challenge to the Magistracy's security and position in that part of the Periphery.

Huffington: So you're saying the Marian Hegemony attacked a number of Canopian and former Canopian worlds to challenge a six-hundred-year-old claim of ownership?

Fleck: Well, not quite. Both Marantha and Gambilon are Canopian planets. What they offered the Marians was a stage on which to throw down their gauntlet. What we're really seeing is the Marians looking to pick a fight with a real opponent. The Duchy of Tamarind-Abbey offered little opposition to the Marians, so they decided to flex their newfound muscle against the proverbial biggest kid on the block, as a way of establishing their own regional dominance.

Huffington: What about the rumors of secret Canopian-Confederation support for the Hegemony's Tamarind-Abbey invasion? If true, isn't it strange to see the Marians turn on their ally while the Free Worlds League grows in strength? And if they really were looking to establish their dominance, wouldn't a deeper push into the duchy eventually offer them that kind of challenge?

Fleck: [Laughs] I've heard the same rumors. I've also heard that Ignatius O'Reilly has a secret love child with Danai Centrella-Liao. They're just rumors. The truth is, the Hegemony's explosive growth over the last two years is a direct threat to the delicate balance of power between the Hegemony, League, and Magistracy. Pushing deeper into the duchy would eventually bring the Hegemony into conflict with the Lyrans, or even the Wolves, which would be counterproductive for the Marians, to say the least. No, the Canopian invasion of the Marian worlds of Islington and Ballalaba is just one more move in the game to bring stability back to the region. I expect the whole thing to die down in a couple of months. . . .

—Excerpt from *Good Morning Taurus*, 23 November 3150

Three days after the Campoleone invasion, the remaining two cohorts of IV Legio assaulted Astrokaszy. At first, the Marians gained considerable ground at the expense of the Fifth Rim Commonality Guards. After the MHAF claimed the major caliphates' capitals, various small mercenary groups, smugglers, and other underground malcontents banded together to make life as difficult for the Marian occupiers as possible. The Marians cracked down on the unrest, flushing out as many dissidents as they could; however, this only worsened the situation. Finally, a mercenary ambush of a Hegemony slaver group forced the Marians' hand. Rather than allow chaos to run rampant, IV Legio abandoned the planet.

The Periphery then quieted, leading many to believe the blunted offensive against the Rim Commonality had stalled the MHAF. However, in late March a VI Legio cohort suddenly took control of the independent system of Thraxa between the Hegemony and the Magistracy of Canopus. The Magistracy then braced for a potential attack on its own soil; they did not need to wait long.

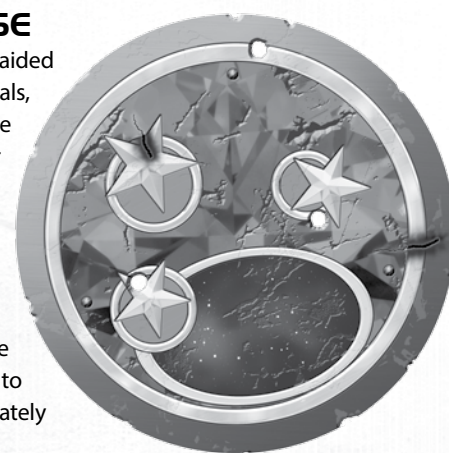
In early April, VI Legio simultaneously swarmed Gambilon and Marantha. Defended solely by militia, Marantha fell quickly. Gambilon, conversely, mounted a much more robust defense due to the efforts of the First Magistracy Highlanders. Ultimately, the Highlanders were unable to hold and retreated after two weeks of combat.

CANOPIAN RESPONSE

For years the Hegemony had raided the Magistracy to obtain raw materials, slaves, and other necessities the Marians could not procure or manufacture for themselves. Magestrix Ilsa Centrella-Liao tolerated the raids to a point—such was the price of maintaining an interstellar nation at the fringes of human-occupied space—but the moment MHAF forces laid claim to her sovereign worlds, she immediately gave the order to retaliate.

During the first two weeks of May, the First Canopian Brigade, First Magistracy Highlanders, and the Third Canopian Fusiliers drove the Hegemony cohorts from Marantha and Gambilon. Though the short campaign was successful, the magestrix decided reclaiming her worlds was not enough. Her brand of justice demanded she teach the Marians that they had interfered in the affairs of the wrong nation.

Between June and August 3150, MAF regiments and mercenary units traversed the long distance between the Magistracy and the Hegemony. On 10 October, the First Magistracy Highlanders and Markson's Marauders appeared in the Islington system. Though the VI Caelum Wing destroyed one of the Marauders' inbound DropShips, VI Prima Auxilia Legio could not withstand the Canopians' collective fury. On 1 November, the Third Canopian Cuirassiers and Second Canopian Light Horse arrived at the neighboring Ballalaba system. The defending IV Prima and Secunda Auxilia Legios managed to dig in and hold out for nearly two weeks before retreating.



3150: THE PREDATORS STRIKE

LEAGUE RESPONSE

When reports of the Hegemony strikes against the Rim Commonality and Magistracy reached Tamarind, Fontaine Marik regarded the news as legitimate proof of how dangerous the Marians were becoming to the Free Worlds League as a whole. On Atreus, he argued in Parliament that the Marian threat needed to be dealt with, and he implored the League to officially declare war on the Marian Hegemony. Instead, the MPs chose to focus on the Republic's sudden military presence in the Augustine Alliance due to Operation SHOFAR, and ensuring the Wolf Empire did not view these League worlds as targets of opportunity.

Fontaine's motion for action against the Marians failed to pass. Intelligence reports from the Magistracy strongly indicated the MAF also planned an invasion of the Hegemony, and Fontaine knew he would lose the opportunity to unbalance the Marians from two different fronts if he waited for Parliament to pass an official declaration of war. Before leaving Atreus, he gathered as much fiscal support as possible and returned to Tamarind, intent on finishing the war Caesar Ignatius O'Reilly had started. Fontaine then shifted around troops and personally hired as many mercenaries as he could reasonably afford.

On 15 August, several mercenary regiments and many of the Tamarind Military District's troops spilled into the Marian Hegemony. The first two worlds hit, San Nicolas and Huntington, fell within days and cut off the Gibraltar prominence from the rest of the Hegemony. The second wave, launched in early September, rolled over Marian defenders on Hazeldean, Landfall, and Lahti, further constricting the MHAF cohorts marooned on Gibraltar, Lepaterique, and Atzenbrug.

Parliament was outraged to learn that the duchy was waging an unauthorized war against a sovereign neighbor. After an emergency division, the MPs passed a resolution to censure the Duchy of Tamarind-Abbey by imposing economic sanctions. As long as Fontaine prosecuted an unlawful war against the Hegemony, all goods imported to and exported from the duchy would be subject to trade tariffs as though Tamarind-Abbey were a foreign state. Parliament hoped the taxes would force Fontaine to end hostilities before bankrupting his own province. Marik did not intend on prosecuting a long war, however, so Parliament's censure amounted to little in his eyes.

THE PATH TO ILLYRIA

By the end of August, Prefect Mohamed Kilgore of III Legio knew he had to act or his MHAF troops would remain trapped behind enemy lines in the Gibraltar prominence. Soon afterward, two Marian raiding forces from II Legio hit the nearby worlds of Sackville and Merton and returned with ample supplies to maintain combat effectiveness. While Tamarind District forces vainly tried to catch the diversionary Marian raiders, III Legio struck Tormentine with hopes of breaking through the FWLM advance and cutting off the duchy's supply lines to the Hegemony campaign.

The planet proved an easy conquest, as most of the duchy's Periphery defenses were already deployed in the Hegemony campaign. Fontaine Marik's ruse to make the Marians believe the Gibraltar prominence was closely guarded was proven to be a smokescreen. This prompted the Marians to test the waters on Aylmer, first with a probing raid and then a follow-up invasion when the probe encountered only militia.

By this point, Fontaine Marik could ill afford to respond to the Marian incursions. Despite the censure from Parliament, he was fully committed to the Marian campaign; troops pulled from the frontlines would only blunt the attack on his end goal. With those elements of II and III Legio cut off from the Hegemony, Marik believed the amount of mischief they could cause before running out of steam and supplies would be minimal.

LET FREEDOM RING!

TAMARIND INQUIRER—The citizens of Tamarind-Abbey can breathe a sigh of relief today, as duchy forces have struck a decisive blow against the Marian invaders. After watching their fellow citizens suffer for years beneath the threat of invasion and raid, the heroic soldiers of the FWLM have brought the war to the enemy by liberating Hazeldean, San Nicolas, Huntington, Lahti and Landfall in the name of the Free Worlds League.

San Nicholas was the first world assaulted in a two-pronged attack designed to cut the Hegemony in half. A single battalion from the Dragonslayers was present for the shocking arrival of two battalions of the Eighth Tamarind Regulars, and quickly fell back to their transports after offering only token resistance.

The defenders of Huntington were the next to feel the Eagle's talons when elements from the First and Seventh Tamarind Regulars landed outside of the planetary capital of Walt's Cove and quickly seized the spaceport. Heavy aerial strikes by Tamarind aerospace fighters devastated several key locations across the Marion continent, knocking out most of the defending III Legio's transports. Over the course of the next two weeks, the vengeful FWLM troops hunted down every Marian soldier still present for their role in the Tormentine attack of April 3147. Similar situations played out on Lahti and Landfall, where a combined taskforce of the First and Eighth Tamarind Regulars annihilated the Secunda Cohors and Secunda Auxilia Legio under the command of Prefect Long Blanchette. On Lahti, two companies of Head Hunters mercenaries were captured in a daring nighttime combat drop by Camacho's Caballeros.

On Hazeldean, the Prima Cohors of II Legio went to ground, using knowledge of the terrain and local support to harass the FWLM with a series of guerrilla attacks. Frustrated by the hit-and-run strikes, General Claudio Brett set a trap for the Marian troops by baiting the town of New Hale with a faux supply depot. The Marians were not fooled, and running low on munitions and other supplies, decided to abandon the planet. In orbit, the FWLS *Therese Marik*, a *Gorgon*-class DropShip, destroyed a Marian *Union* before the cohort escaped.

Questioned about the recent sanction by Parliament, Duke of Tamarind-Abbey Fontaine Marik said that the duchy was simply exercising its innate right to protect and ensure the safety of its people. While the League Parliament continues its deliberations, Marik said the duchy chose to act rather than wait for another round of raids and invasions. "We have paid a high price in innocent lives while Atreus debates what's best for the League. Protecting the citizens and property of the Tamarind people is in the League's best interest. We are simply reminding the rest of the League and the Inner Sphere that threatening our home—in any way—will not be tolerated."

Elsewhere, the MHAF raided Sackville and Merton, and contact has been temporarily lost with Tormentine and Aylmer. Official sources report that duchy forces have been dispatched to all four worlds.

CRACKS IN THE FAÇADE?

[Exarch —The re-formed League is less than two decades old, and it's already beginning to show cracks in its foundation. If Nikol Marik or the League Parliament can't reel in Tamarind-Abbey and Fontaine Marik, their war with the Marian Hegemony could undermine the Captain-General's plans to reintegrate Regulus as well as her continued efforts to incorporate the Clan Protectorate into the Free Worlds League. —Lakewood]

ATREAN VOICE—Duchy of Tamarind-Abbey troops have landed on the occupied Marian Hegemony world of Illyria, battling Marian forces as their private war against the Hegemony continues. Reports continue to stream in from the Periphery, but the Marian defense is allegedly on the verge of collapse, with duchy forces now supported by a popular uprising of the Illyrian people. There are also indications that MHAF forces have abandoned their positions on Aylmer and Tormentine, ostensibly abandoning League territory to return to the beleaguered Hegemony.

With Tamarind's invasion of the Marian homeland and the imminent conquest of Illyria, the duchy's personal war against the Hegemony has entered a new, troubling phase. Since Tamarind-Abbey initiated the conflict in August, the duchy's vendetta has led to an unsanctioned invasion of a sovereign state. The conflict is another example of the festering discord that has plagued the Free Worlds League from its earliest incarnation, the same friction that kept Regulus and Andurien from rejoining our union and cost thousands of League citizen's lives to repair.

"For far too long the League has been plagued by the independent actions of provinces who cherish their well-being above the League's," said MP Jorge Clay of Escobas. "[Tamarind] threatens the very democratic foundation the Free Worlds League was founded on. What good is Parliament if the provinces can simply choose to ignore it at their leisure?"

Clay proposed a plan before Parliament to end hostilities with the Marian Hegemony and order the immediate withdrawal of all duchy forces to their pre-invasion garrisons. In his closing argument, Clay cited the "large swaths of League territory under the thumb of the Wolf" as a motivator to end the senseless conflict in the Hegemony. Despite the recent censure of the Duke of Tamarind-Abbey's actions, his province received support from a number of key independent delegates to block Clay's measure before it could reach a vote.

What does this all mean for the future of the Free Worlds League? At the moment, it means the prosperity and stability of our Periphery border is firmly in the hands of Tamarind-Abbey and not the League, and Parliament is only capable of offering meaningless penalties in response to Tamarind's continued noncompliance. It also means that, for better or worse, our citizens are left supporting Tamarind-Abbey's endeavor until it reaches its final conclusion. In the end, the duchy's quest for vengeance may cost the Free Worlds League far more than lives and money; it may cost us our faith in the future of this nation.

On 11 November, the FWLM arrived at a pirate point in the Illyria system, capital of the Hegemony's Illyrian Province. As many of the provincial forces had been deployed to raid or invade Tamarind-Abbey, Illyria's defense comprised only three cohorts and a single aerospace wing. The II Caelum Wing attempted to destroy as many incoming troops as possible, but the FWLM's assault DropShips prevented any catastrophic losses. In addition to support provided by Camacho's Caballeros, the First, Seventh, and Eighth Tamarind Regulars fought through the megaforests of the Cadmus continent to reach Dalmatia, the planet's capital. By the end of November, I Legio's Tertia Cohors had been destroyed, and II Legio was on the run with the planetary governor, slowly chipping away at the Tamarind regiments with guerrilla attacks.

In early December, MHAF cohorts in the Gibraltar prominence received word of the situation on Illyria. Loath as Prefect Kilgore was to abandon his conquests, he pulled most of his troops from the captured Tamarind-Abbey worlds and moved to reinforce Illyria. The arrival of four more cohorts a few weeks later brought a resurgence to the Hegemony's defense, but the Marian rally did not last. In the final week of December, the First Tamarind Regulars had taken Illyria's governor hostage. Already battle-weary from fighting in the Free Worlds League and on Illyria, the Marian reinforcements took an unrecoverable hit to their morale when Prefect Kilgore was killed attempting to free the governor.

By year's end, the heart of the Illyrian Province was under Fontaine Marik's control.

WAR ON ALL SIDES

Throughout 3148 and 3149, the Lyran Commonwealth faced challenges to the Archon's sovereignty. In 3150, the predators continued to circle.

DISSIDENTS AND BREAKAWAY STATES

In June 3148, the Rim Collection merged with five Timbuktu Theater worlds to give birth to the Timbuktu Collective. This new breakaway state and the violent expansion of the Rim Territories in late 3149 and early 3150 forced Trillian Steiner to take as hard a stance on secession and piracy as her political and military cachet would allow. The defeat of the Buena Collective and the execution of Diego Widmer in early 3148 had done little to discourage continued dissent against her rule.

With the LCAF stretched near the breaking point, High Command could not afford to retake Lyran worlds which formed the Timbuktu Collective or were lost to pirate bands in the Rim Territories. In addition to the LCAF needing to maintain a peacekeeping presence in the former Buena Collective, the High Command lacked adequate troops to cover the nation's rimward borders from Wolf Empire predation. LIC agents also confirmed that Clan Jade Falcon was planning a major offensive but had difficulty pinpointing the intended target. To worsen matters, news of the Free Worlds' war with the Marian Hegemony drew many pirates in the region to the Buena Province, due to the belief that the province's instability left its worlds vulnerable. Additional Rim Territories raids tested the patience and resolve of Bucklands Theater Margrave Gareth Dineson, forcing him to rely solely on organizing, equipping, and training planetary militias to counter piratical threats.



3150: THE PREDATORS STRIKE

When the Timbuktu Collective extended its aegis to Pocologan and Viborg in September 3150, the Lyran High Command and the Estates General urged the Archon to address the situation before things worsened. Rather than strip peacekeeping troops from the still-restive Buena worlds, Trillian again petitioned Vedet Brewer for aid. Since the self-exiled duke had not moved to support General Widmer, Trillian harbored hope that Brewer might answer her call to “support the Lyran Commonwealth in its hour of great need.”

Brewer did not respond. Instead he moved his First Hesperus Guards coreward, toward the Melissia Theater—although for what purpose, the LIC was unable to determine. With Brewer’s silence, common sentiment swept through the populace was that Trillian Steiner was losing her grip on the Lyran Commonwealth.

THE FALCONS GATHER

Amid rumors and intelligence reports indicating a buildup of Jade Falcon forces along the borders of the Donegal Province and Arc-Royal Theater, Trillian spent June through September rearranging her forces. Though initially hesitant to strip defenses from the Wolf Empire front, the Archon’s advisors convinced her that Alaric’s preoccupation with the Falcons and the Republic prevented the Wolves from prosecuting a dedicated invasion of the Commonwealth.

In early October, LIC reports showed a large concentration of Falcon Clusters massing at Cameron and Westerstede. Rumor had it that Malvina Hazen and her Raptor Keshik were among the warriors waiting to invade, and all signs pointed to the invasion target being Donegal. In response, the LCAF reinforced the planet and Donegal braced for the Falcons’ arrival.

By mid-October Malvina had not yet attacked, and deeper investigation revealed the Falcons were departing from both staging points. The LCAF kept watch on the border, but no attacks came. Where Malvina had run off to and why was a mystery the LIC was unable to solve.

THE RACE TO TERRA

With the rearguard threat to Clan Wolf’s invasion dealt with, Alaric Ward proceeded with his plan. Only a small handful of systems stood between Alaric and Terra. Though he was so close to the cradle of humanity, he gave his commanders specific orders to proceed with caution and be wary of Republic traps.

The third wave of the Wolves’ assault on the Republic of the Sphere began on 3 October 3150, and it would end in a way not even the Wolf Khan could have predicted.

THE JAWS CLOSE

On Graham IV, the Wolves encountered the First Fides Defenders—or what was left of the regiment after it fled from Shiloh in April. The First pulled back into the city of Keystone, but Galaxy Commander Tyler Cooper refused to give chase, fearing the Fides was luring him into a trap. A

recon Star failed to spring any such surprises, so the Fourth Wolf Guard Assault and Ninth Wolf Assault Clusters led the way into the city. The Wolves used meticulous fire against the Republic troops, attempting to minimize collateral damage to nearby buildings. When the First Fides was reduced to two companies of ‘Mechs, the Wolves flushed them out of the city and forced them to surrender. Those who chose not to resist were taken as bondsmen and absorbed into the *touman*; those who fought back were cut down.

The Pollux assault on 10 October met with similar circumstances. Anastasia Kerensky led Alpha Galaxy elements against the remains of the Second Fides and Twelfth Principes. True to Alaric’s instructions, Anastasia commanded her warriors to strike at the RAF troops with methodical, precise attacks rather than run roughshod over the survivors with unbridled ferocity. As on Graham IV, the Wolves claimed the most skilled of the Republic soldiers as *isorla* and pressed the remainder into lesser roles.

Reports from the first two attacks gave Alaric pause, as the Republic seemed to be protected by paper tigers, not the vaunted RAF he had envisioned. With this in mind, he approached his next target, Alula Australis, with caution. Alaric intended to use the planet as a staging ground for his invasion of Terra. Going against his immediate advisors’ counsel, he declared a formal *batchall* for the world on 19 October, and Colonel Randolph Abasi of the Eleventh Principes answered his challenge. Suspecting a trap from the much smaller foe, Alaric refused to reduce his initial bid and landed his entire force.

The battlefield, chosen by the Eleventh’s commander, was the Auroria Mines just outside New Horizon City. Riddled with open pits and unexpected sinkholes, the strip-mined expanse created many pockets which could hide potential ambushers. Alaric’s Silver Keshik marched into battle regardless.

Within the first few minutes of battle, a tremendous artillery barrage rocketed toward the Silver Keshik’s positions. Exploding ordnance collapsed old mining sinkholes beneath several Wolf ‘Mechs—a tactic that proved ineffective at evening the odds for

the outnumbered Eleventh. Colonel Abasi had also hoped to catch Alaric’s *Savage Wolf* in the barrage and put an end to the Wolf invasion, but he only infuriated the Wolf Khan.

The Silver Keshik hunted down the Eleventh’s command company for their treacherous tactics, and Alaric killed Colonel Abasi in single combat. The Ninth Wolf Guard Striker and Seventy-ninth Wolf Battle Clusters took on the rest of the Eleventh, who faltered upon learning their commander’s fate, and the Wolves afforded them no mercy. However, RAF soldiers who survived the battle were absorbed into Clan Wolf, further swelling Alaric’s forces.

With the conquest of Alula Australis complete, Alaric Ward and Clan Wolf lay a single jump from their ultimate goal of Terra.

At the beginning of November, Alaric prepared a courier JumpShip to Terra to announce his formal *batchall* for the Terran



SHATTERED FORTRESS

system in advance of his arrival. He would then bring all of the amassed forces at his disposal, and he would not request *sacon*. The courier jumped toward Terra, but within a matter of hours, it returned to Alula Australis space—a mis-jump indicative of the last remnant of the Fortress Wall.

While marshaling his warriors, Alaric vowed to discover a means to defeat the Wall, even if it cost him his whole JumpShip fleet.

THE FALCON STORM

Mere weeks before Malvina Hazen planned to strike Donegal, she learned how close Alaric was to Terra. After shooting the communications tech who handed her the message, she stormed off to her quarters. Not even the presence of her companion Cynthy could quell her rage. Three hours later, she emerged and ordered her warriors to ship out immediately.

“Clan Wolf must *never* be declared iClan!” she announced. “We shall claim blessed Terra and prove once and for all that the Founder chose his Clan poorly!”

The Falcons massed at Cameron and Westerstede, jumped across the Donegal Province to the other side of the Jade Falcon OZ, and commandeered merchant JumpShips to traverse the OZ’s Terran corridor as quickly as possible.

On 11 November, Malvina Hazen organized her warriors into three task forces and embarked on a mad dash for Terra. The Chinggis Khan gave specific instructions regarding each of the first wave’s targets. Her commanders showed reluctance to follow her orders, but complied to keep alive the dream of seeing Jade Falcon as the iClan. On Menkent, Lyons, and Zollikofen, elements of Alpha, Gamma, and Delta Galaxies touched down in the most populous areas and started indiscriminately torching everything in sight, including civilian industry, agricultural regions, and other infrastructure. Without fail, this tactic drew Republic forces into the open to defend their citizenry, and the Falcons exploited the RAF’s protective but undisciplined charges with fast, heavy strikes.

In late November, Malvina’s task force jumped to Thorin for the second wave of attacks on the Republic. The Eleventh Hastati and Principes met her ground forces and tried to pin the Falcons in place, but only succeeded in doing so temporarily. Once Malvina broke free, two formations of Republic reinforcements emerged from the partially destroyed Fortress Laiacona, an SLDF Castle Brian. Malvina had anticipated the presence of such a fortification, but was unable to pinpoint its location until the defenders’ emergence betrayed their underground access. Malvina ordered the C/JF *Jade Aerie* to bombard the mountain concealing Fortress Laiacona. The resulting rockslide buried the Castle Brian’s sole functioning entrance under untold tons of rock and debris, forcing the enemy’s remaining troops to scatter across the countryside.

Additional JumpShips soon arrived in-system, but to Malvina’s shock, the new arrivals hailed from Clan Wolf, not the Republic. During planetfall, the Seventy-ninth Wolf Battle Cluster transmitted to the Falcons a personal message recorded by Alaric Ward himself: “There will indeed be an iClan, my dearest Malvina, but that Clan will not be yours.” The Wolves quickly secured the planet’s functioning HPG while the Falcons were concentrating on hunting down RAF defenders. However, due to being cut off from support, the

remaining Republic troops quickly fell to the Falcons’ persistence, which let Malvina focus on the Wolves. Her warriors carved through the Seventy-ninth with ruthless precision, claiming no bondsmen or prisoners. But before the last Wolf fell, a single transmission was broadcast to an unknown destination.

Alaric’s taunt told Malvina the Wolf Khan was nearing Terra’s front door, so she sidestepped New Earth and jumped her task force to Rigil Kentarus on 15 December, with the goal of establishing a base of operations for a final move against Terra. Planetside, the Raptor Keshik and Alpha Galaxy again faced Republic troops seemingly fighting alongside Wolf Empire warriors. The Fourth Fides and both Wolf Clusters—the Fourth Wolf Guard Cluster and the Seventh Wolf Guard Battle Cluster—did not coordinate their maneuvers, but neither did they fire on each other. Knowing Terra and the iClanship was at stake, Malvina smashed into both groups of defenders without restraint or mercy. Downed Republic and Wolf ‘Mechs were blasted into unrecognizable slag, their cockpits crushed underfoot or shot through at pointblank range. The few enemy personnel the Falcons captured underwent interrogation and torture before being executed, many by Malvina’s own hand. The Chinggis Khan refused to let anyone dare oppose what she believed to be her rightful destiny.

Only Devlin Stone, hiding behind the final bailey in his Fortress Wall, remained in her way.

OPERATION CLARITY: THE BATTLE OF NORTHWIND

After the CCAF conducted two successful invasion waves against the Republic of the Sphere without encountering an alarming concentration of defenders, Daoshen Liao was convinced the other shoe he’d been waiting for Stone to drop would never fall. Maskirovka intel across the swiftly crumbling remains of Fortress Republic pointed to RAF troops scrambling to fend off relentless incursions by the Wolves and Falcons, and the lack of hard defenses arrayed against CCAF forays beyond the Wall meant Stone remained more focused on keeping the Clans from reaching Terra than with blunting Capellan aggression. However, the Capellan Confederation also lay within striking distance of humanity’s birthplace. Regardless of the outcome against the Clans, Daoshen believed the only way he could truly save his nation from the RAF would be to ensure Stone’s downfall himself.

Due to the ongoing chaos inside Fortress Republic’s former borders, military communication—or lack thereof—during the continued Blackout could make or break even the most carefully orchestrated campaign. The surest method of coordinating an operation as important as an attempt to deliver Stone’s *coup de grâce* was to gain control of a functioning HPG station within a fifty-light-year radius of Daoshen’s ultimate goal. However, discounting Terra’s own HPG, only four HPGs were known or suspected of still functioning within Fortress Republic. Devil’s Rock and Thorin lay right in the paths of the Wolves’ and Falcon’s respective invasion corridors, and Imbros III sat not only on the other side of the Fortress but also right along the Rasalhague Dominion border.

Only one planet with a functioning HPG met all of the necessary criteria: the former Prefecture III world of Northwind.

3150: THE PREDATORS STRIKE

CAN YOU HEAR ME NOW?

More than just a military objective, Northwind also held a special position in the Tucker Harwell–helmed Project Sunlight, an effort to diagnose and repair the problems plaguing the vast majority of the Inner Sphere's HPGs. Northwind's HPG ran on older hardware than the other functioning HPGs within the Republic, which puzzled all of the Sunlight technicians who studied it, as most of the HPGs that inexplicably retained their broadcast and transmission capabilities on Gray Monday had boasted more modern, updated technology. These upgrades were believed to have shielded the still-working HPGs from the Blackout's deleterious effects. The Northwind station had initially gone dark along with most other HPGs on Gray Monday, but it did not remain dark: in 3135, the HPG had inexplicably begun transmitting again, though with some detectable signal noise in the transmission. Project Sunlight's main goals on Northwind focused on determining what had self-corrected the HPG's problem, and attempting to apply those findings to other malfunctioning, older-hardware HPGs.

Though the Maskirovka learned of Project Sunlight's involvement on Northwind, Daoshen and his advisors had little interest in their research, since, to date, it had provided no known results. Once Northwind was in Confederation hands, Capellan Intelligentsia would be able to approach the HPG research their own way. Daoshen's main focus was adding another working HPG to the Capellan fold.

THE CAPELLAN THREAT

As Stone focused on the Clans bearing toward Terra, his advisors warned him to remain mindful of the Capellans' proximity to Terra. Though the Clans were a fanatical culture intent on reshaping the political, social, and military landscape of the entire Inner Sphere, to many, the potential Capellan conquest of Terra presented an even worse alternative. If the Capellans possessed a functioning HPG near the front lines, they could achieve the logistical coordination necessary for the Confederation to strike at Terra ahead of possible Clan assault.

Stone needed to deliver a knockout blow to the Capellan war machine, but could not spare the necessary troops to do so. According to High Command's projections, the RAF could attempt to stall the two most immediate dangers to Terra, but maneuvering enough assets to effectively counter all three exigent threats risked spreading their forces too thin, which might collapse one or more fronts. Stone did not believe Daoshen bold enough to strike Terra directly ahead of the incoming Clan juggernaut, so he focused the RAF's resources on the Clan threat and gave the Capellan military enough rope with

which to hang themselves. For the time being, any additional worlds targeted by the CCAF would have to defend themselves with only the on-planet forces already at their disposal: there would be no promise of reinforcements.

Rumors of the impending invasion of Northwind rippled throughout the Capellan populace, resulting in a groundswell of public support, including increased military recruitment. Northwind represented more than just an expansion of interstellar communication capabilities: the planet remained one of the Capellan Confederation's most embarrassing military failures. In early 3029, during the Fourth Succession War, the Northwind Highlanders betrayed the Capellan people by defecting to the Federated Suns in exchange for being able to regain control of their ancestral homeworld. In the century-plus since, the

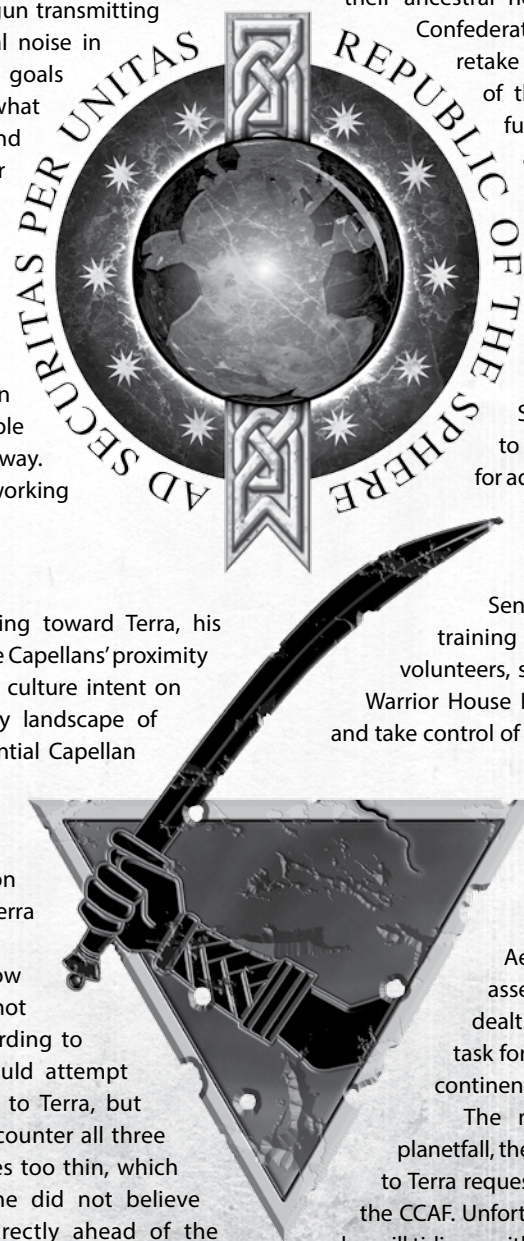
Confederation had never found an opportunity to retake the world. Capturing Northwind ahead

of the Terra invasion would not only bring a functioning HPG into the Capellan fold, but also redeem past failures. The mere notion of the conquest attempt energized the citizenry, especially the CCAF troops who would conduct the strike. If the CCAF were to have any hope of eventually claiming Terra and installing Daoshen Liao as First Lord of a new Star League, Northwind had to fall first. To this end, Daoshen and the Strategios planned to deploy enough force to take the planet and to hold out long enough for additional troops to take up station and ensure

it remained in Capellan hands. According to Maskirovka intelligence, the on-planet defenders comprised the Twelfth Hastati Sentinels, the Northwind Military Academy's training cadre, and a smattering of local militia volunteers, so Daoshen sent three CCAF regiments and Warrior House Imarra to overwhelm Northwind's defenses and take control of its HPG.

The Capellan task force assigned to prosecute Operation CLARITY arrived in Northwind space on 13 November 3150 and made a hard burn planetside to allow the world's defenders less than a week's time to organize. Aerospace screens by the Twelfth's aerial assets bought some additional time, but they dealt insufficient damage to prevent the Capellan task force from landing relatively unscathed on the continents of Kearny and New Lanark.

The moment the Capellan DropShips began planetfall, the Northwind clan elders sent an HPG message to Terra requesting assistance to secure the planet against the CCAF. Unfortunately, the reply from RAF High Command bore ill tidings: with the Clans bearing down toward Terra, Stone needed to reserve as many forces for Terra's defense as possible. The message was clear: Northwind was on its own.



SHATTERED FORTRESS

On 19 November, the assault on Northwind began in earnest. The campaign consisted of two strategic objectives: securing Tara, the planetary capital; and neutralizing Fort Barrett, the Twelfth's primary base of operations. However, operations on New Lanark also required neutralizing the capital's Star League-era fortification, known as the Castle; occupying the Northwind Military Academy grounds; and most importantly, securing and protecting the HPG complex itself. The Fourth McCarron's Armored Cavalry and the First Canopian Lancers spearheaded the assault on Tara and its environs while Warrior House Imarra and Laurel's Legion were assigned to crack Fort Barrett wide open.

The opening engagements between scouting elements on both fronts proceeded in textbook fashion and overwhelmingly in the Capellans' favor, driving the CCAF troops' already-soaring morale to an all-time high. Operation CLARITY's forces outnumbered the Twelfth Hastati nearly three to one, which instilled great confidence in the operation's field leadership. The Twelfth's First and Third Battalion held station on New Lanark, while Second Battalion defended Fort Barrett as best it could, with Northwind's planetary militia making negligible contributions to the faltering defense.

The next three days saw heavier combat on the outskirts of Tara, as the First Canopian Lancers engaged portions of the Twelfth's Third Battalion while swifter elements of the Fourth MAC swept in and plowed through the RAF pickets. Third Battalion withdrew deeper into the city, intending to regroup with First Battalion at the Castle. *Sang-shao* Lindsey Baxter of the Fourth

MAC was determined to pursue Third Battalion into the city itself, but the commander of Laurel's Legion, *Sang-shao* Julie Qiao, advised extreme caution. The Twelfth Hastati's original roster was comprised of former Northwind Highlanders, and Qiao was intimately familiar with Highlander tactics: Laurel's Legion was founded by a retired Highlander in 3014, and Qiao had extensively studied Highlanders history as a matter of tradition. She knew that the Twelfth, though a few generations removed from their Highlanders roots, would protect the city and its inhabitants by any means necessary, including the use of unorthodox tactics. Baxter took Qiao's advice and pressed into Tara proper, advancing one city block at a time while remaining wary for traps.

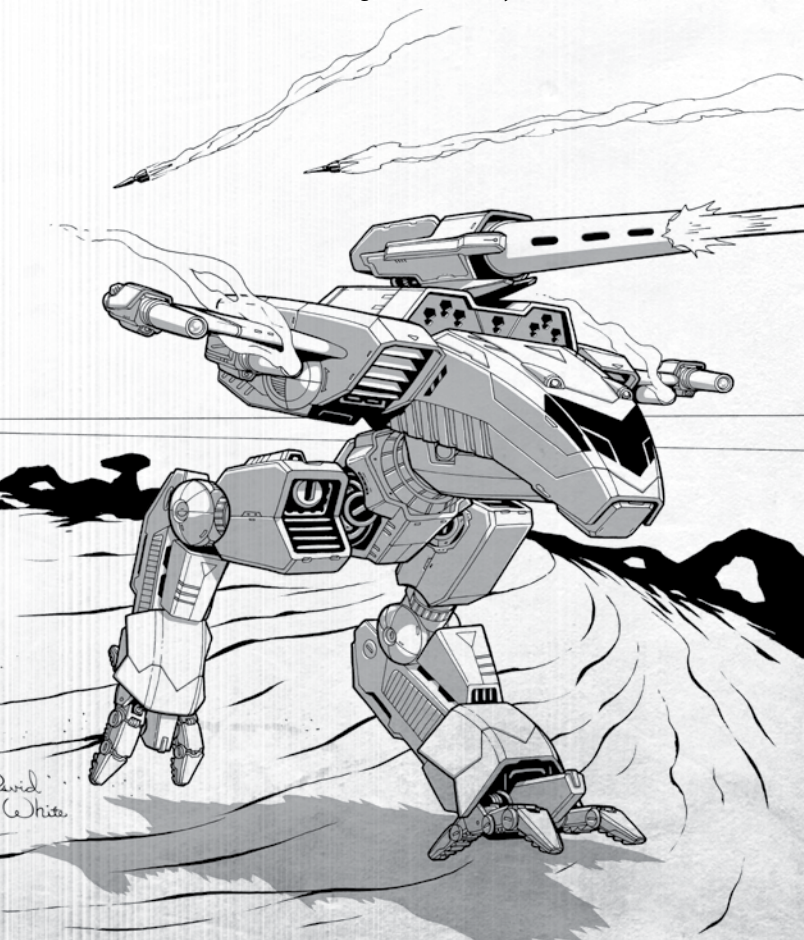
On Kearny, Laurel's Legion and House Imarra's assault on Fort Barrett took a more traditional form. While the Twelfth Hastati's Second Battalion raised an admirable defense against a larger foe, a string of aerospace sorties, flown by instructors and cadets from the NMA's aerospace annex out of the Argyle Islands, bombarded the Capellan invaders wherever possible. Though aerial support paused the enemy advance in critical places, this only delayed the inevitable. Laurel's Legion used its familiarity with Highlanders tactics to cut through withdrawing Second Battalion elements while House Imarra mopped up with flanking actions. According to *Sang-shaos* Baxter and Qiao, the conquest of Northwind was only a matter of time.

UNEXPECTED HELP

On 23 November, the trap Baxter expected to find on the streets of Northwind's capital came not from within the city itself, but from outside Tara's city limits. Unidentified gray-primer 'Mechs bearing unknown tartan insignias appeared in the surrounding foothills and charged the Capellan troops from the rear. Though acting in concert, these new arrivals operated in discrete lances rather than larger formations. Renewed sorties from the Hastati battalions entrenched in the Castle caught Baxter's forces in a pincer, which forced the CCAF troops into a lateral withdrawal through the city, and eventually outside the city, to regroup and take stock of the situation.

These new defenders, which also materialized on Kearny to wreak havoc on the Fort Barrett campaign, proved more organized, more methodical, and better equipped and trained than the average planetary militia or guerrilla force, and *Sang-shao* Qiao noted that they operated using classic Northwind Highlanders tactics. Intelligence efforts identified these elements as the Grey Watch, a secret, emergency regiment of retired Northwind Highlanders unanimously activated by the Northwind clan elders as a last-ditch effort to repel the invasion. The Grey Watch's equipment had been hidden in single-lance caches around the planet; during the early 3080s, each 'Mech in the regiment had been falsely reported to Stone's Military Materiel Redemption Program as lost or unsalvageable.

Though the Grey Watch's sudden appearance caused the Capellans to stumble and evened the odds considerably, it was not enough to fully turn the tide against the invaders. By 25 November, the Capellans had secured Tara and the HPG compound; the defense of Fort Barrett had also failed, with the Twelfth Hastati



3150: THE PREDATORS STRIKE

battalion fleeing for the city of Kearny, and the remnants of the Grey Watch's Second and Third Battalions faded back to the hills to rearm and regroup. The Castle remained the sole holdout on Northwind, and *Sang-shao* Baxter sent a message to Daoshen—transmitted via the newly captured HPG and routed through the courier network to Liao—that the Northwind invasion had borne fruit, and the planet would return to the Confederation fold within days.

In the early morning of 26 November, mere hours before the Fourth MAC and the First Canopian Lancers were to begin a major push to seize the Castle, several JumpShips arrived at a pirate point in the orbit of Glasgow, one of Northwind's moons. IFF transponders marked them as Republic forces.

Foremost among the new arrivals: the Highlanders, commanded by Countess Tara Campbell. Upon learning Northwind was under attack and Stone would not send reinforcements, Campbell vowed to go to Northwind's aid, with or without the Exarch's leave. She and her battalion called Northwind home, and they had been unable to return home since the Wall was raised fourteen years earlier. "If we abandon Northwind to the Capellans, then we have already lost," she told him, before immediately packing up and departing Terra. Realizing that Campbell was right, Stone authorized the deployment of enough RAF troops to ensure she could give Northwind a fighting chance to remain free from Capellan control. To make the thirty-seven light-year trip in time, Campbell's JumpShips first jumped to Caph and hot-charged their K-F drives for the jump to Northwind, risking drive failure. The gamble paid off. At sundown, four RAF 'Mech battalions performed combat drops into hot zones around Tara and Kearny, sowing chaos amid the Capellan assault with Scottish bagpipes blasting from external speakers and across all available communications channels.

On Kearny, First Battalion of Stone's Defenders and the newly arrived Highlanders battalion linked up with the scattered Grey Watch and the remains of the Twelfth's Second Battalion. Together they took advantage of the Greys' intimate knowledge of the region and Fort Barrett itself to dominate the battlefield and force Laurel's Legion to abandon Fort Barrett or risk being overrun.

On New Lanark, the Sixth Fides Defenders' two 'Mech battalions split up to strike their assigned targets. The Canopian Lancers held their ground in the capital, but in defense of the HPG compound, the Fourth MAC clashed bitterly against the Sixth's First Battalion. Only the propitious arrival of House Imarra, recalled from Kearny after the earlier lull in combat, prevented the compound from falling. Though the HPG array took accidental fire during the fight, it remained functional.

Baxter remained confident her task force could eventually hold the planet, but nonetheless put out a request for reinforcement to all allied planets via HPG, to ensure Capellan success. She did not anticipate who would ultimately answer that call.

THE SHADOW ARRIVES

On 5 December, JumpShips bearing two full regiments arrived at pirate points around Dublin, Northwind's second moon. All inbound DropShips bore Draconis Combine markings.

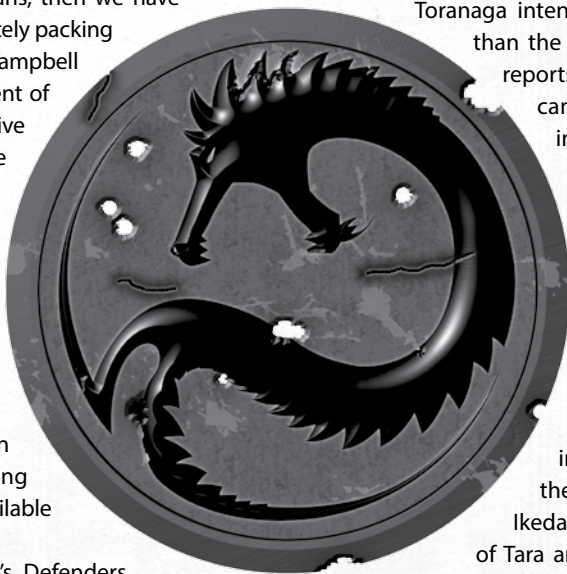
On Ingress, the Hikage had received Baxter's HPG transmission from Northwind, and the regiment's commander, *Sho-sho* Ikeda, exercised his autonomy to address the situation in a manner favorable to the Combine. By the authority of *Kanrei* Toranaga, Ikeda placed the Fourth Dieron Regulars under his command and made the jump to Northwind.

The Combine troops' arrival filled Baxter with unease rather than relief. Though the Confederation and Combine were allied, the Unity Pact contained no provisions for mutual defense, only for joint military operations, which were planned and agreed on before Operation CLARITY launched. As the Combine had no planned participation in CLARITY, these new arrivals were not likely to offer direct military support to her campaign. Adding to her unease, recent local intelligence reports indicated that *Kanrei* Toranaga intended to push farther into Republic space than the initial TIAMAT plans had called for. These reports, however, were part of a misinformation campaign by RAF intelligence operatives intended to weaken Liao-Kurita relations.

When Baxter pressed *Sho-sho* Ikeda to determine his purpose on Northwind, he supplied only cagey non-responses about "duty" and "maintaining vigil."

Due to their status as allies, Baxter's aerospace screens let the DCMS DropShips reach planetary orbit unmolested; however, once the vessels maneuvered into position, they remained in orbit rather than making planetfall to aid the Capellan assault. When Baxter requested Ikeda's troops intervene in the ongoing defense of Tara and the HPG, his response came swift and curt: "You hold no dominion over me."

Fighting around the capital intensified as the Grey Watch coordinated with the Highlanders and survivors of the Twelfth Hastati, prompting the Capellans to raze a large swath of a city quarter to buy some time. Baxter sent several communications to Ikeda in the interim, but her efforts were met with further disdain or silence. Due to the RAF misinformation effort, Baxter believed the Combine troops were biding their time, waiting to see how the battle would evolve below. Rather than assist the Capellans in securing the planet, she came to believe that Ikeda and the Hikage intended to fight the victor for the spoils, the Unity Pact be damned. Additional falsified intelligence reports received via HPG indicated that Toranaga's interest in Northwind matched the Chancellor's—the capture of a working HPG—but the Combine had no intention to share. If Baxter ignored the supposed threat Ikeda's troops posed to the operation, CLARITY's task force would end up fighting a defensive battle on two fronts and risk losing the prize the Chancellor tasked them to secure.



SHATTERED FORTRESS

ON THE RIGHT SIDE OF HISTORY

[begin transcript]

Tucker Harwell: So, the test has been passed.

Devlin Stone: In a fashion. This was merely a litmus test, with only two outcomes. At this stage we can no longer afford a more complex assessment.

Harwell: Do you still believe this is the best course of action?

Stone: I do. Unequivocally.

Harwell: But they captured so, so many Republic worlds. Too many. So many lives lost. . . .

Stone: Not "Republic worlds." *Wolf* worlds. Or at least that's what we allow them to believe.

Harwell: Right—"perception is nine-tenths of reality." Who originally said that? Jerome Blake? Some dead Russian author? [pauses] Doesn't matter. What *does* matter—have we mortgaged our future on what might be an incredibly convincing lie? What happens when the lie is exposed?

Stone: If you've a better solution to offer, then I'm afraid you're a few years too late.

Harwell: For starters, if we'd maintained the Wall—

Stone: The Wall was *never* meant to be a long-term option, regardless of who activated it or why. If we'd kept the Fortress active any longer, the populace would've revolted. I can't speak for you, but my head doesn't belong on a pike. I've sacrificed far too much to get us all to this point, on this path, and I won't let those sacrifices count for nothing.

Harwell: But is this fork we're taking any better? Aren't you merely trading one devil for another?

Stone: Only our successors can truly judge me, Tucker. And it's my fervent hope that they'll judge me to be on the correct side of history. For now we can only wait and believe that we made the right choice.

Harwell: I know, I know. "Be patient. Have faith." [grumbles] But what if you're *wrong*? What if you traded one devil for an even worse one?

Stone: . . .

Harwell: Devlin?

Stone: [exhales] Then it's a choice I'll bear all the way to my grave.

[end transcript]

—*The Stone Conversations, Transcript #G379-F, 27 Dec 3150*

Once more, Baxter implored Ikeda to intervene on the Capellans' behalf. Her entreaty was met with stoic silence.

In response, Baxter ordered her aerospace fighters to fire on the orbiting DCMS DropShips. She believed the Combine troops posed a credible threat to her operation, and eliminating as many Combine troops as possible before they made planetfall would vastly improve the CCAF's chances in ground-combat operations.

Several of the Combine DropShips fell victim to the surprise attack, and undertook emergency landings in the badlands of New Lanark, several hundred kilometers from the capital. Incensed at such treatment by his supposed Capellan allies, Ikeda marched the Hikage toward Tara. The regiment easily cut through the Grey Watch lances and Sixth Fides companies sent to intercept their advance, while the Fourth Dieron Regulars filled out the DCMS rearguard and protected their damaged DropShips undergoing critical repairs.

DROPPED CALLS

Once the Hikage reached Tara on 9 December, they ignored all RAF and Northwind troops, and opened fire on any Capellan unit in sight. Though Ikeda did not coordinate with the planet's defenders, the Hikage and Fourth Dieron Regulars essentially fought alongside the RAF to punish the CCAF and dislodge them from the capital. Ikeda sought Northwind's HPG for House Kurita and intended to hold it until he could use it to contact DCMS reinforcements.

The Hikage's keen edge sliced deep into Baxter's troops at the HPG compound, ultimately forcing a breach in the Capellan lines that Ikeda exploited to the fullest. Several Combine lances burst through the compound's walls and prevented the Fourth MAC from retreating deeper into the complex, and a Republic thrust by the Grey Watch and the Highlanders further widened the breach and spilled through the Capellan defenses.

Rather than fight a losing battle, Baxter called for a temporary withdrawal of all Capellan forces from the compound. During the retreat, however, the HPG array erupted into a fireball that consumed the facility. Several Fourth MAC and Grey Watch 'Mechs were either caught in the explosion's radius or crushed by falling debris. Ikeda believed the Capellans had deliberately destroyed the HPG to childishly deny the asset to anyone, further souring the relations between the two nations, but the explosion had caught Baxter off guard as well. In reality, infiltrators from the Grey Watch had laced the complex with explosives the night before, believing that destroying the invaders' primary reason for conquest would drive both from Northwind.

With no stakes left in the game, Ikeda ordered the Hikage and the Fourth Dieron back to their DropShips. The Republic defenders gave little chase, and the Combine troops left the planet without further incident. The Capellan forces, however, remained. Though the HPG was destroyed, value remained in claiming the planet for the Chancellor, and both Baxter and Qiao resolved to sustain the invasion for as long as they could. RAF counterthrusts cut them off at every turn, and within a week the losses the Capellans sustained fighting the Combine troops and the native defenders took too great a toll.

On 15 December, the ragged remains of Operation CLARITY withdrew to their DropShips and returned to the Confederation in defeat.

In addition to the Republic victory, the conflict on Northwind manufactured cracks in the alliance between the Confederation and the Combine. Baxter laid the blame for CLARITY's failure on the Hikage's refusal to offer direct military support against a mutual enemy, which proved to Daoshen that the Unity Pact was merely an alliance of convenience, not a true partnership.

3150: THE PREDATORS STRIKE

Ikeda's official after-action reports indicated that he had planned to operate alongside the Capellan conquest, assuming that the Chancellor would agree to joint administration of the planet for the mutual benefit of their realms, in the spirit of the Unity Pact. Ikeda had held position in orbit to assess the strategic situation; he would only deploy his troops in a precise, surgical strike when and where they would be the most effective, not at the whims of any Capellan commander.

Regardless of the impetus behind the Capellans firing on allied forces, the damage was done. The outcome of the Battle of Northwind not only prevented the Capellan Confederation from gaining vital communications superiority in the Terran corridor, but also sounded the death knell of warm relations between the Confederation and the Combine.

Unbeknownst to either nation, however, the Northwind HPG's destruction was not as complete as first believed. The infiltrators' carefully placed charges collapsed the aboveground portions of the facility, but the Greys took great pains to ensure that the explosions left the underground core of the HPG system intact, for the sake of rebuilding efforts and Project Sunlight's critical research. Conservative estimates of reconstruction following the invasion concluded that the HPG complex would return to full operational status within two to three years.

FALLOUT

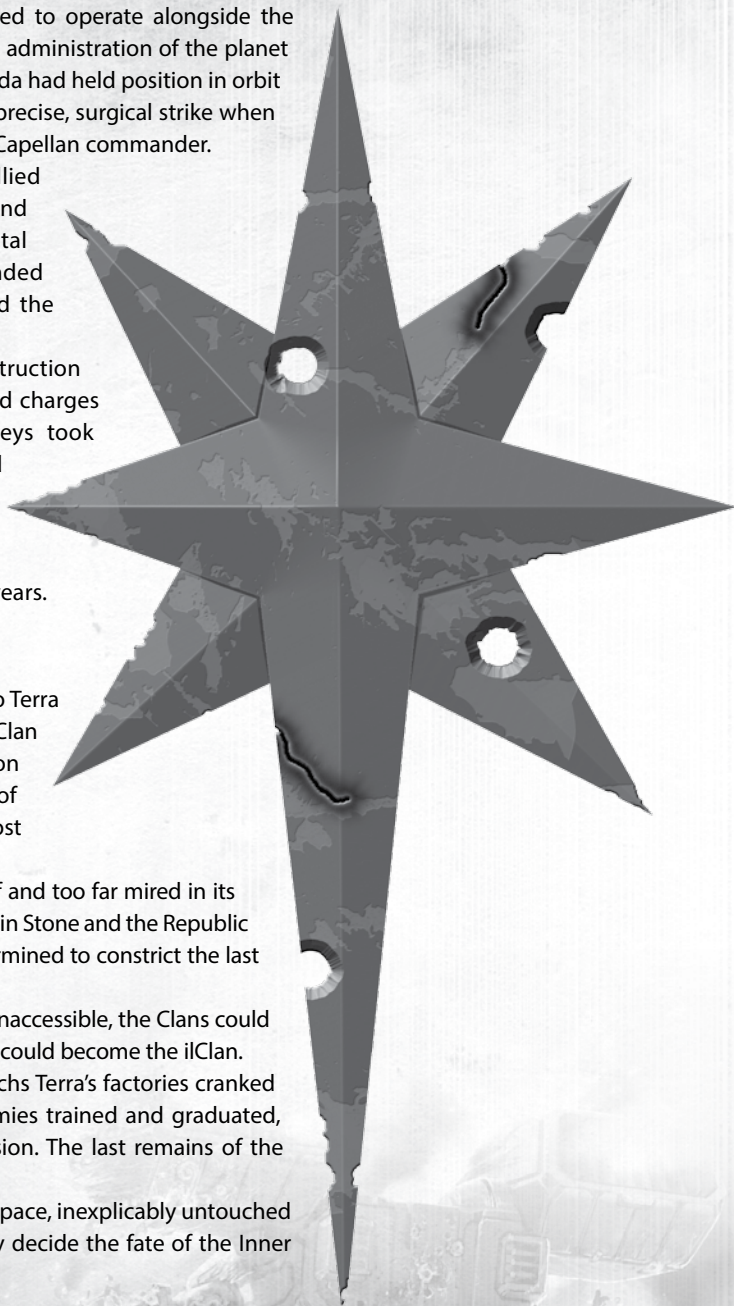
Though the imminent threat the Capellan Confederation posed to Terra had been temporarily neutralized, two preeminent dangers remained. Clan Jade Falcon lay poised to inflict Malvina Hazen's cruel, apocalyptic vision on the birthplace of humanity. Alaric Ward and Clan Wolf dreamed of arriving like a golden conqueror worthy of inspiring jealousy in the ghost of Julius Caesar.

House Davion, the Republic of the Sphere's closest ally, was cut off and too far mired in its own political and martial struggles to offer aid. No help was coming. Devlin Stone and the Republic military had to stand alone against the might of two vicious Clans determined to constrict the last vestiges of the Republic.

But the Wall remained up around Terra. As long as Terra remained inaccessible, the Clans could not claim true victory. As long as no Clan set foot on Terran soil, no Clan could become the ilClan.

All that remained was to wait. But no matter how many new 'Mechs Terra's factories cranked out, no matter how many soldiers, leaders, and heroes Terra's academies trained and graduated, time remained the one resource incapable of manufacture or extension. The last remains of the shattered Fortress Republic were out of time.

On 1 January 3151, an entire fleet of Clan vessels arrived in Terra's space, inexplicably untouched by the Wall. The challenge broadcast by the flagship would ultimately decide the fate of the Inner Sphere and chart the course for the whole of humankind.



SHATTERED FORTRESS



TIMELINE OF EVENTS: 3146–3150

- 3145** **(1 Apr)** Tucker Harwell, disillusioned and desperate, locates and thaws out former Exarch Devlin Stone on Terra.
- (Dec)** Julian Davion's Sea Fox/Federated Suns armada hits Menkalinan to stir trouble in the Confederation rear areas and pull attention from the Federated Suns front.
- 3146** **(Jan)** Julian's task force raids New Canton in the same manner as Menkalinan.
- (Feb–May)** Free Worlds League forces take Abramkovo, Zdice, Kamenz and Bolan from the Lyran Commonwealth.
- (Feb)** Julian's task force arrives at Nanking, where a Republic agent delivers a message from Stone, inviting Julian to Terra. Specific routing instructions are included; failure to follow the procedures will result in a fatal misjump. Julian embarks for Terra under Republic protection.
- (Mar)** The Confederation begins a new assault wave aimed at Kathil.
- (May)** Without Julian, Task Force Navarre pushes through more Confederation systems, conducting fast-strike raids aimed at disruption, slowing the CCAF push toward Kathil.
- (May)** Julian Davion and Devlin Stone meet on Terra and reaffirm their alliance and future plans.
- (May)** MIIO leaks information about mass stockpiles of AFFS materiel on Marlette.
- (May)** Julian departs Terra with more than a regiment of new troops and materiel—christened the Dawn Guards—to bolster the AFFS forces under his command. He “tests” his new Republic-made regiment, which still sports RAF livery, by executing raids on Capellan worlds between the Wall and Suns space.
- (Jun)** Anastasia Kerensky becomes saKhan of Clan Wolf. The remaining Wolf Hunters defect to Clan Wolf.
- (8 Jul)** The DCMS invades New Avalon and settles in for a grueling twelve-week campaign.
- (Jul)** Lyran general Diego Widmer declares himself warlord of Buena. That world secedes from the Commonwealth along with Valloire and Ayacucho to form the Buena Collective.
- (27 Jul)** The Buena Collective Military successfully assaults Loburg, seizing valuable arms factories.
- (4 Aug)** Philip Hughes dies in a hunting accident. While Jessica Marik descends into a period of mourning, Regulus attacks the Free Worlds League.
- (13 Aug–9 Sep)** The CCAF invades Marlette, but the arrival of Julian's Sea Fox task force ambushes the Capellan fleet. The ground battle lasts the better part of the month before Danai Centrella-Liao brokers a ceasefire with Julian.
- (Sep)** Daoshen formally accepts the terms of Danai's negotiated ceasefire.
- (Sep)** Arc-Royal falls to the Jade Falcons. Grand Duke Martin Kell is killed and the Kell Hounds forces on-planet are routed. Clan Wolf-in-Exile forces abandon the planet and relocate to Donegal.
- (Sept)** Binyang, Revivim, Inchicore, Danxian, Maisons, and Ellijay join Widmer's Buena Collective.
- (Oct)** Clan Wolf Khan Alaric Ward offers reconciliation to the Wolves-in-Exile. Few accept his offer.
- (3 Oct)** The Combine plants their flag on New Avalon. With Robinson and New Syrtis also occupied, the AFFS High Command withdraws to June, the last March capital.
- (Oct)** Julian and Erik rendezvous on Goshen; the Sea Foxes depart, and receive the worlds Hean, Alta Vista, and Brussett as payment for their past services.
- (Nov)** The Coordinator declares a month-long celebration on Luthien in recognition of the DCMS's victory over its ancient enemy.
- 3147** **(Jan)** Three regiments of mercenaries hired by Julian assemble at Goshen.
- (Jan)** Clan Sea Fox elements from the Clan Protectorate in the FWL enact an economic interdiction of Regulus, which soon begins to take a toll on its people. The Regulans fight back, sending several ill-fated naval task forces against the enforcing aimags.
- (15 Mar)** Julian Davion is formally installed as First Prince in a hasty ceremony on June.
- (Apr)** Marian Hegemony conducts raids against FWL border worlds, claiming several.
- (7 Apr)** To reassert their claim on the Mongol Doctrine, Clan Hell's Horses launches Operation NOYAN, whose first phase claims two planets from the Rasalhague Dominion.
- (Jun)** Loyal LCAF forces retake Valloire, but fighting on Ayacucho turns into a stalemate.
- (Jun)** Led by Erik Sandoval, Operation PERCEVAL conducts raiding strikes along the DCMS front, attempting to disrupt Combine supply dumps and provide temporary relief to Suns rebel groups on Combine-occupied worlds.
- (17 Jun)** The Hell's Horses attack three Jade Falcon worlds in phase two of Operation NOYAN, taking two.
- (Jul)** In a desperate attempt to break the Sea Fox interdiction on their capital, the Regulans send a strike force to Marik. Regular reinforcements are destroyed en route by the Foxes.
- (3 Aug)** Kaff Doru and Sam Calderon announce the arranged marriage of their children, Reva and Bryant; the reunification of the Taurian Concordat and Calderon Protectorate will result in ten years when Bryant reaches majority.
- (Oct)** Marian Hegemony forces hit Gibraltar. Evidence of Magistracy and Capellan support uncovered.
- (Nov)** Less than a battalion in strength and with a sizable number of attached civilians, a desperate Callandre Kell and the Kell Hounds disappear into the Periphery.
- (7 Nov)** A sharply divided Parliament authorizes retaliatory strikes against the Marian Hegemony in an attempt to win back its lost systems, and formalizes a “trade embargo” against the Confederation.
- (Nov–Dec)** Under mounting pressure from his marshals, Julian launches Operation CERBERUS, a targeted offensive against the Capellan Confederation with the eventual aim of liberating New Syrtis.
- (4–25 Dec)** Julian leads a key AFFS assault on New Syrtis, which reclaims the Capellan March capital.

SHATTERED FORTRESS

3148 (30 Jan) LCAF reinforcements on Ayacucho break the stalemate, and Warlord Widmer is captured on Buena. Many surrendering Buena Collective troops are granted amnesty.

(Feb) The Jade Falcons invade Coventry. Jasek Kelswa-Steiner is killed, but the Lyrans hold the planet. Galaxy Commander Stephanie Chistu accepts *hegira* from Roderick Steiner.

(2 Mar) Jessica Marik is assassinated by a bomb blast at the Halas estate on Oriente. Regulus is implicated. Oriente forces annex several Regular worlds and move a task force toward Regulus with the intent of shattering Regular arms manufacturing.

(Mar) Operation WHIRLWIND: MIIO agents provoke riots and rebellion in systems around New Syrtis. The Confederation ultimately abandons these worlds.

(Mar) Andurien formally annexes many of the independent worlds between the Duchy and Regulus.

(Mar) The Wolves-in-Exile seize Upano and Incukalns from the Jade Falcons but are stopped cold on Pobeda. Galaxy Commander Stephanie Chistu offers them *hegira*.

(28 Mar) Warlord Widmer is executed for treason on Buena.

(6 Apr) Regular Captain-General Lester Cameron-Jones denounces the complicity of his generals' involvement in Jessica Marik's death, and tries to broker a ceasefire. Oriente refuses.

(May) The Wolves-in-Exile leave all of their garrisons in the hands of the LCAF and depart to an unknown destination.

(Jun) Timbuktu, Wiltshire, Hinkley, Coldbrook, and Halifax join the Rim Collection, forming the Timbuktu Collective.

(Jun) After repeatedly denying *Kanrei* Toranaga's requests for fresh troops, Coordinator Yori Kurita presents him the Hikage, a combined-arms unit staffed by DEST-trained personnel.

(18 Jul) A bomb laced with biological and chemical weapons detonates in the capital of New Syrtis; the fallout eventually kills several hundred thousand civilians.

(7 Jul) Regulus officially surrenders to the new Free Worlds League and is granted provisional status in the League for ten years.

(Aug) Toranaga sends the Hikage to take Remagen. The attack fails to break Operation PERCEVAL's back, but the Hikage perform well.

(Aug) Julian Davion faces a Capellan counterattack on New Syrtis, led by Danai Centrella-Liao. Though the CCAF is forced to a stalemate, Julian is injured during the fighting. Danai negotiates a temporary ceasefire with Julian.

(Aug) In protest of a formal peace treaty with the Federated Suns, Ki-Linn Liao and seven members of her personal household immolate themselves on the steps of the Forbidden Palace on Sian.

(Aug–Oct) Daoshen is shaken by Ki-Linn's public suicide and refuses to offer Julian a formal peace treaty. However, both nations nonetheless stand down from further aggression against each other—Daoshen to focus on the Republic invasion he believes is imminent, and Julian to focus on liberating New Avalon and turning back the Combine invasion.

(Sep) Rumors that ComStar has refused to fix the HPG on Xieng Khouang because of anti-Capellan prejudice prompt the ransacking of the station in what becomes known as the Xieng Khouang Massacre. Thirty-eight ComStar staff and dependents are lynched in the streets before order is restored.

(Sep) Several independent worlds located between the FWL and the Magistracy of Canopus—Payvand, Obrenovac, Rohinjan, Saonara, Rushegg, and Ayn Tarma—join the Magistracy.

(Dec) Rim Territories pirates conquer the defenseless Lyran worlds of Elume, Canal, Tsarahavana, and Issaba.

3149 (6 Jan) Devlin Stone brings down the Wall of Fortress Republic. Operation SHOFAR begins, ultimately reclaiming several former Republic worlds, some without the need for violence.

(Feb–Nov) Daoshen orders a full-scale invasion into the Republic aimed at Terra. Operation BÀOYÍNG targets Hall, Terra Firma, Outreach, and Epsilon Eridani.

(Mar) Hall, Outreach, Terra Firma, and Epsilon Eridani fall to the Confederation with minimal resistance. BÀOYÍNG is halted as a precautionary measure.

(Mar) Operation ERUPTIO, under command of Paladin Max Ergen, liberates several worlds on the Suns-Combine border for the Federated Suns.

(5–29 Mar) Paladin Ergen raids Dieron. Warlord of Dieron Kambei Okamoto is killed in combat against Ergen.

(Apr) A team of Capellan diplomats meets with the Coordinator and offers a strategic alliance to coordinate a two-pronged assault on the Republic.

(Apr) Operation PERCEVAL liberates Coloma and its neighbors.

(May) Liao and Kurita military leaders forge a coordinated battle plan, known as Operation TIAMAT, to create a front stretching from Ingress to Tybalt to Mallory's World.

(Jun) The Combine's first wave of TIAMAT begins, targeting Mallory's World, Ronel, Ingress, and Deneb Kaitos.

(Jun) Clan Wolf seizes Alhena, Chertan, and Dubhe from the Republic Remnant. At the battle of Dubhe, the crippled Fidelis WarShip *Flatus* is intentionally scuttled to buy Remnant forces time to withdraw to Callison.

(Jul) Clan Sea Fox finalizes the acquisition of all ComStar assets in the Free Worlds League. ComStar has no resources with which to fight the takeover and quietly acquiesces.

(Aug–Feb) The Marian Hegemony raids several Duchy of Tamarind-Abbey worlds.

(Aug) The CCAF's opening wave of TIAMAT hits Bryant, Epsilon Indi, and Liberty. The only significant Republic defense occurs on Liberty, deepening Daoshen's suspicions.

(29 Aug) Damien Redburn opposes Stone's request to rejoin the Republic. After a short firefight on Callison, former Exarch Jonah Levin's task force apprehends Redburn and takes him to Terra for court-martial. The Republic claims the remainder of the Remnant.

(Sep) A Clan Wolf fleet arrives at Denebola and discovers evidence of a massive naval fleet near the system's fringe. A few months later, the Watch discovers the "flotilla" is actually a large-scale deception.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS: 3146–3150

(Sep–Nov) Two more worlds fall to PERCEVAL, but the DCMS retakes Coloma.

(Oct) The CCAF's opening phase of Wave Two of TIAMAT takes New Home and Procyon from the Republic.

(Oct) A small Republic counterstrike retakes Liberty from the Confederation.

(18 Oct–25 Nov) The ERUPTIO task force liberates Robinson for the Federated Suns.

(Dec) The CCAF arm of TIAMAT seizes only Keid in the second phase of Wave Two.

3150 (Jan–Mar) Capellan units gathering on several worlds taken by TIAMAT suffer equipment failures and sabotage, prompting Daoshen to end the Confederation's participation in the operation.

(Feb) AFFS troops reinforce Robinson and other RAF-liberated Draconis March worlds. Within days of their arrival, they defeat a DCMS raiding force tasked with probing Robinson's defenses.

(Feb–Apr) Flush with a string of successes against Tamarind-Abbey, the Marian Hegemony takes Thraxa, Gambilon, and Marantha, but are rebuffed from Campoleone and Astrokaszy.

(Mar) Clan Wolf invades and seizes Skye from the Jade Falcons. In subsequent assaults, the Wolves take Callison and Marcus from the Republic, followed by Castor, Denebola, and five other poorly defended Republic worlds.

(Mar) Paladin Ergen's task force arrives at Shiloh after using uncharted systems to bypass Wolf Empire holdings. The sudden appearance of a sizeable RAF force in the Wolves' rear areas brings a temporary halt to Alaric's invasion. Ergen's task force claims Gacrux, Phecda, and Wing in the next month, cutting Alaric's invasion off from its supply line.

(Apr) The Dominion takes advantage of light Combine defenses and seizes Dyev and Lambrecht for their Vega province.

(Apr) Clan Wolf turns its leading forces on Paladin Ergen's conquests, retaking all four worlds over the next two months. On Wing, Paladin Ergen is grievously wounded in a duel with Anastasia Kerensky and evacuated to Terra.

(16 Apr) A Capellan exploratory force jumps from Procyon to Terra. The mangled remains of the ships return to Procyon: the Wall around Terra is still operational.



(Apr) Toranaga ends DCMS participation in TIAMAT.

(May–Sep) The Marians, Rim Collection, Free Worlds League, and independent worlds along the Lyran border take advantage of minimal Lyran defenses and execute raids on military stores and materiel.

(Sep) The Timbuktu Collective annexes Pocologan and Viborg, offering better protection from predation.

(May–Nov) The Magistracy lashes back at the Hegemony, retaking Marantha and Gambilon, and then Islington and Ballalaba.

(Jun–Sep) The Duchy of Tamarind-Abbey appeals to Parliament for a declaration of war against the Marians. The motion fails. The Duchy launches an unsanctioned war against the Hegemony, earning censure from Parliament.

(Aug) Tamarind-Abbey takes Hazeldean, San Nicholas, Huntington, Lahti, and Landfall. The Marian Hegemony raids Sackville and Merton, and captures Aylmer and Tormentine.

(Oct) The Wolves launch a full assault against the Republic, forcing Stone and Jonah Levin to conduct a defensive campaign.

(Nov–Dec) Tamarind-Abbey troops land on Illyria. The MHAF abandons Aylmer and Tormentine and attempts to reinforce Illyria, which falls to Tamarind-Abbey by the end of the year.

(Nov) Alarmed at the idea of a Wolf ilClan, Malvina Hazen abandons her plans for further invading Lyran space and races toward Terra, seizing three Republic worlds en route.

(Nov) The Falcons assault Thorin at the end of the month and use orbital fire to bury the RAF's base. Wolf Empire forces make planetfall and fight the Falcons alongside RAF troops, but no coordination exists between the Falcons' adversaries.

(15 Dec) Malvina arrives at Rigil Kentarus and orders the RAF and Clan Wolf defenders destroyed with impunity.

(13 Nov–15 Dec) The CCAF invades Northwind in Operation CLARITY, hoping to capture a functional HPG close to Terra. The appearance of a new unit—the Grey Watch, formed from mothballed Highlanders 'Mechs—catches the Capellans by surprise. The Hikage arrives but does not aid the CCAF attack. The Capellans fire on the DCMS forces due to persistent rumors that the Combine seeks to steal Northwind from the Confederation. During the fighting, the HPG complex explodes, prompting the Capellans and the Hikage to depart.

INNER SPHERE - 3151



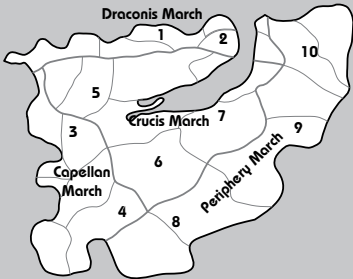
Inner Sphere Powers

- 1) Republic of the Sphere
- 2) Clan Jade Falcon
- 3) Clan Hell's Horses
- 4) Rasalhague Dominion
- 5) Wolf Empire
- 6) Raven Alliance
- 7) Filtvelt Coalition
- 8) Tortuga Dominions
- 9) Calderon Protectorate
- 10) Taurian Concordat
- 11) Fronc Reaches
- 12) Magistracy of Canopus
- 13) Marian Hegemony
- 14) Lothian League
- 15) Timbuktu Collective
- 16) Rim Territories
- 17) Chainelane Isles
- 18) The Barrens
- 19) Galatean League



Draconis Combine

- Pesht Military District
- 1) Albiero Prefecture
 - 2) Bjarred Prefecture
 - 3) Qandahar Prefecture
 - 4) Ningxia Prefecture
 - 5) Kagoshima Prefecture
 - 6) Irece Prefecture
- New Samarkand Military District
- 7) Oshika Prefecture
 - 8) New Samarkand Prefecture
 - 9) Matsuida Prefecture
 - 10) Barlow's End Prefecture
 - 11) Kaznejev Prefecture
 - 12) Tancredi Prefecture
 - 13) New Avalon Prefecture
- Benjamin Military District
- 14) Buckminster Prefecture
 - 15) Xinyang Prefecture
 - 16) Benjamin Prefecture
 - 17) Proserpina Prefecture
 - 18) Irurzun Prefecture
- Dieron Military District
- 19) Algedi Prefecture
 - 20) Dieron Prefecture
 - 21) Al Na'ir Prefecture
 - 22) Ashio Prefecture



Federated Suns

- Draconis March
- 1) Robinson Operational Area
 - 2) Tancredi IV Operational Area
- Capellan March
- 3) Kathil Operational Area
 - 4) Taygeta Operational Area
- Crucis March
- 5) Markesan Operational Area
 - 6) Chirikof Operational Area
 - 7) Minette Operational Area
- Periphery March
- 8) June Operational Area
 - 9) Anjin Muerto Operational Area
 - 10) Woodbine Operational Area



Free Worlds League

- 1) Oriente Protectorate
- 2) Duchy of Tamarind-Abbey
- 3) Rim Commonality
- 4) Clan Protectorate
- 5) Covenant Worlds
- 6) Augustine Alliance
- 7) Regulan Fiefs

Former Free Worlds League

- 8) Duchy of Andurien



Lyran Commonwealth

- Provinces
- 1) Donegal Province
 - 2) Arc-Royal Theater
 - 3) Coventry Province
 - 4) Bucklands Theater
 - 5) Buena Province
 - 6) Florida Theater



Capellan Confederation

- 1) Tikonov Commonality
- 2) Chesterton Commonality
- 3) Sarna Commonality
- 4) Capellan Commonality
- 5) Sian Commonality
- 6) St Ives Commonality
- 7) Victoria Commonality



LEGEND

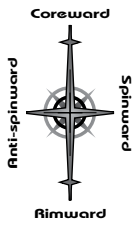
30 LIGHT YEARS

120 LIGHT YEARS OR 36.6 PARSECS

- ⊙ Region capital
- ⊙ District capital
- ★ National capital
- ⊙ Clan Sea Fox World

MAXIMUM JUMP: APPROXIMATELY 30 LIGHT YEARS

Map compiled by COMSTAR.
From information provided by the COMSTAR EXPLORER CORPS
and the STAR LEAGUE ARCHIVES on Terra.



NEW UNIT PROFILES



DAWN GUARDS [FEDERATED SUNS]

CO: Colonel Janne Wealthow

Average Experience: Veteran/Fanatical

Force Composition: 1 assault 'Mech regiment, 1 heavy aerospace wing

Unit Abilities: Force the Initiative, +2 to all rolls on Random Assignment Tables, +1 to all Piloting Skill Rolls when performing a Combat Drop.

The realization of the alliance between the Republic and the Federated Suns, "Stone's Covenant" was gifted to First Prince Julian Davion to buoy his campaign against the Capellan Confederation, and to herald the Republic's imminent return in force.

Every member of the Guards possesses some ancestral ties to the Suns, and volunteered for duty with the understanding that the assignment would essentially transfer their service to the AFFS. Each Guardsman was thoroughly vetted both for martial prowess and their commitment to the ideals of the Republic. As the first RAF troops to sally forth from Fortress Republic back into the turbulent realms of the Inner Sphere, they were charged with carrying forth the spirit of Stone's dream and serving as champions of a bright new day. The importance of that mission has largely—but not entirely—silenced the few voices who question whether Julian Davion is truly the best hope for the Republic's survival.

Befitting the shock that the Guards' initial appearance caused among Capellan line units, the unit specializes in devastating lightning strikes delivered by their cutting-edge Republic technology. Whether combat-dropping onto the enemy's weakest point or forming the vanguard of a backbreaking charge, the Dawn excels at applying pressure where opponents find it most uncomfortable.

A capable battlefield commander, Guards CO Janne Wealthow possesses broad intelligence training and an excellent service record with her previous unit, Stone's Lament. Though she also holds some ancestral ties to the Suns, she grew to respect Julian Davion on her own terms and developed a close working relationship with the First Prince as a key member of his command staff.



HIKAGE [DRACONIS COMBINE]

CO: *Sho-sho* Hisao Ikeda

Average Experience: Elite/Fanatical

Force Composition: 1 heavy reinforced 'Mech regiment, 1 heavy aerospace wing, 1 battle armor battalion, 1 medium vehicle regiment, 1 artillery company

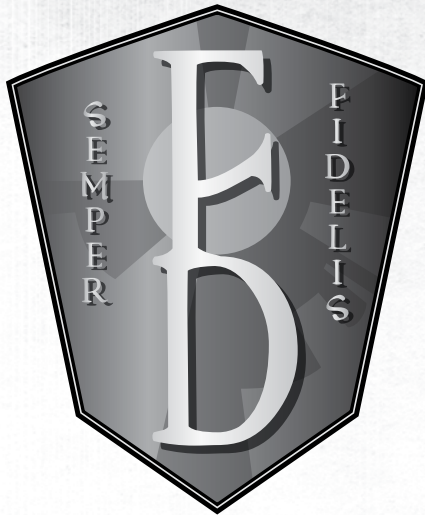
Unit Abilities: Overrun Combat, +2 to Initiative rolls if they are the Attacking force.

MechWarriors with the minds of commandos, the Dragon's Shadow serves several purposes both on and off the battlefield. First and foremost, they were a message from the Coordinator to *Kanrei* Toranaga—an unobtrusive notice that his influence over her was at an end, and that it was time for him to curb his ambitions and assume his proper place as her subordinate. But the Hikage were a gift as well, a show of faith in Toranaga's service and successes, and of the esteem in which the Coordinator holds him.

The Hikage are unique among the DCMS. The regiment consists almost entirely of former DEST commandos and DEST-educated personnel cross-trained as MechWarriors. In the field, the Hikage are ruthlessly efficient and often behave in ways that opponents steeped in generations of BattleMech orthodoxy do not expect. Units as small as a lance are frequently allowed to operate with little direct tactical oversight, giving them the freedom to pursue strategic goals in whatever way they feel is most effective.

Similarly, the unit as a whole reports to Toranaga, but is never commanded in the field by the *kanrei* and only occasionally receives direct orders from him. Instead, in the absence of specific directives the Hikage have standing orders to "act in service to the Dragon," allowing them to select targets and undertake actions as *Sho-sho* Ikeda sees fit. This latitude also grants the Hikage the right to take operational command of other DCMS regiments, and employ them in pursuit of their goals.

Ikeda is staunchly loyal to the Coordinator, but also respects the great glory that Toranaga has brought to the Dragon, making him an ideal bridge between the two headstrong leaders. Nonetheless, the *kanrei* strongly suspects that the Hikage's commander has an open line of communication with the Coordinator and would swiftly report any orders from Toranaga that indicate disloyalty.



FIDES DEFENDERS [REPUBLIC]

CO: Brigadier General Lara De Klerk

Average Experience: Veteran/Reliable

Force Composition: 12 medium 'Mech battalions, 6 battle armor battalions, 6 medium aerospace wings, 6 heavy vehicle regiments, 6 infantry regiments

Unit Abilities: Tactical Specialization (Combined Arms), Tactical Adjustments.

Exarch Jonah Levin's most pressing task after the initiation of Fortress Republic was clear: raise new troops and begin rebuilding the Republic Armed Forces for the day that the Wall came down. In addition to raising new Hastati, Principes, and Triarii units, Levin also envisioned an all-new brigade which would draw upon the expertise of a clandestine group that former Exarch Damien Redburn activated before his departure: the Fidelis.

Knowing that the Fidelis themselves were too few in number to make the impact he required, Exarch Levin instead tasked them with fulfilling their vow to Devlin Stone by instilling their discipline and methods in a new brigade comprised of RAF veterans. Though not as legendarily effective as true Fidelis, these Fides units would infuse the most important of their abilities into a regiment-sized formation.

Due to a higher-than-usual washout rate among recruits, each of the six Fides regiments is organized along the lines of a Principes unit, with two 'Mech battalions and the standard number of armor, infantry and support regiments. Each Fides lance is composed of two 'Mechs each of different weight classes, and MechWarriors are extensively drilled in rapidly shifting and recombining lances to leverage the best pairings. Though difficult for many MechWarriors to get used to, the tactic emphasizes the Fidelis' focus on flexibility and improvisation to devastating effect. Joining the 'Mech battalions is a third battalion of special operations infantry, divided equally into one company specializing in headhunting, one company in infiltration and sabotage, and one company in direct battlefield support.

Nearly all Fides troops hold their Fidelis trainers in true reverence. After an initial period of adjustment, most of the original Fides troopers began so closely emulating their teachers that they took on some of the Fidelis' more ceremonial rituals. Brigadier General De Klerk has encouraged this tendency, believing that it is not enough for the Defenders regiments to act *like* Fidelis—they must attempt to *become* them in every possible way.



THE GREY WATCH [REPUBLIC/MERC]

CO: Colonel Michael Griffin

Average Experience: Regular/Reliable

Force Composition: 1 medium 'Mech regiment

Unit Abilities: Hit and Run, Off-Map Movement, -1 to all Initiative rolls when operating in any formation larger than a company.

When Devlin Stone launched his Military Materiel Redemption Program in 3083, the clan elders of Northwind faced a dilemma. They were willing to let the Highlanders' standing regiments be largely absorbed into the Republic Armed Forces, but many private individuals on Northwind either owned a family BattleMech, or had retired from active service with the Highlanders with sufficient funds to purchase their 'Mech. Though strongly supportive of Stone's vision for his new nation, the elders were not willing to force Northwind citizens and veterans to surrender their private property.

Complicating matters was the distrust with which many still viewed the Highlanders following their "liberation" from a Blakist ruse just six years earlier—failing to surrender their weapons of war could invite disastrous retribution. Fortunately, one of their own, former Highlanders Colonel Andrea Stirling, was Stone's newly named Paladin Exemplar and understood the Highlanders' fierce independence perfectly well.

As Stirling helped "redirect" the law enforcement efforts of the MMRP's Materiel Oversight Division, the clan leaders began quietly instructing 'Mech owners to stash their machines away among Northwind's highlands in groups no larger than a single lance. However, due to internal politics and other mitigating factors, these 'Mechs remained in mothballs until after the Steel Wolves' invasion of Northwind caught the clans flatfooted in 3133 and again in 3134.

Countess Tara Campbell and her contingent of Highlanders were entrenched outside the Wall in 3135, and the First Kearny Highlanders were long since absorbed into the RAF, so Northwind's elders knew they would need to take definitive measures to ensure the world's security and avoid future incidents like the Steel Wolves invasions. As the clan elders funneled resources and technicians to bring the aging 'Mechs back into fighting shape, they began formally organizing the Grey Watch. During the subsequent decades, locally born instructors and cadets from the Northwind Military Academy secretly trained the Greys in basic combat operations.

Command of the regiment went to Colonel Michael Griffin, who had retired from active service with the Highlanders after the Steel Wolves' invasion of 3133. Griffin had overseen the Highlanders' intelligence network on Northwind and knew the exact numbers, locations, and owners of the hidden forces, while his spit-and-polish demeanor lent much-needed discipline to his new troops. His XO, Lt. Col. Cadha Jaffray, comes from a longstanding Northwind Highlanders pedigree.

Though they possess a reasonable level of individual talent in the cockpit, the warriors of the Watch had not drilled together prior to the Battle of Northwind. Their inexperience in formations larger than a lance is immediately apparent, and will take time to overcome.

FORTRESS REPUBLIC TECHNOLOGY

The Republic of the Sphere has demonstrated amazing defensive technologies. The precise nature of the “Fortress Republic” systems is not yet known, but the following report encompasses both the most likely cases and a few best guesses by experts in the field of hyperspace theory.

—Briefing provided by Svetlana Lebedev, University of Sian, 3151

HPG BLACKOUT

Since the collapse of the hyperpulse generator network on “Gray Monday” in 3132, speculation about the actual cause for the event has continued unabated. Most doubt that the Republic knowingly caused it; they seemed as unprepared for the collapse of interstellar communication as every other nation. In the handful of cases in which select HPGs were directly attacked, the operatives involved bore an insignia of a snake coiled around a sword on a blood-red disk. Analysts have attributed the attacks to, variously, a fringe group within the Republic government, ComStar, or even the Word of Blake. Regardless, it is clear that the party or parties involved had extensive knowledge not just of HPG technology, but of the vagaries of the ancient HPG network itself.

News of the restoration of Wyatt’s HPG in 3135 was greeted with great interest throughout known space, enthusiasm which dissipated when Harwell’s solution could not be successfully duplicated elsewhere. His breakthrough did prompt Project Sunlight, a concerted effort by the Republic to restore the HPG network.

The following theories have been advanced to explain the ongoing Blackout of most interstellar communications.

HYPERSPACE DISRUPTION

The notion that hyperspace itself could be disrupted in a meaningful way became the focus of intense research after the raising of the Fortress Wall. This theory holds that a device or series of devices is used to disrupt hyperspace in a way that only interferes with HPG communication, not K-F jump travel. It should be noted that Tucker Harwell’s Wyatt solution did seem to rely on this theory to some degree, as K-F jumps and HPG transmissions occur on different “frequencies” of hyperspace. There are also associations with the Word of Blake super-HPGs, thought to have disrupted hyperspace in an area for brief periods of time.

This theory also explains some equipment failures and damage seen across the Inner Sphere, as a hyperspace disruption effect could cause misjump-style malfunctions in HPGs, or cause energy feedback not seen during normal HPG function.

However, it does not explain why certain HPGs are unaffected, or why Harwell’s solution on Wyatt provided no lasting remedy for other HPGs. Additionally, the ability to disrupt hyperspace such that it affects the entire Inner Sphere seems to require an impossible amount of power. Proponents instead refer to a “ripple effect” (see below) to support this theory.

TARGETING FLAW

A more recent hypothesis posits that the Blackout is the result of the introduction of a targeting flaw into affected HPGs. In theory, an affected HPG attempts to operate normally, but is made to slightly miss its target and instead aim for either the target

planet’s core or the system’s sun. The error could be caused by either bypassing the hyperpulse generator’s K-F controller, or realigning it as a means of achieving the effect. This concept would explain most of the bizarre damage seen in some HPGs, and would also explain why traditional antivirus efforts are unsuccessful, as the root cause is not a virus per se.

Apparently, not every HPG was vulnerable to such a flaw, warranting sabotage and direct attack in some cases. The HPGs still operating normally were simply beyond the reach of the group performing the attacks, proponents claim.

This theory is impossible to test on affected HPGs, as any attempt at long-distance transmission results in damage to the hyperpulse generator, and any short-distance communication attempts would not reveal the flaw. Because HPGs must interface with actual gravity sources for targeting, much like Kearny-Fuchida jump drives, there is no way to “fake” that effect for testing purposes.

VIRUS

Numerous unverified reports claim that HPG stations are being affected by a complex virus, much like the whiteout events during the Blakist Jihad. This virus causes physical damage to key components of the HPG, rendering them inoperable. HPG operating systems have become so complex over the centuries due to patches and modifications by increasingly less competent individuals (or technicians actively deluded by Blakist scriptures) that any virus may be impossible to trace. It may be hiding in long-forgotten portions of the operating system, or even have residence in hardware specifically installed to hide such a virus. This could be as simple as a storage device that is invisible to the system, but connected to it. Another possibility is a back door of some kind, through which the virus gets uploaded again and again by exterior radio or HPG signal.

This explanation doesn’t quite explain why Clan HPGs are equally affected, unless the vulnerability at fault dates back to the very origin of the HPG network. Proponents of this theory lean toward that explanation, and even insist that the base operating systems of HPGs might include the virus code in such a fashion as to render its removal impossible.

This theory also fails to explain why HPGs of different generations with differing parts fail in ways deemed physically impossible, why some HPGs seem completely unaffected, and why commando raids by the group responsible for the Blackout proved necessary in some cases.

THE WALL

The Fortress Republic protocol was activated by Exarch Levin on 1 October 3135, giving light a short time later to a new technology dubbed the Wall. When attempting to transit within a ring of worlds slightly larger than the Republic’s Prefecture X, JumpShips would misjump, or bounce back to their point of origin in a mangled state. Any JumpShips which did appear to complete the transit have not been seen since, and are presumed to have been captured by the Republic beyond the Wall, misjumped to destinations unknown, or been completely destroyed in the attempt.

The Wall provided yet another example of how little is truly known about hyperspace, as the few Kearny-Fuchida experts in existence were unable to explain how the feat is possible. While theories abound, none have been verified—JumpShips are too expensive and rare to waste on experimentation, and no crew is eager to take the chance. The most prominent theories, and their tactical implications, follow.

HYPERSPACE DISRUPTION FIELD

Hyperspace has a predictable and precise relationship with real space; otherwise, K-F travel would be random. Matter and gravity have an effect on hyperspace, as evidenced by the thirty-lightyear jump limit and by the use of gravity to target a jump.

Therefore, it is plausible that a device could disrupt hyperspace using these observed properties. This is the favored theory of many studying the Wall, who also presume the Republic is using Word of Blake technology to achieve this effect. The Wall, then, is one or more devices that make hyperspace unusable for JumpShip travel to particular star systems, using a gravity effect or an as-yet-unknown property of hyperspace. Just as K-F drives use a lensing effect to expand their jump field, proponents claim that Fortress technology uses a similar principle to expand their disruption envelope to cover an entire star system.

While this theory explains the catastrophic effects of attempted jumps through the Wall, the energy requirements to affect a region of space as large as Prefecture X seems implausible. One proposed solution addresses this problem by recalling how water ripples are formed. Crudely speaking, when water is displaced by wind, a thrown stone, or a surface vessel, gravity and surface tension assist and amplify the effect of the disruption. The Wall device would utilize an amount of energy that is within our reach, but “displaces” enough of the local hyperspace medium to cause an ambient “ripple” effect in hyperspace. Such ripples then prove disruptive to normal K-F jumps.

The most extreme version of this theory was proposed by Dr. C. Lorem, who posited that the ripple effect might oscillate in a single area for a long period beyond the initial “stone throw” into hyperspace. However, Lorem’s theory only works if hyperspace has an “edge” for the ripples to bounce off of relatively near to us.

But if such ripples could disrupt K-F travel through direct interaction, then normal K-F travel should also cause this ripple effect through reciprocity. No such disruption has been observed despite events such as Aleksandr Kerensky’s final attack on Terra during the Amaris Civil War, which involved hundreds of JumpShips all arriving in a relatively small area. If the disruptive “stone throw” is of greater power still, its input power would have to exceed the power requirement of nearly a thousand jumps.

Another variation of the theory presumes the field is merely a barrier around the protected area, with the irregular shape explained as either a consequence of hyperspace vagaries, or a result of the placement of multiple “Wall generators.” As it cannot be definitively stated that travel within hyperspace moves from point-to-point as it appears to in normal space, a barrier may be plausible.

Regardless, a hyperspace disruption field would have to be treated as a flawless K-F jump deterrent, preventing K-F travel 100 percent of the time, in the entire affected area. And such a technology could be inflicted on the Republic’s enemies. It may also be possible for the Wall to be selectively turned off, allowing the Republic to trap hostile forces that enter the presumed breach.

HYPERSPACE INTERCEPTORS

Perhaps the most exotic theory posits a JumpShip that can stay inside hyperspace. This feat is achieved by some type of force field around the vessel that makes it compatible with hyperspace. It could then attack, disrupt, or even capture incoming JumpShips.

Those who subscribe to this theory insist that incoming jump events would be detectable at enormous distances, in order to get around the need to quickly detect incoming travel (though some have proposed a satellite network in hyperspace). They also state that such an interceptor would be able to travel nearly instantaneously to anywhere within its operational range, as it is no longer limited by the roughly thirty-lightyear range of current technology by remaining in hyperspace. In that way, a handful of vessels could intercept incoming travel across a huge portion of space.

This approach gained prominence due to the support of Dr. Mary Garden, the theory’s most respected and vocal champion. It relies on the observation of Dr. Kearny that matter could exist within hyperspace if enveloped in a proper transitional medium, though his observation was limited to individual atoms, and a device on our end creating the medium.

HYPERSPACE INTERDICTION

Another theory with a considerable following presumes a network of devices which could actively target a JumpShip, preventing it from jumping successfully. The advantage of this theory is that the amount of energy needed to achieve the effect is much more plausible.

Nonetheless, it has a large number of flaws. For one, this concept would require an enormous detection network, and one that would require access to HPG communications to be effective. Relying on normal EM transmission would cause delays in targeting that would make the system ineffective. The expense in HPGs alone seems to make such a system cost-prohibitive, though that is predicated on the cost picture presented by ComStar. Many presume that an extensive knowledge of HPG technology and direct access to a series of HPGs could permit someone to drastically reduce the costs involved.

The theory also seems to fly in the face of known Kearny-Fuchida issues. K-F jumps are disrupted by gravity or the proximity of another K-F field. A hyperpulse generator transmission is a pulse, not a continuous effect—even if the transmission was powerful enough to have an effect on K-F jumps, which HPGs are not known to have. We have no technology that would permit the projection of a major gravity effect at range, and likewise have no way to create the K-F “lensing” effect remotely.

If true, such interdiction could be partially defeated by escaping initial detection and targeting. This could be achieved by jumping into a system beyond the range of the detection network. However, any interloper could be targeted and interdicted once discovered in the system, and thus be unable to leave; a vessel would need to remain completely undetected for the entirety of the mission. This could be a reason why only certain planets are covered by the Wall, those deemed to have a sufficiently effective detection network to prevent this strategy.

If the interdictor hardware were to be deployed on multiple space stations in deep space between inhabited systems, the system would be very difficult to defeat without espionage providing the stations’ locations. Deep space deployment would allow the interdiction of all JumpShips in an invasion fleet after their arrival, even if the invaders achieved total control of the system. The effects on a typical “multiple wave”-style invasion are obvious. Additionally, such deep-space positioning could be used to cut off enemy-held systems.

TOUCHPOINT TRACKS

The scenarios in this section allow the recreation of battles from this tumultuous time in the Inner Sphere's history. These scenarios can be played as stand-alone games, or they can be incorporated into longer campaigns by using *Chaos Campaign* rules (see p. 156, *CO*, or p. 116, *AS*).

For ease of flexibility, these tracks contain options for both *Total Warfare* rules (which is compatible with *BattleMech Manual*) and *Alpha Strike*, allowing each battle to be played with either rule set.

Forced Withdrawal rules are in effect for each track unless otherwise noted.

RULES

For ease of use, rules for the following topics can be found in these locations. For each entry, *Total Warfare* rules references are listed first, followed by *Alpha Strike* references.

Force Creation

- **Random Allocation Tables (RATs):** pp. 212–240, *FM: 3145*
- **Skill Levels:** p. 273, *TW*, or p. 93, *CM: M*
- **Special Command Abilities:** pp. 83–87, *CO*; or pp. 44–49, *ASC*
- **Special Pilot Abilities:** pp. 70–82, *CO*, or pp. 49–58, *ASC*

Gameplay

- **Artillery:** p. 179, *TO*, or p. 73, *AS*
- **Forced Withdrawal:** p. 258, *TW*, or p. 27, *AS*
- **Hidden Units:** p. 259, *TW*, or p. 101, *AS*

TOUCHPOINT: ARC-ROYAL

“Attention, First Wolf Legion! The Falcons killed our Khan, slaughtered our sibkos, and think they can destroy us! They are wrong! Our Clan is in retreat, and we must stop those arrogant surats that dare call themselves Jade Falcons from breaking through and claiming more of our Clan! I have one order: No Falcon gets past us!”

—Star Colonel Jacob Carns

SITUATION

Business District

Wolf City

Arc-Royal, Lyran Commonwealth

29 September 3146

The Jade Falcons' use of Mongol tactics against Clan Wolf-in-Exile resulted in thousands of deaths. While the rest of the Clan evacuated from Arc-Royal, the First Wolf Legion was tasked with stopping the Falcons from reaching the spaceport. Aided only by a few *solahma* platoons, the First Wolf prepared to sell their lives dearly so the rest of the Clan could escape.

GAME SETUP

Recommended Terrain: Light and Heavy Urban Terrain; see p. 263, *TW* (*AS*: 40% light buildings, 40% medium building, 20% heavy buildings).

If using *Alpha Strike* terrain, the Defender sets up 75% of the buildings, the Attacker the other 25%. Attacker chooses their edge first; defender's edge is opposite the attacker's.

Attacker (Clan Jade Falcon)

Recommended Forces: 53rd Falcon Talon, 6th Falcon Striker, and Raptor Keshik

The Attacker is 180% of the defender's force, evenly split between all three units with a command element designated for each cluster. Both the Fifty-third and Sixth are Frontline units, while the Raptor Keshik is a Keshik unit. The Fifty-third and the Raptor Keshik have Elite skill ratings, and the Sixth Strikers have a Regular skill rating. All three units have the Overrun Combat Command Ability, and the Fifty-third has the Force the Initiative Command Ability. The Raptor Keshik's inability to work alongside other forces results in a -3 Initiative modifier for the Jade Falcons while any member of the unit remains on the battlefield.

The Attacker's forces, including the Fifty-third and Sixth, enter on Turn 1. The Raptor Keshik enters on Turn 10.

Defender (Clan Wolf-in-Exile)

Recommended Forces: First Wolf Legion

This Frontline unit rolls on the Lyran Commonwealth RAT (see p. 216, *FM: 3145*). For every four rolls on the Lyran RAT, the defender can make one roll on the Wolf Empire RAT, but without any bonuses. The First has a Veteran skill rating and the Zone of Control Command Ability. Designate one unit as the force's commander.

In addition, the Defender receives *solahma* infantry platoons equal to 25% of their total force, of Regular skill level. 50% of the platoons (rounding down) are SRM platoons; the rest have rifles. All have the Urban Guerrilla Special Pilot Ability.

The Defender deploys within the urban area as Hidden Units.

WARCHEST

Track Cost: 750 WP

Options

+300 Armed and Dangerous: All Defender's *solahma* platoons have SRMs. (Attacker only)

+300 Command is Here: The Attacker adds an Elite-level command star. (Defender only)

OBJECTIVES

Breakthrough. The Attacker must get 50% or more of their force off Defender's home edge before Turn 15. **[500] (Attacker Only)**

Fang and Talon. Destroy/cripple the enemy **[50 for each enemy destroyed, 25 for each enemy crippled]**

Headhunters. Destroy the enemy commanders' units **[100 per command unit destroyed]**

SPECIAL RULES

The following rules are in effect for this track:

No Zellbrigen

Neither side follows *zellbrigen* rules (see p. 274, *TW*).

No Retreat. No Surrender

Neither side is subject to Forced Withdrawal.

AFTERMATH

The battle raged for several hours, destroyed large sections of the business district, and reduced both sides to a fraction of their strength. Only then did Khan Malvina Hazen unleash the Raptor Keshik. The fresh troops smashed through the Wolves' weak lines and raced for the spaceport, only to discover the rest of the Clan had escaped. Only three Wolf Legion warriors survived to become Falcon bondsmen.

TOUCHPOINT: NEW AVALON

"Up to this point, the DCMS had done the bulk of the fighting, regulating the Dragoons to reserve and security missions. That changed when the Second Robinson Rangers bullied their way through the Combine's picket forces and landed on Albion. They destroyed a Fifth Sword battalion and pushed hard toward Avalon City to retake it. With no other force able to intercept, Kanrei Toranaga ordered the Dragoons into action."

—Patrice Mallory, *Broken Sword: The New Avalon Campaign*, 3146

SITUATION

Wilson Forrest Preserve
Dalban Mountains, Albion
New Avalon, Federated Suns
28 September 3146

The arrival of the Second Robinson Rangers was the first glimmer of hope the New Avalon defenders had seen in three months. Breaking through the Combine's aerospace screen, the Rangers landed several hundred kilometers northwest of the capital. Moving quickly, they overran and destroyed the Fifth Sword of Light's Second Battalion, then headed toward Avalon City.

Wolf's Dragoons, held in reserve for most of the New Avalon campaign, were ordered to stop the Rangers. In the forest preserve, the two sides collided.

GAME SETUP

Recommended Terrain: Woodlands (see p. 263, *TW*) (AS: 40% of the board light woods, 20% heavy woods, 40% clear).

The Attacker chooses one edge as their home edge. The Defender's edge is the opposite.

Attacker (Draconis Combine)

Recommended Forces: Gamma Regiment, Wolf's Dragoons.

The Attacker equals 100% of the Defender's total force. Gamma Regiment is an "A" rated Mercenary unit with a Veteran skill rating, and possesses the Overrun Combat Special Command Ability.

The Attacker deploys within two hexes (AS: 4") from their home edge. Designate one unit as the commander.

Defender (Federated Suns)

Recommended Forces: Second Robinson Rangers.

The Rangers are a "B" rated unit of Regular skill and possess the Off-Map Movement Special Command Ability. Designate one unit as the commander.

One-fourth of the Defender's force deploys within five hexes (AS: 10") from their home edge. On each of Turns 2, 3, and 4, another 25% of the Defender's force enters the map. The additional forces can use the Off-Map Movement Special Command Ability, but they may only enter and exit from the Defender's home edge. The command unit must enter on Turn 4.

WARCHEST

Track Cost: 500 WP

Options

+300 Night Fight: Use the rules for Moonless Night (see p. 58, *TO*) or Darkness (p. 92, *AS*)

+300 They've Got Big Guns: The opposing force gains three off-board Long Tom artillery pieces and six pre-designated hexes noted in secret at the beginning of the game. The artillery pieces are of Regular skill and are five mapsheets away.

OBJECTIVES

Destroy! Cripple or destroy 50% of the enemy force [250]

Obliterate! Cripple or destroy 75% of the enemy force [500]

Headhunter. Destroy the enemy commander [250]

SPECIAL RULES

The following rules are in effect for this track:

Flatfooted

The Rangers are unprepared for the Dragoons' assault. To reflect this, they suffer a -3 modifier to their Initiative roll on Turn 1, a -2 on Turn 2, and a -1 on Turn 3. On Turn 4 and after, they roll Initiative normally unless the *Take the Head* special rule is in effect.

Take the Head

The Rangers rapidly rebuilt following the loss of Robinson two years earlier, but have not completely gelled as a unit. To reflect this, if the Rangers commander's unit is destroyed or crippled, roll 2D6. Modify this roll by the difference between the number of destroyed/crippled Attacking units and the number of destroyed/crippled Defending units. (If the Defender lost fewer units than the Attacker, the modifier is negative; if the reverse is true, the modifier will be positive.)

If the result is 7+, all of the Defender's units must withdraw toward their home edge as though under Forced Withdrawal rules. If the roll is 12+, the Rangers panic, and all Defending units move toward their home edge at best possible speed, ignoring all Attacking units. Any Defending units that are not currently on the map are unaffected by this panic. If the roll is 6 or less, the Rangers continue fighting, but they must roll again at the start of every subsequent turn, with the same modifiers and effects. Regardless of the roll result, the Rangers suffer a -2 modifier to their Initiative roll for the rest of the game.

AFTERMATH

Under the Dragoons' assault, the Rangers shattered like a pane of glass under a hammer. Two-thirds of the senior Rangers command were killed or captured and the unit ceased to be a cohesive combat formation. For the second time in seventy years, the Federated Suns' capital was under enemy control.

SHATTERED FORTRESS

TOUCHPOINT: MARIK

"Attention, Regular Hussars! I am Galaxy Commander Rikkard Nova Cat, and I challenge Colonel Juliette Mejia to a duel! Are you a warrior, Colonel, or a coward?"

SITUATION

Winter Palace Training Grounds

Dormuth, Marik

Clan Protectorate, Free Worlds League

14 July 3147

The Regular Fiefs' efforts to retake Marik had gained a foothold as the Fourth Regular Hussars, supported by the Thirtieth Hussars, pushed the Shiva Keshik back to the Winter Palace, the home of the Protectorate government. In the training grounds northeast of the Palace, the Shiva Keshik finally made their stand, and Galaxy Commander Rikkard Nova Cat looked to seize the initiative by challenging the Fourth's commander to a duel.

GAME SETUP

Recommended Terrain: Flatlands terrain (see p. 263, *TW*) (AS: no more than 30% woods)

The Attacker chooses one edge as their home edge. The Defender's edge is opposite the Attacker's.

Attacker (Regular Fiefs)

Recommended Forces: The Fourth and Thirtieth Regular Hussars

The Fourth Hussars equal 50% of the Defender's total force, while the Thirtieth Hussars equals 100% of the Defender's force. The two commands roll as "A" and "C" level units, respectively, on the Regular Fiefs subtable of the Free Worlds League RAT. The Fourth possess a Regular skill level, while the Thirtieth is Green. Designate a command unit for each force; the Fourth's commander is in overall command. Both units have the Off-Map Movement Special Command Ability.

The Attacker deploys within two hexes (AS: 4") from their home edge.

Defender (Free Worlds League)

Recommended Forces: Shiva Keshik

This Elite-skill unit is organized along Clan lines into five-unit Stars. For every three rolls on the Clan Protectorate Cluster subtable of the Free Worlds League RAT, the Defender may roll twice on the Clan Sea Fox RAT as a Keshik unit. The Shiva Keshik receives a +2 Initiative modifier and negates any Initiative modifiers of Inner Sphere-affiliated foes.

The Defender deploys within 7 hexes (AS: 14") of their home edge. Designate one unit as the command unit unless the *Cats on the Prowl* special rule is in effect (see below). In that case, Rikkard Nova Cat commands the Defender's force.

WARCHEST

Track Cost: 750 WP

Options

+300 Cats on the Prowl: (See *Special Rules* below) (Attacker only)

+300 More Targets: Increase the Thirtieth contingent present by an additional 25% of the Defender's total force (Defender only)

OBJECTIVES

Passing Through. At least 50% of the attacker's force exits via the Defender's edge [500] (Attacker only)

Challenge! Rikkard makes the challenge [300] (Defender only)

Off with their heads! The enemy commanders are killed or crippled [200 per unit]

SPECIAL RULES

The following rules are in effect for this track:

Cats on the Prowl

If this option is used, the Defender adds an Elite command Star commanded by Galaxy Commander Rikkard Nova Cat in his FS9-M2 *Firestarter* (see p. 100, *TRO: 3145*). Rikkard is an Elite Clan warrior with the Sharpshooter, Weapon Specialist (Flamers), Natural Grace, and Combat Intuition Special Pilot Abilities.

To make a valid challenge, Rikkard must be in line of sight of at least four Regular units, including the Attacker's overall commander. If the Attacker accepts the challenge, their command unit and Rikkard engage in a one-on-one duel, under *zellbrigen* rules (see p. 274, *TW*) until one is either crippled or destroyed. No other unit may declare attacks during the duel, though unit movement is allowed. If Rikkard is crippled or killed in a fair duel, the Keshik will move toward their home edge as though under Forced Withdrawal.

If any of the Attacker's units fires on Rikkard while the duel is in progress, the Keshik immediately goes berserk. All Defending units must move at their best speed toward the nearest Attacking unit and engage them, immediately gaining a +1 bonus to all of their Gunnery and Piloting rolls. However, all incoming attacks apply a -1 modifier to their to-hit rolls, to a minimum of 0. If a Keshik unit becomes crippled, it gains another +1 bonus to all Gunnery-based rolls and will continue to fight.

AFTERMATH

Colonel Juliette Mejia turned victory into defeat due to her ignorance of Clan culture. In response to Rikkard Nova Cat's challenge, she ordered her troops to mass their fire on his *Firestarter*. The downing of their leader's 'Mech threw the rest of the Keshik into a rage that sent the Hussars reeling. With the subsequent destruction of the Thirty-first Regular Hussars by Clan Sea Fox, any chance of the Regular Fiefs seizing control of Marik ended.

TOUCHPOINT: NEW SYRTIS

The Cave.

To most, it means nothing. But the First Davion Guards remember the Cave as a nightmare of tunnels and traps, of Liao bastards lurking in the darkness before us, and merc traitors behind us. Those of us who survived have no fear of hell, because we've already seen it, and it's on New Syrtis.

—Captain Breen Mallory, First Davion Guards, New Syrtis, 3147

SITUATION

The Cave

New Syrtis

Sian Commonality, Capellan Confederation

6 December 3147

Located deep inside a cave system under New Syrtis's capital, the former Capellan March's command center was a primary target in Julian Davion's liberation effort. Leading the First Davion Guards into the tunnels, Julian and his force found themselves in a maze of traps, collapsing tunnels, and sniping attacks. When Fortune Charlie, a Federated Suns-employed mercenary force, appeared behind the Davion Guards, things should have gotten easier. Instead, the mercenaries tried to assassinate Julian, turning the tunnels into a horror show of close combat and uncertain loyalties.

GAME SETUP

Recommended Terrain: Tunnels; use the Ishiyama maps from Map Pack: Solaris 7 and/or Deep Canyon maps from Map Set Compilation 2, with every elevation higher than Level 1 considered impassable; or use any city or urban map, and treat all non-road hexes as impassable walls. (AS: Set up restrictive, branching, tunnel-like terrain in a manner agreeable to both players.)

The Defender receives one 20-point minefield (AS: Mine Density 2) for every two of the Attacker's units, and one tunnel booby trap for every four Attacking units (see Special Rules below). The Defender must record the location of booby traps and minefields prior to the start of play.

The Attacker chooses one edge as their home edge; the Defender's home edge is the opposite edge.

Attacker (Federated Suns)

Recommended Forces: First Davion Guards

This "A"-rated unit has a Veteran skill rating and possesses the Force the Initiative and Overrun Combat Special Command Abilities. Julian Davion in his modified *Templar III* (see p. 120) is the designated commander.

The Attacker deploys in the tunnels, within four hexes (AS: 8") from their home edge. Units unable to fit on the map at the start of play may move onto the map as soon as space is available.

Defender (Capellan Confederation)

Recommended Forces: Warrior House Kamata, Fortune Charlie

The Defender equals 100% of the attacking force; Fortune Charlie represents 75% of the Defender's force, and Warrior House Kamata comprises the remaining 25%.

Warrior House Kamata is an "A"-rated unit with an Elite skill rating. Due to their belief in signs and portents, if the Defender's Initiative roll for the turn is even, all Kamata units receive a +1 bonus to all Piloting and Gunnery rolls for that turn; if odd, they receive a -1 modifier.

Fortune Charlie possesses a regular skill rating and rolls on the Mercenary RAT as a "C"-rated unit. They possess the Overrun Combat Special Command Ability.

Deploy House Kamata units as Hidden Units. Fortune Charlie enters from the Attacker's edge on Turn 8.

WARCHEST

Track Cost: 750 WP

Options

+300 Quicker than Expected: Fortune Charlie enters from the Attacker's edge on Turn 5.

+300 Push of a Button: All minefields are command-detonated (see p. 209, *TO* or p. 103, *AS*).

OBJECTIVES

The Prince Must Live! Julian Davion must not be crippled/destroyed [500] (Attacker Only)

Push Out! The Defender must not allow the Attacker to exit more than 25% of their force off the Defender's home edge [750] (Defender Only)

Die, Traitors! At least 50% of Fortune Charlie must be crippled/destroyed [500] (Attacker Only)

SPECIAL RULES

The following rules are in effect for this track:

Julian Davion

Julian Davion is an Elite-level MechWarrior whose presence on the battlefield grants a +3 Initiative modifier to his force, along with a +2 modifier on any Morale checks (see p. 211, *TO* or pp. 32–34, *ASC*). The rest of his command lance are Elite-rated warriors who receive +3 to all shielding attempts (see p. 19, *TO* or p. 12, *ASC*) when shielding Julian Davion. Any other Attacking unit attempting to shield Julian Davion receives a +2 modifier for the attempt.

Tunnel Collapses and Minefields

No mine or tunnel booby trap may be placed within 10 hexes (AS: 20") of the Attacker's home edge; only one tunnel booby trap may be placed on each mapsheet.

All Minefields are conventional minefields and can be placed anywhere, except where noted above (see p. 207, *TO* or p. 102, *AS*).

Tunnel booby traps are triggered when an Attacking unit enters the hex, unless the trap was successfully detected by an Active Probe (see p. 99, *TO*) or the Eagle's Eye Special Pilot Ability. When an Attacking unit enters a booby-trapped hex, the Defender rolls 2D6. On a roll of 7+, the booby trap explodes, and the tunnel collapses. A tunnel collapse permanently blocks the tunnel on that hex. Any infantry or combat vehicle in the hex is destroyed. Any 'Mech in the hex must make a Piloting Skill roll with a +2 modifier to avoid being buried (destroyed); if the roll is successful, the Mech takes 30 points of damage in five-point clusters (use the 'Mech Punch Location Table) and is displaced to an adjacent hex of the player's choice.

AFTERMATH

Despite the Capellans in front of him and turncoat mercenaries behind him, Julian Davion and the First Davion Guards managed to seize the command center. Fortune Charlie suffered 80 percent casualties, and the survivors were arrested and tried. The Capellan resistance continued for a few more months, before the last Confederation defenders departed New Syrtis. But they would be back, and in force.

SHATTERED FORTRESS

TOUCHPOINT: BUENA

"Are you sure about this, Ramon?"

"Do we have a choice? Widmer wants us to fire on Lyran troops! My family has served in the LCAF for three centuries, and I'll be damned if I start shooting them!"

"Rumors say the Archon's troops are doing their best to limit enemy casualties. This may be the best chance we get to show we're still loyal. What matters is, when?"

"We wait for the right moment. When that time comes, follow my lead."

—Transmission between two Buena Training Battalion cadets, 27 Jan 3148

SITUATION

Fort Buena
Dominika
Buena, Buena Collective
27 January 3148

Outside Fort Buena, the Lyran Commonwealth's Task Force Kingbreaker could not overcome both the fort's defenses and the Third Collective Guards. Unwilling to kill their enemy or destroy the planet's infrastructure, the LCAF units pulled back. Seeing a chance, the Third's commander ordered the Buena Training Battalion forward to fill the gaps in Fort Buena's defenses. Unknown to either side, most of the training battalion's cadets remained loyal to the Commonwealth.

GAME SETUP

Recommended Terrain: Heavy Urban/Flatland (see p. 263, TW) (AS: 50% Urban, 50% open)

Place the mapsheets so half of the battlefield is urban, while the other half is flatland. A level 4 hardened wall with CF 150 (AS: CF 50) divides the two halves. For every four Attacking units, the Defender receives a turret with two AC/10s (20 rounds) and two LRM 20s (20 rounds) with CF 120 (AS: 3/3/2, CF 40) placed on the wall, with a 360-degree field of fire. Gunnery Skill for the turrets is 4 (AS: Skill rating 5). The wall has three two-hex-wide gates, each with CF 90 (AS: CF 30) in the wall, placed an equal distance apart. Each gate takes one full turn to open and another full turn to close; the Defender must declare during the Initiative Phase whether the gates will be opening or closing that turn. The Defender decides whether the gates are open at the start of play.

The Defender's edge is the Urban side of the map; the attacker's home edge is the opposite edge. Units may exit off either of the other two edges without penalty.

Attacker (Lyran Commonwealth)

Recommended Forces: Eighth Lyran Regulars, First Bolan Jaegers

The Eighth and First each comprise 50% of the Attacking force. Both units possess a Regular skill rating. The Eighth is a "B" unit and the Jaegers is an "A" unit.

At the start of the track, the Attacker can choose one of the following Special Command Abilities: Force the Initiative, Banking Initiative, or Overrun Combat. The Jaegers have the Off-Map Movement Special Command Ability.

The Attacker starts on the flatland side, within 3 hexes (AS: 6") from their home edge.

Defender (Buena Collective)

Recommended Forces: Third Collective Guards, Buena Training Battalion

The Defender's force is 200% of the Attacking force. The Third consists of 75% of the Defender's force, while the Buena Training Battalion comprises the other 25%.

The Third has a Regular skill rating and is a "B" rated unit; the training battalion is Green and is an "F" rated unit. The Third has the Force the Initiative Special Command Ability.

The Defender sets up half of the Third's units on the flatland side of the wall, within 4 hexes (AS: 8") of the wall. The rest of the Third's units set up on the Urban side of the wall, within five hexes (AS: 10") of the wall. The Buena Training Battalion sets up anywhere within the urban area, but must be more than six hexes (AS: 12") from the Defender's home edge. Defending units may pass freely through any open gate.

WARCHEST

Track Cost: 750 WP

Options

+300 A Cut Above: Half the opponent's Regular-skill units are now Veteran.

+100 Long Tom Incoming: Opponent receives a single Long Tom Cannon, with seven HE rounds. The artillery piece is one mapsheet away.

OBJECTIVES

Taking It Easy. Cripple (but do not destroy) at least half of the enemy's force [500] (Attacker Only)

Stand Your Ground. At least half of the player's force survives the battle. [500]

Eviction. No enemy units are on the Urban half of the board by the end of Turn 12. [500]

SPECIAL RULES

The following rules are in effect for this track:

Special Care

The Attacker's forces are under orders to avoid killing enemy combatants. No Attacking unit may fire on a Defender's crippled unit that is actively falling back due to Forced Withdrawal. If at any time the Defender's units outside the wall outnumber the Attacker's units by two to one, the Attacker's force must withdraw toward their home edge as though Forced Withdrawal had taken effect.

TOUCHPOINT TRACKS

Time to Revolt

The Buena Training Battalion remains under the Defender's control until any of the following happen:

- The Defender's units outside the wall outnumber the Attacker two to one, and the Attacker has begun withdrawing.
- More than 50% of the Training Battalion is outside the wall.
- Turn 10 begins.

During the End Phase of any turn that any condition above is met, the Attacker rolls 2D6 for every Training Battalion unit. On 7+, the Attacker immediately gains control of that unit. Training

Battalion units under the Attacker's control are not subject to the *Special Care* rule above.

AFTERMATH

"The assault on Fort Buena came close to being a disaster. It took the cadets of the Buena Training Battalion to turn the tide and help liberate the planet from the tyrant, Diego Widmer. We, the Lyran Commonwealth Armed Forces, are proud to have men and women like you in our ranks. Thank you."

—Speech by Colonel John Nelson, before the assembled cadets of the Buena War College



SHATTERED FORTRESS

TOUCHPOINT: REMAGEN

“The appearance of the Hikage on Remagen was an unpleasant surprise. Unable to fully rearm and repair both the First Kestrel Grenadiers and First Avalon Hussars before the Dragon’s Shadow descended on them, General Timothy Cunningham’s Kestrel Grenadiers decided to sacrifice themselves to give the Hussars time to prepare. Already battered and low on ammo, the Grenadiers threw themselves at the Combine invaders with a fury not seen since the fall of New Avalon.”

—Patrice Mallory, *The Quest for Avalon: Trials and Tribulations of the Federated Suns (3147–50)*

SITUATION

**Rhineland Hills
Remagen
Crucis March, Federated Suns
12 August 3148**

With Draconis Combine forces advancing on Operation PERCEVAL’s central base of operations, neither the First Kestrel Grenadiers nor the First Avalon Hussars were ready to face them. Faced with a bitter choice, General Timothy Cunningham ordered the Grenadiers’ tech staff to help the Hussars’ repair and rearm while he led the Grenadiers out to delay the enemy.

What they found was a new opponent, one as deadly as any they had ever faced, and with the burning desire to destroy the Grenadiers to the last soldier.

GAME SETUP

Recommended Terrain: Hills (See p. 263, *TW*) (AS: 50% Hills)

Lay out the mapsheets in a 2x2 formation. The Attacker chooses their home edge first; the Defender’s home edge is the opposite.

Attacker (Draconis Combine)

Recommended Forces: Hikage

This “A”-rated unit possesses an Elite skill rating. The Hikage gain a +2 bonus to Initiative rolls and have the Overrun Combat Special Command Ability.

The Attacker deploys within 5 hexes (AS: 10”) of their home edge.

Defender (Federated Suns)

Recommended Forces: First Kestrel Grenadiers

The Defender’s force equals 200% of the Attacker’s force. They have an Elite skill rating and are an “A” rated unit. One out of every four BattleMechs may be rolled using the Capellan Confederation or Republic of the Sphere RAT (see pp. 214–217, *FM: 3145*). Prior to the start of play, the Defender must roll 1D6. On a roll of 6, the Defender’s units suffer a –1 Initiative modifier for the first 5 turns.

The Defender deploys within 5 hexes (AS: 10”) of their home edge.

WARCHEST

Track Cost: 750 WP

Options

+300 Not as Damaged as They Look: Reduce the Defender’s preexisting damage by 50% (Attacker only)

+300 Artillery Support: Opponent receives three Long Tom Cannons, with 15 standard rounds between them. The artillery is five mapsheets away.

OBJECTIVES

Turkey Shoot. Destroy as much of the enemy force as possible [+25 per unit]

Blitzkrieg! Destroy/Cripple 50% of opposing units by Turn 12 [500]

Breakthrough. The Attacker exits at least 50% of their force off the Defender’s home edge by Turn 12 [500] (Attacker only)

SPECIAL RULES

The following rules are in effect for this track:

No R&R

The Defender has not had time to repair and rearm. To reflect this, the Defender uses the table below to determine each unit’s preexisting damage. Apply this damage in 5-point clusters, rerolling any damage that would destroy or cripple the unit.

In addition, each Defending unit starts the track with only half their normal ammunition load (rounding up) (AS: Reduce damage at all ranges by 1).

PREEXISTING DAMAGE TABLE

Mech/Vehicle Weight Class	Damage (TW)	Damage (AS)
Light	3D6	1
Medium	5D6	2
Heavy	7D6	3
Assault	9D6	4

AFTERMATH

The Grenadiers’ action resulted in heavy casualties for the AFFS unit, but allowed the Grenadiers’ and Hussars’ technicians the time needed to bring the Hussars up to full strength. The Hussars blunted the Hikage’s assault on PERCEVAL’s central base. However, the resulting losses pushed the AFFS back on the defensive, resulting in Julian Davion’s decision to concentrate on the Combine for the next year.

TOUCHPOINT: CASTOR

"Sentinel Five-Six to Sentinel Six Actual. Wolves in sight."

"Copy Five-Six. What are they doing?"

"Waiting for us, north of Regal's Crossing."

"So they want a fight?"

"Appears so."

"Let's give them one."

—Transmission between two unknown RAF soldiers

SITUATION

Jaffe Farm

Acaba

Castor, Wolf Empire

20 January 3149

The sudden appearance of Republic of the Sphere forces in Wolf Empire space was the first knowledge the Republic had dropped the Wall. At first, the Fifteenth Hastati Sentinels pushed the Wolf Empire forces on Castor, but the Wolves quickly recovered and put the Republic on the defensive. The Fifth Fides Defenders' arrival swung the battle back in favor of the Republic. The Wolves withdrew to the Acaba continent until it became clear to Star Colonel Antonio Radick that Castor was lost.

Ordering his DropShips to land in a valley, Radick turned and hit the leading elements of their pursuers at Jaffe Farm, to slow them down before withdrawing to the DropShips.

GAME SETUP

Recommended Terrain: Flatland/Wooded/Hills (see p. 263, TW) (AS: 25% Light woods, 25% Hills, 50% clear)

Arrange the mapsheets in a 2x2 or 2x3 formation. The Defender chooses their home edge first; the Attacker's edge is the opposite. The Defender adds 1D6+3 light buildings (CF 15, AS: CF 5) to the center of the playing area.

Attacker (Republic of the Sphere)

Recommended Forces: Fifteenth Hastati Sentinels, Fifth Fides Defenders

The Attacker equals 150% of the Defender's force, evenly divided between the Fifteenth and the Fifth. Both the Hastati and Fides Defenders are "HS" rated units with Veteran skills. The Fifteenth Hastati has both the Communications Disruption and Overrun Combat Special Command Abilities. The Fifth Fides has the Tactical Specialization (Combined Arms) and Tactical Adjustments Special Command Abilities.

The Attacker deploys within 3 hexes (AS: 6") of their home edge.

Defender (Wolf Empire)

Recommended Forces: 328th Wolf Assault Cluster

The 328th is a front-line unit with an Elite skill rating. The Wolves ignore Forced Withdrawal and can choose two of the following three Special Command Abilities before the track begins: Force the Initiative, Overrun Combat, or Zone of Control.

The Defender sets up in the middle of the playing area, at least 12 hexes (AS: 24") away from their home edge.

WARCHEST

Track Cost: 750 WP

Options

+ 300 Blood Harvest: All clear hexes are Planted Fields (see p. 38, TO, or p. 66, AS)

+ 300 Wolfpack: The Defender's starting force is increased by 25% (Attacker only)

OBJECTIVES

Breakthrough. The Attacker exits at least 50% of their force through the Defender's home edge. **[500]** (Attacker only)

Wolf Hunt. The Attacker destroys/cripples 75% of the Defender's force. **[750]** (Attacker only)

Warrior's Grit. The Defender prevents the Attacker from completing either of their objectives **[1000]** (Defender only)

SPECIAL RULES

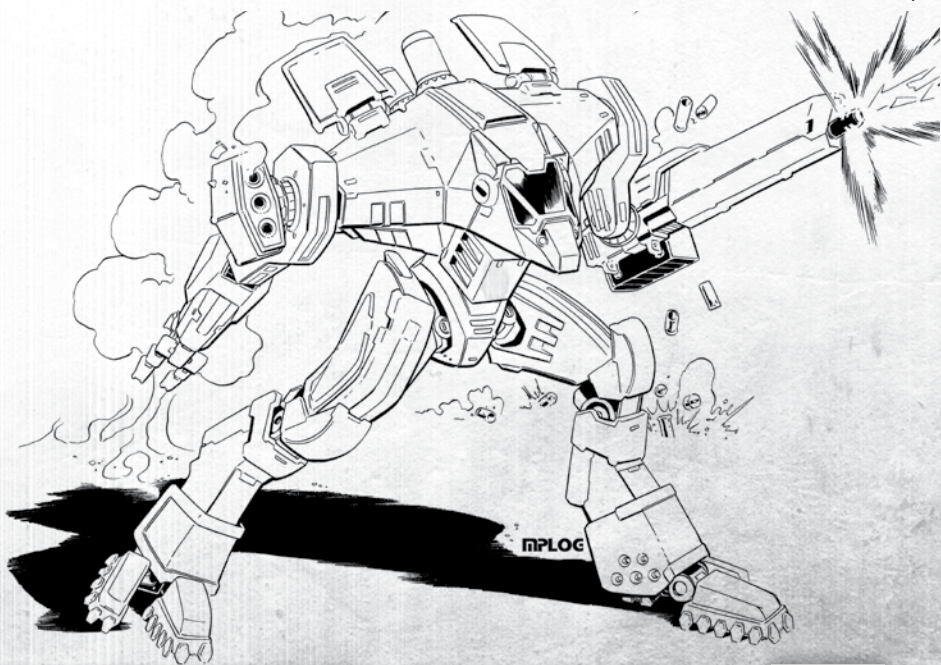
The following rules are in effect for this track:

Fighting Withdrawal

Before the track starts, the Defender rolls 1D6+6, keeping the roll secret from the Attacker. The total is the number of turns the Defender must stay on the playing area before withdrawing. At the beginning of the next turn after the target turn is reached, the Defender can begin withdrawing via their home edge.

AFTERMATH

The Wolves' rearguard managed to hold off the Republic forces long enough for the rest of the cluster to board the DropShips and escape. The loss of Castor was offset by the news the Republic had dropped the Fortress Wall and the way to Terra was clear.



SHATTERED FORTRESS

TOUCHPOINT: ROBINSON

"Sir! The Ryuken are retreating!"

"Damn them! We will hold our ground!"

"But sir—"

"We are the Sword of Light! We do not run, we do not yield, and we do not surrender!"

"Hai!"

"Send word to the battalion commanders. We hold our ground. For the Coordinator, for the Combine!"

—Transmission between *Tai-sa* Lincoln Marovitch and unidentified aide during the battle for the RSBW Industriplex, October 3149

SITUATION

RSBW Industriplex

Canaan, Robinson

New Samarkand Military District, Draconis Combine

25 October 3149

The DCMS forces in the Robinson Standard BattleWorks Industriplex were beset on all sides by Republic forces. Under the pressure, the Ryuken-*ni* fell back, but the Eighth Sword of Light did not. Outnumbered three to one, the Combine warriors were determined to make the enemy pay for every meter in blood.

GAME SETUP

Recommended Terrain: Light/Heavy Urban (see p. 263, *TW*) (AS: 50% light urban, 30% heavy urban)

Arrange the mapsheets in a 2x2 formation. The Defender chooses their home edge first; the three other edges are the Attacker's. The Defender chooses 20 of the urban hexes as Heavy Industrial Zones (see p. 31, *TO*) or ten 2" squares within 6" of a building (see p. 65, *AS*).

Attacker (Republic of the Sphere)

Recommended Forces: Tenth Hastati Sentinels, Tenth Principes Guards, Tenth Triarii Protectors

The Attacker's force equals 150% of the Defender's starting force, evenly divided between the Hastati, the Principes, and the Triarii. For determining Skill levels, the Hastati are an "HS" unit with an Elite skill rating. The Principes is a "PG" unit and the Triarii is a "TP" unit, and both possess a Veteran skill rating.

The Tenth Hastati have both the Communications Disruption and the Overrun Combat Special Command Abilities. The Tenth Principes applies a +2 Initiative modifier for all battles where they fight alongside another RAF force. The Tenth Triarii may never deploy more than two companies of 'Mechs in any scenario and are wary of hidden threats, suffering a -2 Initiative roll modifier when the enemy has Hidden Units still hidden.

Each of the three RAF commands deploys along a different Attacker's edge within two hexes (AS: 4") of the edge. Any unit that withdraws must do so via the edge they entered. Paladin Ergen is a veteran MechWarrior and pilots a DLR-O *Doloire* Prime (see p. 164, *TRO*: 3145). He can deploy along any of the Attacker's three edges.

Defender (Draconis Combine)

Recommended Forces: Eighth Sword of Light

For determining Skill levels, the Eighth are an "A"-rated unit with a Veteran skill rating. They have the Zone of Control and Tactical Adjustments Special Command Abilities.

The Defender deploys no closer than 6 hexes (AS: 12") from any edge. Up to 75% of the Defender's units may be deployed as Hidden Units. *Tai-sa* Lincoln Marovitch is an Elite MechWarrior and pilots a *Tenshi* Prime (see p. 174, *TRO*: 3145).

WARCHEST

Track Cost: 800 WP

Options

+200 Livewire: Double the number of Heavy Industrial Zones.

+300 Night Fight: Apply a +2 to-hit modifier to all weapon attacks.

+300 Wreckage: Mark half of the buildings present as destroyed. Each destroyed hex is converted into an Ultra Rubble terrain hex (see p. 39, *TO*, or p. 67, *AS*).

OBJECTIVES

Break the Sword. Destroy/cripple 50% of the enemy force. [500]

Headhunter. Destroy/cripple the enemy commander. [500]

Limited Rewiring. At least 50% of the Heavy Industrial Zones remain intact. [100 per intact hex] (Attacker only)

SPECIAL RULES

The following rules are in effect for this track:

Forced Withdrawal

As long as *Tai-sa* Marovitch is alive and uncrippled, all of the Defender's units are immune to Forced Withdrawal. The Attacker is subject to Forced Withdrawal as normal.

Extra Bracing

If the Defender uses the Bracing rules (see p. 84, *TO*), they receive a -3 to-hit modifier to all attacks made with the weapons in the braced arm.

AFTERMATH

The DCMS were finally ejected from the Industriplex, but only after *Tai-sa* Marovitch was captured when Paladin Ergen crippled his 'Mech. Fighting continued for another month before Ergen declared the planet free from Combine control, but it took another month to finally stamp out the last Kurita resistance.

TOUCHPOINT: SKYE

"Where is he?"

"No sign of Ward or the Silver Keshik!"

"We will finish breaking these Wolves and—"

"My Khan! The enemy is approaching from behind!"

"That surat! We will show those stravags the Falcon's claws and force that coward to come out of hiding and face us!"

—Transmission between saKhan Ryan Pryde and unknown Turkina Keshik warrior

SITUATION

Llandudno

New Scotland, Skye

Jade Falcon Occupation Zone

12 March 3150

The Jade Falcons believed Khan Alaric Ward was personally leading the attack on Skye. Unknown to them, the Wolves had used prerecorded communications from Alaric and loose talk about the Wolf Khan's presence on the radio to create the impression Alaric was on Skye—and lure the Turkina Keshik into a trap.

GAME SETUP

Recommended Terrain: Hills (see p. 263, *TW*) (AS: 50% hills, 25% light woods)

Arrange the mapsheets in a 2x2 formation. The Defender designates one edge as their home edge; the Attacker's home edge is the opposite edge.

Attacker (Clan Jade Falcon)

Recommended Forces: Turkina Keshik

Turkina Keshik is a Keshik unit with an Elite skill rating. For every Star fielded, the Attacker may roll once on the Republic of the Sphere RAT.

The Turkina Keshik adheres to *zellbrigen* (see p. 274, *TW*) as long as their opponent does. If the enemy breaks *zellbrigen*, the Keshik gains both the Force the Initiative and Overrun Combat Special Command Abilities.

The Attacker deploys within 5 hexes (AS 10") of their home edge.

Defender (Wolf Empire)

Recommended Forces: Ninth Wolf Guard Striker Cluster and Nineteenth Wolf Striker Cluster

The Defender is 150% of the Attacker's force, divided equally between the Ninth and the Nineteenth. The Ninth has a Regular skill rating, while the Nineteenth are Elite; both are Frontline units.

The Ninth have the Zone of Control Special Command Ability. The Nineteenth have the Communications Disruption and Sharp Shooters Special Command Abilities.

The Ninth deploys at least five hexes (AS: 10") from their home edge. The Nineteenth enters based on the *Springing the Trap* special rule (see below).

WARCHEST

Track Cost: 500 WP

Options

+200 Dusk/Dawn: All units suffer a +1 to-hit modifier to all weapons fire (see p. 58, *TO*, or p. 89, *AS*).

+250 Tangled Woods: All hexes with Light Woods are considered Heavy Woods, and all Heavy Woods terrain is considered Ultra-Heavy Woods (see p. 40, *TO*, or p. 70, *AS*). If there are fewer than 8 Woods hexes on the battlefield, this option cannot be selected.

OBJECTIVES

Break them! Destroy/Cripple at least half of the opposing force [750]

Breakthrough! The Attacker exits 50% of their force off the Defender's home edge [500] (Attacker only)

Complete Breakthrough! The Attacker completes *Breakthrough!* before the Defender's second force arrives [750] (Attacker only)

SPECIAL RULES

The following rules are in effect for this track:

Springing the Trap

At the start of turn 5, the Defender rolls 2D6. If the result is 9+, the Nineteenth enters from the Attacker's home edge. If the roll fails, the Defender repeats the roll at the beginning of every turn afterward, reducing the target number by 1 (on turn 6, the Nineteenth enters on 8+; on Turn 7, 7+, and so on). The Nineteenth will enter on Turn 10 if all previous rolls have not succeeded.

Where's Alaric?

The Falcons have been fooled into believing Khan Alaric Ward is on his way to the battle. Because of this, no Attacking unit is subject to Forced Withdrawal until the Nineteenth arrives. After the Nineteenth arrives, the Attacker secretly rolls 1D6+1; the Falcons will fight on for that many more turns. The Attacker must exit off either their starting edge or the Defender's home edge. Any unit that exits via any other edge is considered destroyed.

AFTERMATH

The Turkina Keshik had nearly broken the Ninth Wolf Guard Striker Cluster when the Nineteenth Wolf Striker Cluster hit them from behind. Unwilling to retreat before confronting Alaric Ward, the Falcons fought until saKhan Ryan Pryde finally ordered them to withdraw from the battle. After evaluating their resulting losses, Pryde abandoned Skye altogether. Only after careful analysis of the Wolf communications did the Falcons realize Alaric Ward had tricked them.

SHATTERED FORTRESS

TOUCHPOINT: NORTHWIND

Centurion Seven: "The Cappies have reached Campbell Highway! The Cappies have—"

McNamara: "Centurion Four! Send a lance to Sector Seven!"

Centurion Four: "Negative! There are no reserves left!"

McNamara: "Blast, we need to— What the hell is that?"

Centurion Four: "Bagpipes."

McNamara: "I know that! Why in the hell am I hearing them?"

Griffin: "That would be us, Brigadier McNamara."

McNamara: "Griffin? Michael Griffin? What in the hell?"

Griffin: "It's Colonel Griffin, sir. The Grey Watch is here. Now, let's show the Confederation the way off Northwind."

—Transmission recorded 15 Nov 3150, Maskirovka audio file # R151131450002154

SITUATION

Tara

New Lanark

Northwind, Republic of the Sphere

15 November 3150

Outnumbered and forced back into the capital by the combined might of the Fourth McCarron's Armored Cavalry and the First Canopian Lancers, the First and Third Battalions of the Twelfth Hastati readied themselves to defend the Castle, the planet's Star League-era fortress. Operation CLARITY was on the verge of success.

Hope surged through the defenders' ranks when they received help from an unexpected source—the Grey Watch, a last line of defense the clan elders of Northwind had hidden from the Republic in case of invasion.

GAME SETUP

Recommended Terrain: Urban (see p. 263, TW) (AS: 40% Light Urban, 40% Heavy Urban)

Arrange mapsheets in a 2x2 pattern. The Defender chooses their home edge first; the Attacker's home edge is the opposite. In addition, the Defender chooses three adjacent hexes, each touching all of the others, no closer than 3 hexes (AS: 10") from their home edge. These three hexes represent a 'Mech-size tunnel entrance into the Castle. These hexes have hardened buildings with CF 150 (AS: CF 50), and the center hex has gates with CF 90 (AS: CF 30). These gates are closed and sealed.

Attacker (Capellan Confederation)

Recommended Forces: First Canopian Lancers, Fourth McCarron's Armored Cavalry

The Attacker equals 200% of the Twelfth Hastati portion of the Defender's force; do not include Grey Watch units in this calculation. The Fourth MAC is an "A"-rated unit with a Veteran skill rating. When rolling for a unit, on a result of 12, the player may choose to keep that 'Mech and trade any previously rolled 'Mech for another 'Mech of the same weight class on the RAT.

The Lancers are a "C"-rated unit on the Magistracy of Canopus RAT (see p. 222, FM: 3145) and possess a Veteran skill rating. To reflect the Lancers' preference for lighter units, apply a modifier of -2 to the roll result when randomly determining the lance or company weight classes for this force (see p. 265, TW).

The Fourth MAC may use the Banking Initiative Special Command Ability and may bank three Initiatives instead of the standard two. At the beginning of a scenario, the player must designate a command unit. If the designated command unit is destroyed, the regiment loses any currently banked Initiative and suffers a -2 Initiative penalty for the next 2 turns.

The First Canopian Lancers has the Overrun Combat and Off-Map Movement Special Command Abilities.

The attacking player designates one unit from each command as the unit commander. The Attacker sets up within 3 hexes (AS: 6") of their home edge.

Defender (Republic of the Sphere)

Recommended Forces: Twelfth Hastati Sentinels, Grey Watch

In addition to the Twelfth Hastati force, the Defender may field Grey Watch units equal to 75% of the Twelfth's strength. Both units possess a Regular skill rating. The Hastati are an "HS"-rated unit. The Grey Watch is a "D"-rated unit and rolls on the Mercenary RAT (see p. 221, FM: 3145). For every four Grey Watch units, the Defender can roll once on the Republic of the Sphere RAT as an "F"-rated Mercenary unit.

The Twelfth has the Esprit de Corps and Tactical Specialization (Defense) Special Command Abilities. The Grey Watch has both the Hit and Run and Off-Map Movement Special Command Abilities, but suffer a -1 to all Initiative rolls when operating in any formation larger than a company.

The Attacker designates one unit from each command as the formation's commander. The Twelfth sets up as Hidden Units. One-fourth of the Grey Watch force enters from any edge each turn from Turns 6 through 9.

WARCHEST

Track Cost: 750 WP

Options

+50 Air Support: The opponent receives one Medium aerospace fighter to conduct a strafing, striking, or bombing run one time during the track. This option can be selected up to four times.

+200 Firestorm: Prior to the battle, aerospace bombing ignited more fires in the city. Randomly determine if any buildings are on fire, and automatically assign all wooded hexes as burning. Resolve smoke effects as normal.

OBJECTIVES

Dead...with Prejudice. Destroy/Cripple the entire enemy force before Turn 15. [1000]

Breach the Gates! The gates on the gatehouse must be destroyed by Turn 15. [500] (Attacker only)

Cut Off the Head. Cripple or destroy the enemy's commanders. [200 per commander]

TOUCHPOINT TRACKS



SPECIAL RULES

The following rules are in effect for this track:

Dion an Dachaigh (Defend the Home)

The Grey Watch soldiers are willing to lay down their lives for their homeworld. As such, they gain a +1 modifier to their to-hit rolls at short range and a -1 modifier at long range. In addition, when they receive enough damage to be subject to Forced Withdrawal rules, the Watch player rolls 2D6. On a 7+, they ignore Forced Withdrawal and gain a +1 modifier on all to-hit rolls at all ranges.

Backs to the Wall

With nowhere left to run, the Defender's BattleMech physical attacks are made with a +1 to-hit modifier and all Defender MechWarriors add +1 to their Consciousness Checks.

AFTERMATH

The sudden arrival of an unknown force caught the Capellans by surprise. Forced out of Tara, the invaders rallied and pushed the defenders back. Just as things once again looked bleak for the Republic, Countess Tara Campbell arrived with reinforcements, tilting the advantage back to the defenders. The subsequent appearance of Combine forces made it a three-way fight.

