

## **Bannson Universal Unlimited Acquires DiNapoli Industries**

By Alec Felsner, Republic News

06/13/3132

TANTRIL, ANKAA—In an eleventh-hour deal that has already sent ripples throughout the Republic’s financial community, Bannson Universal Unlimited (Republic Stock Exchange: BUU) CEO Jacob Bannson announced last evening that the DiNapoli Industries Board of Directors had finally accepted his company’s takeover bid for an undisclosed sum of cash and Bannson stock. This agreement closes the door on a saga that has already lasted ten months and has drawn much public attention.

When Bannson made his first offer in September of last year, Angelo DiNapoli, chairman, CEO and founder of DiNapoli Industries (RSE: DNI), turned him down outright. While his company showed lower-than-expected earnings in the second and third quarters of last year, DiNapoli shrugged that off as expenses related to expanding DropShip construction lines on Ankaa and expressed his confidence that DiNapoli Industries would successfully continue on, operating under his family vision.

That did not stop the maverick Bannson’s quest, however. “When he sets his sights on something, he gets it,” reports industry analyst and former Bannson executive Darva Rottinger.

When a key expected deal with Republic Cartage (RSE: CTG) for the purchase of fifteen new DropShips over the course of the next five years fell through, DiNapoli stock took a major hit. That, combined with a report from independent accounting agency Tyler Morse indicating another quarter of lower-than-expected earnings, caused DiNapoli stock to lose more than 40 percent of its value over the course of two weeks in October. With his own value at an all-time high, Jacob Bannson began to snatch up DiNapoli stock in preparation for another takeover bid.

In an effort to boost its lagging sales and move extra inventory, DiNapoli offered its existing customers huge price breaks on almost its entire line of AgroMechs. Apparently, DiNapoli’s stockholders weren’t impressed. Even with a projected earnings increase in the first quarter of 3132 and an incredibly prosperous market, DiNapoli’s stock continued its dive.

Jacob Bannson still had his eyes on the flagging company, however, and in early January made another takeover bid, this time with the support of the majority of DiNapoli’s stockholders. Angelo DiNapoli was still dead-set against the merger, and this time involved the Republic Senate in the mess. Appealing to the Trade Subcommittee, DiNapoli argued that the takeover would negatively impact trade within the Republic and would inevitably end in the loss of thousands of jobs and the virtual creation of a monopoly within Prefecture IV—leaving Bannson holding all of the cards.

Neither the Senate nor the market would have any of it, though. Bannson and DiNapoli stock shot through the roof when news of the renewed takeover bid hit the markets. The DiNapoli Hearings, originally scheduled to run through the end of June, lasted only three weeks before Jacob Bannson’s testimony won over the committee and all in attendance.

Apparently it won over DiNapoli as well. The very next day, Angelo DiNapoli withdrew his letter of opposition and began negotiations to finalize the takeover. Yesterday, the two sealed the deal in the presence of Senator Ross Kain, chairman of the Trade Subcommittee, at DiNapoli corporate headquarters in Tantril on Ankaa.

Founded by Angelo DiNapoli in 3110, DiNapoli Industries was the largest producer of AgroMechs within Prefecture IV, and the fifth largest in the Republic. Additionally, its other divisions are significant builders of DropShips and heavy ground transports.

Jacob Bannson is the founder and CEO of Bannson Universal Unlimited. Organized in 3118, BUU has in its short history grown to be the largest corporate entity headquartered within Prefecture IV. It has operations within each of the Republic’s prefectures and offices in every Successor State. Its various divisions produce and sell items ranging from consumer financial services to fusion engines to DropShips throughout the Inner Sphere.

## Duke Sandoval Departs on Trade Mission

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AP-HPG News Services

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TIKOGRAD, TIKONOV—Duke Aaron Sandoval departed today on a diplomatic mission with scheduled stops on Northwind and Terra.

"I believe this will be one of our most fruitful tours yet," said Sandoval. Thousands cheered as he waved from a podium atop the boarding ramp of his DropShip, *Opportunity*. The vessel will transport Sandoval's diplomatic entourage to a waiting JumpShip.

"Nothing is more important to the well-being of our citizenry than the growth of our Republic's economy," said Sandoval. Despite a windstorm, his voice was clearly audible to officials, press and well-wishers gathered on the starport's landing field, thanks to a vast array of sound- and vid-projection equipment surrounding the crowd.

"History shows that nothing is more important to the well-being of our economy than technological innovation. Our mission in the coming weeks, and beyond, is to ensure that all the people of the Republic continue to have access to the best technology available, and the financial benefits such developments can afford us during this time of peace," Sandoval said.

Since the formation of The Republic of the Sphere, citizen income has risen an average of 28% adjusted for inflation.

Prefect Katana Tormark, of nearby Prefecture III, watched Sandoval's departure via live HPG feed courtesy of AP-HPG News. "Lord Governor Sandoval is one of the wealthiest citizens in the Republic," she said. Sandoval's worth cannot be determined, but he is known to control much of his family's fortune.

"His people believe he works for their best interests," Tormark said. "Perhaps. The man owns a DropShip."

When asked to elaborate, Tormark offered a politic response, saying, "Sandoval presents himself as the citizen's advocate, but many are concerned about the true goal of this trade trip. There is great honor in promoting the good of one's Prefecture, especially before the good of the House to whom one is loyal. I hope that is his true mission." The Sandoval dynasty has strong ties to House Davion.

AP-HPG News has been unable to verify the accusations alluded to by Tormark that Sandoval's mission promotes a Davion-sponsored agenda. However, one high-ranking official in Prefecture IV—Sandoval's regime—seems to back up these suspicions. "Yeah, he's a family man, through and through," said the official, who asked not to be identified and would not elaborate.

Later, when asked to respond to these allegations, Sandoval said, "My record speaks for itself." He spoke from aboard the *Opportunity*. "My work fosters interstellar trade based on cooperation in key technological areas. Agreements brokered by my administration have led to the birth of entire industries! Thousands are newly employed in excellent tech-sector jobs because of our work."

Several technological breakthroughs in Sandoval's Prefecture have been news headlines lately, notably research based on Professor Pierre Cormier's groundbreaking work on cryogenics.

"Everyone lives better today than even a year ago," Sandoval said. "My detractors can say what they will, but the citizens know the truth when they watch the news on their brand-new Tri-Vid."

Sandoval's supporters have credited his administration with developing unprecedented interstellar commerce that has led to an enhanced standard of living throughout Prefecture IV. Others credit Devlin Stone's "swords to plowshares" philosophy, which ended centuries of war and began the current era of peace and prosperity engendered by The Republic of the Sphere. Supporters of the latter view suggest that Sandoval is merely capitalizing on what occurred naturally when industry converted from building machines of destruction to delivering consumer goods.

## **Without the BattleMech: Stone's Military Materiel Redemption Program 65 Years Later**

by Corel Malonne, ComStar INN

06/13/3132

Sixty-five years ago, Devlin Stone promised the newly formed Republic that it could buy peace and prosperity by cashing in on the tools of warfare. Under his Military Materiel Redemption Program, a privately owned 'Mech, tank, or battlesuit could be traded in against obtaining full citizenship and—often—a large piece of land or a business loan. Did he deliver on that promise?

"Of course he did," says Senator Lissa Ruchenko (Nationalistic Party—Procyon). "It was the ultimate recycling program. I'm proud to say that my family was an early supporter. 'Procyon for Peace.' It remains a central promise of the Ruchenko Barony, even today."

Devlin Stone's process went something like this:

First, one had to own a significant piece of Military technology, and in that age of Succession Wars and revolution far too much destructive hardware remained in the hands of private concerns.

Second, the owner of such technology simply agreed to the MMRP value or, in some cases, bargained for a slightly better price. At the time it was considered a positive testament to many of Stone's forward-thinking noble supporters, such as the Ruchenkos, who signed on with additional incentives on top of the government's offer.

Third, and this was the hard part, the owner gave up forever his claim, and the claim of any descendant, on that piece of military technology. It was to be decommissioned and, with the exception of a few machines bound for museums or the small Republic-authorized militias, scrapped to make many of the one billion peace medals Stone awarded.

The program was open to any hardware, though it targeted BattleMechs with an efficiency never seen before by any Clan or Inner Sphere resident. For such a (self-described) selfless act, taken for the betterment of mankind over personal glory and riches, one became a citizen of The Republic of the Sphere. The owner was enfranchised, with the right to vote in elections and own significant property.

"No small gift," promises Senator Ruchenko, "as those residents who have worked just as hard since that time to earn their citizenship can testify."

Sebastian Myrna of the Immigrant Citizenship Coalition, a political action group committed to the rights of relocated families, is not so sanguine. "Yes, citizenship was—and is—a valuable commodity. It was also selectively handed out to Stone's chief supporters first, and remains an elusive dream to many residents who work so hard they have no time for five years of public service. As always, the rich and the privileged hold every advantage." The ICC champions a shorter period of service and lighter requirements for families who immigrated from outside the Sphere or for those residents who were forcibly relocated to new worlds by Stone's resettlement programs. "These people have also given much to The Republic's success. They were simply born to nonmilitary traditions."

Such accusations of favoritism may not be without merit. Depending on a BattleMech's MMRP value, one could also obtain a land grant or take a government-secured business loan.

"But consider the long-term effect," asks Knight Winsom Tykes, originally of Tikonov (one of the worlds hardest hit by the resettlement directives). "Armies shrank, seemingly overnight. Many warriors returned to the farms from which they had originally sprung, a true 'swords to plowshares' mentality that Devlin Stone preached and predicted. In this case," Sir Tykes believes, "the end truly justifies the means."

Many economists agree, especially as much of The Republic's economic growth can also be tied back to the Redemption Program. Setting aside the furious rate at which new businesses sprang up (and succeeded at greater than the normal Inner Sphere rate) due to MMRP loans, there is also the very real effect that disarmament had on the commercial sector. Some 'Mech production facilities went out of business, but more converted over to the production of industrial-use WorkMechs such as the ForestryMech, AgroMech, and MinerMech. With the proliferation of such labor-saving machines The Republic knew a boom time of over three decades, and enjoys the benefits of that growth even today.

"It is everything we asked for," Senator Ruchenko asserts, "and everything [Stone] promised."

Devlin Stone was many things to many people, but that he was a visionary is without serious argument even from the ICC. Warfare is all but unknown, except as delivered through the entertainment industry. Residents and citizens of The Republic have lived through a golden age unknown since the fall of the original Star League.

It is life without the BattleMech.

During his farewell address, Stone said, "It was once [a MechWarrior's] right and responsibility to take up arms for a greater good. We have given them the chance to lay down those arms for the same reasons.

"Righteousness has prevailed."

## Camelot's Son: A profile of Damien Redburn in his second year as Exarch

By Mace O'Ronnell, Stellar Associated

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What does one expect from a man who was born to great traditions in military service and historical study? Who earned his way up the military ladder of command, from MechWarrior cadet to full Colonel of Stone's Liberator's—one of the Republic's most storied units—in just seven years? Who was one of the youngest men ever knighted by Devlin Stone, the architect of peace, and the youngest paladin the Sphere has yet seen?

### Great Things

So it seems at odds with Damien Redburn's history that, two years into his four-year term as Exarch of the Republic, Devlin Stone's handpicked successor seems more intent on maintaining the status quo than in creating a grand legacy in his own name.

"I have to admit, I expected a great deal more," said CEO Jacob Bannson, a powerful business leader based on Tybalt. "He's a watered-down version of Devlin Stone."

Hardly complimentary. Then again, it was in Damien Redburn's first six months as Exarch that he had to contend with trouble of Bannson's making. Labor unions under Bannson's influence organized disruptive labor strikes on the world of Addicks, claiming that the pro-Kurita bias of the local governor kept them from attaining any real collective bargaining position. They demanded that governmental control of Addicks be shifted to nobles in Prefecture IV.

The Exarch allowed that any world mustering fifty-one percent favor could admit a vote of no confidence in their local government and request such a change. Bannson, speaking on behalf of the unions, agreed to the terms. But too many local businesses relied on Addicks' economic ties to worlds such as Ozawa and Towne, part of the economic programs instituted by Devlin Stone, and the disgruntled unions could not muster enough support.

Exarch Redburn credited Devlin Stone's foresight.

Jacob Bannson obviously holds a grudge. "We were only asking for a fair shake. There are a lot of unhappy people on Addicks, and I'm not sure if I can control them now."

Bannson is not the only business leader unhappy with the Exarch. Later in 3131 came the ComStar bid for upgrading Republic-controlled HyperPulse Generator stations, with a number of stations to be turned over to full ComStar aegis. Considerable pressure was brought against the Exarch to accept. Instead, he eventually ruled in favor of the Republic's current contract with ComStar affiliate Stryker Productions Limited. SPL was one of the first corporations to get its start with a loan taken under the Military Materiel Redemption Program.

### Stone Again

"ComStar cannot fault Exarch Redburn for protecting Republic business interests," said Precentor Olivia Palos of ComStar's negotiating team. "We can only hope he has not sold out the future for the special interest concerns of today."

Lord Governor Heather Jarman (Prefecture VII—Irian) is more supportive of the Exarch's status-quo efforts. "Some voices just like to shout and be heard. The Republic seems to be doing just fine. If it's not broke, why fix it?" she says, a remark that seems aimed right at her long-time debate opponent, Lord Governor Aaron Sandoval (Prefecture IV—Tikonov).

Lord Governor Sandoval has repeatedly called on the Exarch to take a stronger hand in policy. "[Devlin] Stone abandoned us, and in his place left us a pale clone with no strength to meet the challenges of our changing nation. We require a man of vision."

Prefect Kal Radick (Prefecture IV—Tikonov), speaking on behalf of Clan Wolf descendents, is more specific in his grievances. "If there is an issue that demands the attention of the Exarch, it is the inequality [Wolf descendents] continue to face even after sixty years. We have been forever treated as second-class citizens despite our contributions to the Republic. Our cultural traditions are still met with derision and a lack of acceptance."

Such challenges to the Exarch's record are uncommon, though, as Damien Redburn is typically held up as a champion for the regular man. Most recently, the Exarch sent legislation back to the Senate (sponsored by a supporter of Kal Radick) that would have allowed citizens to purchase government land for the purposes of sharecropping at least half of it to non-citizen residents, eventually helping the residents take control of their own small farms. Exarch Redburn's position was the very real fact that a common resident could never earn enough to pay for the parcels, leading to a kind of permanent indentured servitude, and those who did would receive only half value.

What is the old saying? A society is best judged by how it treats its lowest members. "It's very typical of Exarch Redburn," says Lord Governor Jarman. "The day he puts special interests ahead of the common people is the day he loses my support."

Exarch Damien Redburn often refers to himself as the steward of Devlin Stone's Republic. In fact, he has never publicly referred to it as his Republic. Is this admirable humility, or cunning dissemblance? Exarch Redburn is capable of both, certainly. The truly noteworthy fact is that he has applied that which is always most appropriate for the Republic of the Sphere, and not once what might be considered more favorable for himself.

That may be the greatest legacy any leader can offer.

## **Prefect Katana Tormark Declines Knighthood**

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06/18/3132

TERRA-In an astounding turn of events, Prefect Katana Tormark has declined appointment as Knight-Errant of The Republic of the Sphere. No person so honored has ever before turned down the offer. Knight of the Sphere Carter Dylan, who had recommended Tormark for the position, could not be reached for comment. There are 250 Knights-Errant in The Republic, one representing each world.

"I am honored to have been nominated by the Knight Dylan," said Tormark at a formal press briefing on Ozawa. She wore a kamishimo coat and trousers in subdued brown cotton, as well as her ceremonial katana and wakizashi swords slung from a yellow obi (waistband). Likely because she would not sit, no one present at the briefing sat.

"To accept this honor would require me to abandon my duties as Prefect of my people, and require me to dissolve my loyalties. The bushido code is very clear in these matters. I would expect the same from any soldier in my Prefecture."

Republic Exarch Damien Redburn held his own press conference on Terra within minutes of Tormark's refusal. "I must respect her choice, though I regret that she has declined to serve," he said. "I, as well as countless other Republic leaders, hold Duchess Tormark in the highest regard. Certainly I understand her concern over no longer being able to execute her duties as Prefect, but that is only a brief appointment compared to the lifetime of prestige and honor attached to Knighthood."

A reporter at the Exarch's conference asked the Republic's leader if Tormark's refusal suggested that her loyalty to House Kurita might be greater than her loyalty to The Republic.

"I can only comment on her spotless record of service to the Republic," Redburn said. He took a few more questions and left the conference.

Northwind Legate Tara Campbell, contacted by AP-HPG News, was dismayed by the news. Tormark is Campbell's direct superior.

Because a Knight-Errant must renounce all loyalties to local jurisdictions as well as to the ancient Houses, many Republic insiders wonder if Tormark's comment about "dissolv[ing] [her] loyalties" suggests that her allegiance is first and foremost to House Kurita rather than The Republic.

"Treason?" asked Lord Governor Aaron Sandoval, briefly interviewed on the grounds of his palace. "I wouldn't use so strong a word, but I wouldn't be surprised if her loyalty to the Republic turned out to be less than it seems."

Tormark's only comment on the accusation was, "Anyone who accuses me of treason had better be prepared to discuss their thoughts with me in person."

## **Senator Kev Rosse Announces Discovery of New Crude Oil Resources on Addicks**

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Republic Geological Resources Makes Find; Boon for Industry

06/18/3132

GENEVA- Senator Kev Rosse of Prefecture Three announced today the discovery of new oil resources on Addicks. At his press conference in Geneva he confirmed rumors that a new survey by Republic Geological Resources (Republic Stock Exchange: RGR) had uncovered major deposits of high-grade crude oil in the western expanse of the Sparro continent. Its discovery will revitalize industry on Addicks and the surrounding worlds.

"I can confirm that the recent survey of the mid-worlds of Prefecture Three by Republic Geological Resources has revealed extensive deposits of high-grade crude oil on Addicks. This discovery portends a bright future for Addicks and its neighbors," he stated with his precise enunciation. "It will ease the deployment of IndustrialMechs on Addicks, supporting both the manufacturing process and their fuel needs." Senator Rosse went on to detail the extent of the discoveries. "It is expected that the field will deliver 135 million liters of high-grade crude oil per day, with an estimated life span of over 200 years."

Republic Geological Resources, founded in 3098, has undertaken numerous surveys of Republic worlds, but this is the largest and most significant find of its 34-year history. RGR administrator Beatrice Cole praised her employees' diligence but stressed the difficulties that those tasked with the extraction were yet to face. "Though some parts of the field are easy to access—indeed, oil could be extracted within months—much of the newly discovered reserve lies in contaminated land and under the Loyd Sea. This poses a considerable, but not insoluble, problem to the companies involved in the extraction process."

Senator Rosse also announced the allocation of Republic funds to aid the development process. "After consultation with my fellow Senators, I have authorized the release of Prefectural funds to the government of Addicks. Prefect Tormark and I spoke a short while ago regarding her development plans and I understand negotiations are well advanced with appropriately skilled companies. Details of the find and plans for its exploitation will be available from the prefecture headquarters on Ozawa shortly, and also from the Republic Records Office here in Geneva."

IndustrialMechs have been used in Prefecture III for many years, but a shortage of appropriate petrochemical resources has hindered their employment, on some worlds making them as rare as their fusion-powered siblings, BattleMechs. Addicks, like so many worlds devastated by centuries of warfare, lost its largest employer, Johnston Industries, which left the world after many of its factories were destroyed in the 3030s, during the Fourth Succession War. The locals, feeling abandoned, rallied their own resources and determination to stabilize their economy and bring unemployment down. With the new discoveries, corporations are once again descending on Addicks with the offer of jobs and opportunities.

Despite these developments, the discovery has not found universal favor. Lani Mohr of the Addicks Environmental League has denounced The Republic's sudden interest in Addicks. "Now we have something he wants, the Exarch is suddenly interested in our jobs? In providing us with opportunities? Where was that aid for the last 40 years? Where was our 'peace dividend'?" Though AEL is a nonviolent group, their denouncement, together with less-measured comments from more extreme environmental groups, have prompted the deployment of a detachment from Rosse's Spirit Cat Galaxy to safeguard the drilling site. The Senator stressed that this was temporary measure until more appropriate safeguards could be established around the facility.

## **Burning Sky: An Immortal Classic?**

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by Nero L. MacLeon

06/20/3132

Settle into your seat with the biggest bag, bucket, or barrow of popped corn you can find. Easy on the drinks though, because in any three-minute restroom run after the opening half-hour set-up you will miss at least two explosions, a few hundred rounds of automatic weapons fire, and a close-up shot of a favorite BattleMech design. Don't worry about missing that moment of character growth, though.

It isn't there.

This is Burning Sky, director Lawrence Kohlman's latest (and most successful) foray into the world of immortal warriors and endless ammunition supplies that originally began under writer/director Mike Haufenpahl a century ago. Technology has improved and our taste in Tri-Vids has supposedly evolved in the last hundred years, but the plotlines and characters in this hyperbole-driven military adventure series have not.

The story follows pretty closely the usual opening pattern: Warrior leaves military and settles down on new world that no one realized was about to explode into violence. It's a modern setting, within the oh-so-fanciful "Union of the Sphere." This time our immortal hero is drawn into a conflict that rises out of the old hatreds and rivalries which existed before "Daniel Rock's grand order" was imposed on these poor, defenseless people (hiding a cache of BattleMechs and unlimited small arms) who just want the freedom to hate each other in peace.

All right, the entire conflict could have been avoided if supporters on both sides just sat down to talk with each other. So what? The spark that sets it off is a vicious officer so conservative he makes Daoshan Liao look sympathetic. And big deal, it wraps up in a nice neat package after the final twenty-eight-and-one-half minutes of virtually non-stop violence. Let's get down to what we really care about: 'Mechs!

Love 'em or just like 'em a lot, three-dimensional images of those great war machines stomping across the theater are still a huge turn-on with audiences, enough so that Burning Sky broke all previous records for Tri-Vids set in the same milieu. Most critics agree that there were at least eighteen different designs showcased within the space of only two hours, ten minutes. That's about sixteen more than you can usually find on your average Republic planet.

Eighteen BattleMechs. Twelve minutes of footage where they walk, run and jump their way into and out of battle. Thirty-seven separate cockpit shots. Two hundred and eight weapon discharges and about twice that many weapon hits. The detail level is so incredible, except for the extra hits, you have to believe the hype that Kohlman shot Burning Sky on a twelve-world tour just to locate so many varied designs. No mock-ups here; or if they are, they're some of the best work to be found yet out of the wizkid operation of Jay Wise Special Effects.

What more could you want?

In an age where open warfare has been set aside, the adventurous can still live vicariously through the life of a new immortal warrior.



## **Clan Wolf Accuses the Republic of Keeping Wolf Descendants Secondary Citizens**

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Star Captain Katrina Ward of Clan Wolf has long criticized aspects of The Republic, but her vitriolic attack on citizenship policies surprised even her closest allies. Speaking at a press conference today on Tikonov she claimed, "The Republic of the Sphere deliberately set out to disenfranchise Clansmen.

"We are a martial people," she continued, "and the requirement of disarming to gain citizenship is an insult to our culture, particularly as our arms belong to the Clan, not the individual." In a dramatic move, she drew her Makarov pistol and threw it across the stage. "There: my warrior status is emasculated, but what do I get from it? Nothing. I have no BattleMech to surrender in exchange for civil rights, nor do I hold land or run a major corporation. To The Republic, we Wolves are second-class citizens despite the blood our forebears shed in the Scouring of Tamar and Vlad Ward's drive to liberate Skye. We put our trust in Devlin Stone and have been betrayed!"

Exarch Redburn's press secretary, Ilya Moran, refuted the accusation, describing some of Colonel Ward's claims as preposterous. "I see the Star Colonel has inherited her ancestor's love of rhetoric, but shows a poor appreciation for history. The Republic was founded on the principal of equality for all, civilians and warriors alike. Turning in privately held war materiel to reduce tensions is one method—the Military Materiel Redemption Program instituted by Devlin Stone—but it is not the only way. Service to The Republic, though gaining less immediate results, is an honorable path to gain citizenship and the one I followed myself. While I appreciate that some paths may not be open to former members of the Clans—all the Clans, not just Clan Wolf—they have, in fact, an advantage with some methods of gaining citizenship. Service with the Republic Armed Forces is one such avenue, five years of service granting a warrior citizenship, and I would have thought members of the Wolf Clan would embrace this method wholeheartedly."

Khan Seth Ward of Clan Wolf refused to be drawn into the matter, though Senator Kev Rosse, a former Nova Cat MechWarrior, issued a brief statement. "I understand Star Colonel Ward's grievances and appreciate her bravery in raising this thorny issue. The question of citizenship is a difficult one, fraught with pitfalls and complications, and I pledge that the matter will be given a fair hearing in the Senate at the earliest possible time." Star Colonel Ward was said to be pleased with the Senator's advocacy, especially given his affiliation with a different Clan, and optimistic regarding the outcome.

It seems, however, that there is little prospect of change; the terms of the Republic Formation Treaty and the arrangement between Vladimir Ward and Devlin Stone are clear and unambiguous. "Every resident of The Republic has the same paths open to them to gain citizenship," reiterated Secretary Moran, "and no one faction is singled out for special treatment or hindrance. Devlin Stone created The Republic as an egalitarian society and we strive daily to ensure that it remains so."

## **Earthwerks Ltd 'Mech Plant Opens ConstructionMech Division**

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06/20/3132

LYNCHBURG, TIKONOV-Tikonov's Earthwerks Ltd (TEL) opened the first phase of their new ConstructionMech division headquartered in Lynchburg today. Chairman Ezra Marquez used an Earthwerks AgricultureMech to cut the ribbon across the entrance to the new manufacturing plant, signifying its official opening. Becoming fully operational later this month, the division is expected to have produced more than 500 GRD-9 Girder ConstructionMechs by year end.

In a speech at the ceremony, Marquez said that the opening symbolized the growth their 'Mechs have helped create throughout the Prefecture. He said, "Having planted the seeds of good will and service to our neighbors, we are harvesting the benefits. And we will reinvest what we have harvested in a new direction, helping to build a stronger future for our children and our children's children."

The new direction Marquez spoke of includes new design features for the Girder model developed in an effort to set it apart from the pack of ConstructionMechs already on the market. One promised innovation includes reverse-induction heating coils for the welding tool, which TEL engineers claim will halve the heat buildup compared with conventional welders. Another is a more efficient fuel injector, which engineers claim will raise the 'Mech engine's efficiency to 29%, and burn fuel 12% cleaner.

Industry analysts say this could put Earthwerks on top of the ConstructionMech heap in Prefecture IV, and possibly in The Republic. The economy around the Sphere is in its best shape in 40 years, since the decommissioning of the BattleMechs and the end of the wartime economy under Devlin Stone's leadership. Last year, construction within the sphere grew so rapidly that new equipment production barely stayed even with demand. At the same time, TEL has shown seven years of continual growth, reporting more than 10.8 billion C-Bills in revenue last year, up from 9.4 billion the year before. Their rate of growth outpaces even the rosy economy of the Inner Sphere.

The local economy of Lynchburg, a city of 80,000 people, is also expected to skyrocket. The manufacturing and construction plant in Lynchburg is expected to create 9,500 new jobs in the area, and pour over 50 million C-Bills into the industrial town over the next five years.

City councilwoman Maya Standifer said, "Lynchburg has always welcomed partnerships with Tikonov's Earthwerks. They have a proven record of working with citizens and government to create better living for everyone. We're inordinately satisfied with our relationship, and feel we have much to offer one another."

Lynchburg was chosen from the three finalist cities for its low tax rates, trained work force, and potential for growth. City leaders also promised nearly 20 acres of land to TEL for building.

In addition to generous government land grants, Lynchburg is already home to TEL-owned oil refinery, Synasco. Experts cite TEL's choice of Lynchburg as an attempt to integrate the two, fleshing out the company's horizontal business strategy.

Antipollution protestors from other parts of Tikonov appeared at the opening ceremonies, but were quiet and respectful throughout the proceedings.

## Market Bullish Following DiNapoli Acquisition

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By Alex Felsner, Republic News

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TANTRIL, ANKAA—For the second straight day, markets throughout the Republic of the Sphere, including the benchmark Republic Stock Exchange (RSE) based on Mallory's World, and Earth's stalwart New York Stock Exchange (NYSE), have risen to all-time highs. Thanks in no small part to Jacob Bannson's acquisition of DiNapoli Enterprises and fueled by a continuing period of economic prosperity, traders in every major market are reporting huge gains.

"Face it," says market analyst Holden Pettigrew, "the markets love Bannson. If he's happy, the markets are up, and he's not happy unless the markets are up."

The markets opened an average of 10 percent higher the morning after Bannson announced the DiNapoli acquisition, followed by another 8-percent spike a day later when the corporate maverick announced yet another predicted profit increase in the second and third quarters—including within the recently floundering DiNapoli divisions.

Bannson wasn't surprised at all. "I knew that DiNapoli had the potential to blossom. All it needed was a logistical base that could handle that potential."

The only losers, if there have to be any, are in the medical sector. While heavy industry and entertainment are making double-digit gains, the medical industries are gaining only a few paltry points.

"I guess the happier people are, the less they need fixing," says Bannson, a man also heavily invested in med-tech. "If the price for happiness is less visits to the doctor, then call me satisfied."

## Mech-o-rama

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Causeway Press

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It's no secret to parents that kids love 'Mechs. Sometimes children know more about the metal monstrosities than the adults. But face it, since the dinosaurs, kids—the quintessentially powerless people—have been attracted to giant things that are way more powerful than mommy or daddy, and won't make them eat their peas.

So we can say with some certainty that your kids are gonna love Mech-o-rama, published by Causeway Press, the latest book in their "o-rama" line. If you've got kids, you might also have read Tank-o-rama and DropShip-o-rama about fifty thousand times. Well, get out the reading glasses. Mech-o-rama's got large, bright color pictures of 'Mechs on every page, and it's filled with kid-friendly facts that kids love to memorize and tell you about again and again when you're trying to get them to go to bed.

Just so you can keep up with them, here's a rundown of what you'll find in Mech-o-rama:

**AgricultureMechs:** You can generally tell what kind of 'Mech you're looking at by the shape of the spinning blades. For the AgroMech (that's the cool lingo), circular blades thresh crops by the kilogram.

**ConstructionMech:** These 'Mechs don't even have the semblance of hands. One arm has a dirt scoop, the other a big clamp for grasping and holding.

**ForestryMech:** You can spot these 'Mechs by the huge saw blade in place of the left arm.

**MiningMech:** The blades on this one are more strangely shaped. That's because they're designed to chew through huge chunks of rock to get at the valuable ore veins.

**BattleMech:** Unlike the other 'Mechs, these come in a dizzying variety of styles and functions. You're better off just letting your kid explain it all to you.

Of course there's much more inside. Mech-o-rama sells for 19.95 C-bills at most bookstores, on sale next week throughout the Republic.

## **Prefect Radick: Star League is Destined to Return**

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Controversial Remarks Cause Stir

06/25/3132

TIGRESS—In a meeting with planetary leaders on Tigress yesterday, Prefect Kal Radick, Galaxy Commander, spoke openly about his plans for military buildup within the Prefecture.

Many planetary leaders are concerned about a stockpile of military might in a time of relative peace and prosperity. The purpose of yesterday's meeting was, ostensibly, to reassure them of the Prefect's plan for stability in the region.

The meeting took an unusual turn when, toward the end of his outline of disposition of military installments, Radick made some unusual remarks. In reference to placement of a munitions dump on Sheratan, Radick said, "...and it will remain in a primary location for the return."

When questioned about what might be returning, the Prefect went on to say, "Well, the return of the Star League." Upon further questioning, the Prefect said, "The Republic has done excellent work keeping the planets together after all the hardship under the Word of Blake onslaught. But eventually, the Star League must return as the leader of humanity in the galaxy."

Radick's staff members were quick to attempt to clarify his intent. Spokeswoman Gina Hatcheson said in a press conference later that day, "Prefect Radick fully supports the government, initiatives, and the citizens of The Republic of the Sphere. His remarks were meant to indicate that he foresees the return of the spirit of unity which the Star League represents in the honored rolls of human history."

However, Radick's detractors, among them Mirach Planetary Governor Sergio Ortega, claim that Radick was clear enough in his original statement. Ortega said, "Prefect Radick's statement shows forethought, and is an unfortunate critique of The Republic's current government." Many others believe a personal apology and retraction are in order.

Radick has made bold (and what many observers would call blundering) political statements before. He is often noted as appearing uncomfortable conducting civil affairs, and accused of being blind toward the behavior of his political subordinates. Radick has never made as strong a statement as yesterday's.

Few have had cause to question Kal Radick's loyalty to The Republic before. Though raised in the tradition of the Clans, Radick has always supported The Republic, calling it a "bastion of civilization" in a speech delivered shortly after winning his Bloodname at the age of 22. Climbing the military ranks within The Republic, he has been decorated several times for valor and prowess in combat. His Clan leanings make the statement all the more ironic, considering that the Star League was formed in 3059 for the purpose of repelling Clan invaders.

## Redburn Praises Free Trade Pact Initiative

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By Corel Malonne, ComStar INN

06/25/3132

Speaking before the Senate this week, Exarch Damien Redburn congratulated the Senators on the apparent success of their Free Trade Initiative. He held up FTI as an indicator of a "bright future, full of new economic possibilities for -The Republic of the Sphere and a potential that may even rival the booming decades following [Devlin] Stone's Reformation."

Under the Free Trade Initiative, all import and export tariffs on physical goods are eliminated between The Republic and signing parties so long as the trade deficit in either direction remains at twenty percent or less. Services and intellectual properties are excluded. The Lyran Commonwealth was a strong force behind FTI and the first beneficiary of the agreement.

Ambassador Amber Steiner-Avanti of the Lyran Commonwealth Diplomatic Corps called Exarch Redburn's outlook, "one of forward-thinking and strong direction."

Not everyone is as sanguine about the developing economic situation, however. A source close to the Exarch, who spoke only on condition of anonymity, reported that there is much debate among senior government officials over the value of the Free Trade Initiative, and that there are some "dark clouds" on the horizon.

"There has been a serious recession looming on the horizon for years," according to this source. "We've all known about it, including the Exarch. Free trade with the Lyran Commonwealth is not going to solve that, especially when the trade deficit is certain to swing against us."

Republic Senator Lissa Ruchenko (Nationalistic Party—Procyon) disagrees. "The call to protect local jobs and trades has always been a red herring, thrown out by isolationist supporters to distract attention away from their real goals. Exarch Redburn is smart enough and studied enough to know that free trade has always been a catalyst for economic growth."

## Rosse Proposes Major Military Budget Increase

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06/25/3132

GENEVA, TERRA—In a surprise speech today in the Senate Military Operations Committee (SMOC), Senator Kev Rosse called for a massive increase in military spending, both to expand the armed forces and to upgrade their equipment. Choosing to wear his uniform of Galaxy Commander rather than the suits that are his usual Senate attire, Rosse's lean figure dominated the committee room even before he began his address.

"After centuries of war, the dividend of peace is richly deserved by the people of the Inner Sphere, but we should not forget that said peace was purchased with the sacrifice of our warriors. I do not say we must wage war, but we should be ready to fight when we have to. In 3067, with the end of the civil war in the Federated Commonwealth, people expected a new era of peace. We all know what followed, and it is sheer folly to think that another such apocalypse could never happen again. We have become complacent, enamored of peace and blind to the risks. Weakness is an invitation to conflict, not a means of avoiding it. Our forces have not faced a military threat in years, their skills atrophied by lack of use. Furthermore, much of our equipment is older than the Republic, handed down from parent to child for generations. We need to rectify this, to train new warriors and to give those in service the best tools for their mission. The only way to do this is to boost military spending and I urge the Senate to consider such a measure—a real-world increase in the armed forces budget—at their earliest convenience."

A regular attendee at SMOC meetings, Senator Rosse's pro-military views are well known though not always well received. "What do you expect from a Senator raised in the Clan way? Their idea of subtle negotiations is using a knife instead of a pistol," said Senator Aeisha Mubatu, formerly the Governor of Helen. "Kev Rosse would see shadows on even the brightest day. He has allowed his so-called vision quests to cloud his perception of the real world," said Senator Geot. Others were equally critical, though the most stinging attack came from Alice Syrmar of Prefecture I. "The Senator's Clan-bred desire for martial glory has come to the fore at last, and he would propel us into a war against an enemy that only exists in his imagination. Devlin Stone would be dismayed to see how little difference his efforts to create harmony amongst the peoples of the Republic have made to the Clansmen in our midst. Are Senator Rosse and his kin truly members of the Republic or are they merely puppets of Khan Jacali Nostra and the warriors of the Draconis Combine?"

A few members of the government, such as Legate Christine Sandoval of Mara, gave the proposal a guarded welcome. "I understand the Senator's concerns and agree that an upgrade program is long overdue. Almost half of the Scimitars under my command are the venerable MK I variant and most of my infantry regiments lack adequate transport. However, I don't believe there is a need to expand the armed forces—we have more than enough men under arms and as has been demonstrated so often, it's quality not quantity that counts on the modern battlefield. That is one aspect of Clan heritage that the Senator appears to have forgotten."

When confronted with his critics' comments, Rosse seemed unperturbed. His reply was simple and enigmatic. "I have glimpsed what is to come and we must work to safeguard the future, not allow our own carelessness to rob us of it."

## Book Review: Diary of a Stone Migrant

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Storytellers Press  
338 pages / C21.95

06/27/3132

At first glance there is little to distinguish Shanda McMurry's *Diary of a Stone Migrant* from the plethora of other works on the Stone Reformation that have appeared in recent years. Unlike other works, however, McMurray's substantial volume tells the story in the words of the migrants themselves, woven together with McMurry's background material, giving the readers a keen insight into contemporary thoughts and attitudes rather than a post-facto analysis of events from a thirty-second-century perspective. The book follows the Shah family, former residents of Regulus who fled to Irian as the Free Worlds League fragmented after the Blakist revelations. The diarist is Jacob Shah, the family's eldest child, who was fourteen when the diary begins and twenty-two at its end. His early chapters, while less polished than those that follow, capture the feelings of fear and desperation that accompanied the family's flight to Irian.

Where the book comes into its own is with the details of how the Stone Reformation affected individuals. Jacob's youth made it difficult for him to understand the social and political rationale for the relocation of populations within the new Republic, namely the desire to break down the cultural and social barriers that fueled many past conflicts. To him it was another forced relocation, though his hopes for the future are clear to see. "I can remember little but war. If this Reformation gives us the chance to end it for all time then it must be a good thing."

Sometimes funny—Shah's recollections of his arrival on Lyons are priceless—and often moving, his words bring his family into startling relief—the pragmatic father, Sanjay, his stoic mother Lucy, his demanding brother Suleiman and tragic sister Maggie—each emerging as living, breathing characters.

The book's strength is also its greatest weakness: its exclusive focus on the Shahs. We see the trials and tribulations of this family in stark detail, and McMurry provides context material for their journey, but it is just one family's story among that of millions. The broader scope of the Reformation is lost in the minutiae of family life and it would have benefited from a broader view of events, either in McMurray's scene-setting material or by combining Jacob Shah's narrative with that of other migrants. Despite this weakness, the volume is a worthwhile addition to the libraries of those interested in the Reformation.



## Jude Dacert Interviews Prefect Kal Radick

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06/27/3132

Prefect Kal Radick has a reputation for making statements that both his supporters and opponents find hard to swallow. Before his elevation to Prefect of Prefecture IV, Radick was a successful military leader and Mech pilot, rising to the rank of Galaxy Commander within Clan Wolf. Radick is accused of blustering his way to the top, but his accomplishments and no-prisoners attitude earn him attention, if not respect, from his contemporaries.

Jude Dacert interviewed Radick this week on Current Events. Excerpts from the interview appear below:

**JD:** Some of your detractors say that your military mindset is not particularly useful in peace time. How do you respond to those charges?

**KR:** Well, first let me say that this is the first I have heard of that, and it is funny that someone would make that claim, but not to my face. But in response I would say that discipline and preparation do not go out of style. I do not have a lot of use for political posturing, so maybe that is what they are referring to.

**JD:** I would be remiss if I didn't ask about your recent comments about the return of the Star League. Things seem to be going fairly well under the current administration. Why call for a return of the Star League?

**KR:** Jude, I am not advocating a complete overthrow of the current government. I would not be here if I did not believe in it. But it is a fact that the Star League had pivotal strengths that the current Republic lacks. One was the unstoppable unity of the League. When faced with an outside threat, all of humanity joined in the struggle. Today, we have backbiting, politics, and everybody takes a "me-first" approach. You did not see that kind of attitude in the League.

Second, the Star League is our history—the history of humanity. What we have now is good for what it is—a provisional government. But the holes are wide open to anyone who looks. To ignore our history and put our collective faith in Devlin Stone—who has certainly done good things but is someone we know very little about—seems foolish.

Third, under the Star League, not only did humanity enjoy all the prosperity it has now but it had an exceptionally strong military, something the current Republic is sadly lacking. The next would-be Word of Blake is lurking somewhere. Dismantling the military just because there is no obvious threat is like leaving your door unlocked because no one you know is a thief.

**JD:** Championing the Star League seems especially odd, given your strong Clansmanship.

**KR:** Neg. Not at all. I am very proud of my Clan heritage, but your Star League would have never formed without the pressure put on it by the Clans. The Clans helped reunify humanity, one way or another. If the Clans had won that war, then they would have brought humanity back to its roots. The fact that the League ended the conflict by using the Clan Trial of Refusal in 3060 means that the Clan system worked.

**JD:** Representatives on Yangtze and Mirach are calling for a formal retraction of your statement.

**KR:** I have spoken with planetary governors on the matter, and we think we have come to an acceptable agreement.

**JD:** What is the agreement?

**KR:** Well, it is complicated. But the bottom line of it is that as a Prefecture, we need to be together on these things. Do I believe the Republic is a failure? Neg, of course not. Do I believe it can be better? Yes, certainly. So we can all agree that working for a better government is a worthwhile goal. If we use different words to get there, then I suppose some semantic quibbling might happen. But we will work for a stronger, better government. And I think we have an excellent model in the original Star League, one that I see as nearly inevitable under the forward-thinking kind of government I want to be a leader in.

## Sandoval Strikes Historic Earthwerks 'Mech Deal

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AP-HPG News Services

06/27/3132

RIO DE JANEIRO, TERRA—Today, Duke Aaron Sandoval announced that Tikonov's Earthwerks Ltd. has signed 'Mech subsystems-integration deals with several corporations on Prefecture III and Prefecture X worlds, including two on Terra. The deal is reported to be worth several billion C-Bills per year for Sandoval's constituents alone. Duke Sandoval arrived on Terra only yesterday, suggesting that negotiations have been under way for some time now.

"This is a historic agreement," said Sandoval at the signing ceremony. "By signing these documents, we are sealing a better future for the people of three Prefectures. This is The Republic in action." Also in attendance were Earthwerks COO Jerome Dutch, several Terran officials, and members of the press. Officials from Tikonov, as well as officials and corporate leaders from Ozawa in Prefecture III, attended by Hyperpulse Generator net linkup.

Countess Tara Campbell, Legate of Northwind, was among those attending via HPG link. The appearance of Northwind's highest military official was remarkable, given Prefect Katana Tormark's recent criticism of Duke Sandoval. Tormark is Campbell's direct superior.

Reached at her dojo on Ozawa by AP-HPG News Service, Tormark said, "Of course I was aware that Legate Campbell was following Duke Sandoval's dealings." Because Tormark had been in martial training at the time we contacted her, she was dressed in simple infantryman's tan camouflage. (After the interview, a representative of the entertainment press noted that Tormark "is even more striking when working out.")

"I designated her as a liaison to Duke Sandoval in this matter," Tormark stated. "Legate Campbell's mission was to ensure that Prefecture III defense contractors had the equipment necessary to produce the most up-to-date defense systems available should the need arise. She has accomplished that mission."

When asked about her criticism of Duke Sandoval, she said, "We must beware of those who seek to improve military technology in a time of peace. I don't believe the Duke's motives to be as pure and free of politics as he would suggest."

Another official spoke on condition of anonymity. "Follow the money trails. You might discover that some unpleasant things are brewing." The only client for the subsystems to be built by Earthwerks and its subsidiaries is The Republic, whose military has received little attention in the last three decades.

Later, in an informal press reception, Duke Sandoval responded to Tormark's comments. "Prefect Tormark accused me of self-interest—of an obsession with technology—when I began this mission. I just delivered agreements that will enrich both of our Prefectures."

Sandoval looked thoughtful while others in the room awaited his response. "Okay, let's say I'm obsessed with technology. Where's the failing there? Who would prefer to shovel coal into a steam engine when you can turn a key and fly quietly, comfortably, and economically to your office? Humankind would not even exist in the worlds beyond Terra, here, without technological innovation. Prefect Tormark might wish to return to the bad old days, but I wager that few citizens in our Prefectures would agree."

When pressed to address the specifics of the current deal, which centers around defense systems rather than civilian technology, Sandoval declined to comment further.

Sandoval travels next to Northwind before returning to Tikonov.

## Tormark Exposes Black Market 'Mech Ring

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06/27/3132

ELBAR—Prefect Katana Tormark today announced the results of what is reported to be a year-long inquiry led by Tormark herself. Sources say that Tormark, with the aid of the ultrasecret Order of the Five Pillars (O5P), is responsible for gathering the intelligence that led to the arrest of several top interstellar trade organization leaders, corporate officers, and the implication of dozens more.

"We first became aware of 'Mech trafficking after a unit of the Prefecture III border patrol intercepted an unregistered vessel entering the Prefecture from the Periphery," Tormark said in her press conference. "They were carrying nine 'Mechs, whose registry showed them as decommissioned and dismantled.

"I immediately formed a special task force to investigate," Tormark said.

The press conference was held on Elbar, just beyond the borders of Prefectures III and IV. Elbar has twice been given the opportunity to join the Republic but has declined, some say because of its ties to radical anti-Republic militants. One local official informed AP-HPG News that Elbar appears to have been the control center of the 'Mech smuggling operation. The official also stated that arrests made by Tormark herself in concert with the O5P and a special Prefecture task force group came only after a bloody battle that left as many as 100 smugglers dead and might have included a brief 'Mech battle. This information could not be verified. No one would comment on any losses to the O5P or the task force group, but one source who declined to be identified suggests that Tormark did not lose a single soldier in last night's lightning operation.

A member of the press corps asked why no information was released concerning the earlier arrests.

"Those smugglers were unimportant," Tormark said. "We needed to discover who had faked the decommissioning papers, who had moved the 'Mechs, and who wanted to buy them. During the last year, we learned deeply disturbing facts about a large number of corporate and public officials. Their plans have backfired."

Tormark refused to identify these officials, only stating that the investigation continues. With regard to the identity of the persons currently being held by the O5P, Tormark said, "They are being questioned. When we have identified all the high-level coconspirators, we will release their names."

When asked to explain "their plans," Tormark declined comment, stating only that the smugglers were supplying 'Mechs for "a broader treachery."

The discovery has stunned officials across The Republic. Exarch Damien Redburn was reached for comment. "This operation shows why Katana Tormark was nominated for Knighthood. She is brilliant and tenacious, and deadly to any force that stands against the Republic."

Lord Governor Sandoval of neighboring Prefecture IV added, "It's a damn shame that she declined that nomination imagine what she could do on a Republic-wide scale if she's able to find poisonous insects way out there in the Periphery?"

Some are questioning whether Sandoval's recent trade agreement, which brought Earthwerks a large set of contracts in 'Mech integrations systems, might not be a good idea in light of the discovery of this smuggling ring. "If anything," Sandoval said, "those deals will help assure that the Republic can stand against anarchists who want to build secret armies."

## Kal Radick Supports Rosse Military Proposal

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07/02/3132

TOKOGRAD, TIKONOV—In a stunning announcement today, Galaxy Commander Kal Radick, Prefect of Prefecture IV, has joined the growing call for increased military spending, supporting the Rosse-Campbell military proposal. His recent comments regarding the re-establishment of a Star League and his conflict with Rosse supporter Tara Campbell—the two are at loggerheads after Campbell's recent comments—lead few to predict this declaration.

Addressing a small group of journalists at the Prefectural command center in Tikograd on Tikonov, the twenty-five year old Galaxy Commander was at his most eloquent. "When my ancestors chose to join the war against the Blakist armies, Wardens and Crusaders alike were unified in their desire to eliminate the grave threat posed by the Jihad. Martial prowess was the Clans' gift to the Inner Sphere, and remains a cornerstone of our involvement in The Republic. If the Republic of the Sphere is to realize its full potential as the heart of humanity's domains, we must be strong militarily as well as ethically. To that end, everything possible must be done to ensure passage of the Rosse bill and the bolstering of the military."

Radick did not answer questions but he did state that while he personally could not vote for the measure, he would encourage the senators of Prefecture IV to support it. "People must vote as their conscience dictates, though to me there is little to debate."

Senator Rosse, originator of the bill to modernize and expand the Republic's military, responded cautiously to Kal Radick's pronouncement. The Nova Cat senator seemed to be of two minds about the value of the outspoken Prefect's endorsement. "I am glad that Prefect Radick approves of the bill," he said, "but he must be aware that my intention is to strengthen The Republic, not to force the establishment of a new Star League on The Republic or its neighbors. Perhaps one day we will see the rebirth of that hallowed body, but we should be wary of the mistakes of last century, which lead to the False Star League and set the Blakists on the war path."

Radick statement met with a mixed reaction from the Senators. Shay Lantan of Tigress stated, "I will consider Prefect Radick's recommendations carefully. I value Kal's judgment on military matters." Senator Stev Kesh likewise announced his decision to "weigh up all considerations" before deciding on a course of action. However, Lord Governor Aaron Sandoval was less well inclined. "I appreciate the Prefect's position—I, too, know what it is to lead men in battle and to sit at the controls of a 'Mech—but do we need more equipment when we are already establishing stockpiles on worlds such as Tigress?"

Outside Prefecture IV, reaction to the pronouncement was muted. "A prefect seeking to influence the Senate? An interesting turn of events," said Alycia Rousset, one of the senators for Prefecture VII. Staunch opponent of the Rosse bill, Alice Syrmar of Prefecture I, shrugged off Prefect Radick's statement. "The tail cannot wag the dog, no matter how good its pedigree."

## **Knight Siyanda Ashanti Killed in Action**

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By Colin Horbach, Republic News

07/02/3132

SASA, OZAWA—Exarch Damien Redburn confirmed today that Knight of the Sphere Siyanda Ashanti was killed in action on the world Proserpina three days ago.

Dispatched to Proserpina two weeks ago, Knight Ashanti was given the unenviable task of quelling the riots that had suddenly taken hold of the world's capital. Once the seat of government for a large section of the Draconis Combine, the city of Conqueror's Pride has always had a larger than average population of Combine descent. It was little surprise that a group of pro-Combine residents began to rattle their sabers following Bulldog Enterprises' loss of a major government contract to rival Bannson Enterprises. What did surprise the Exarch, however, was the organizational and financial strength of these protesters.

By all accounts, what Knight Ashanti found when she reached Proserpina was far more than a mere dissident movement. While the Combine Now! group had recruited thousands of Proserpina residents, including a number of citizens, at its core was a powerful group of Combine businessmen looking to reabsorb Proserpina back into their nation.

And they would apparently stop at nothing to do so.

While Ashanti's mere appearance on the world did much to quell the movement, it was her week of travel across the planet that truly began to nail the coffin closed on the Combine Now! movement. The 32-year-old Knight easily won the confidence of Proserpina's people and the hatred of the Combine Now! inner circle, so much so that on the 19th of this month the movement boldly attempted to kill Ashanti in her suite within the Republic government building in Conqueror's Pride. Their failure only sealed their eventual fate.

Under the authority of the Exarch and the Knights of the Sphere, Ashanti entered the Combine Now! movement headquarters and arrested more than a dozen conspirators. The conspirators were scheduled to face a Republic Magistrate on the 22nd, but were freed by a rogue 'Mech force, led by a Black Hawk.

Knight Ashanti immediately led a small force in search of the rogues, quickly catching up with them before they made it back to their DropShip. Unfortunately, the rogues outnumbered Ashanti's force by two-to one. The Knight nevertheless led her troops into battle, charging into the fray in her Atlas.

Knight Ashanti did not survive to see the end of the battle, though. The Black Hawk and its compatriots singled her out from the start, and eventually brought her down, but not before she felled the Black Hawk. She dealt serious damage to them, and her death simultaneously threw her MechWarriors into a rage and the rogues into a panic. Ashanti's MechWarriors put down the rogues and recaptured the surviving conspirators minutes after her heroic death. A day later, the combined population and citizens of Proserpina rose up in Ashanti's memory and rid their world of Combine Now!

Said the Exarch, "This has been a terrible tragedy, but Knight Ashanti's sacrifice has at the very least ensured the freedom of Proserpina's citizens. And what is life without freedom?"

## **Radick Challenges Campbell to "Trial of Grievance"**

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by ComStar Correspondent Rene O. Collman

07/02/3132

TIKONOV—Last night, at a fund-raising event for the Immigrant Citizenship Coalition, in front of several interstellar news agencies, Prefect Kal Radick (Prefecture IV) erupted with a violent condemnation of Countess Tara Campbell (Legate of Northwind, Prefecture III) and her recent statement, which suggested that Prefect Radick might no longer be suited to his office.

"That woman has stepped above her position for the last time," Radick said. "She has offended me and my office. Her intention was not just to insult but to sabotage my ability to lead, and I will make her answer for this challenge to my authority."

This exchange began with remarks made by Prefect Radick several days ago. In a meeting with planetary leaders from across Prefecture IV, Radick is quoted as saying, "The Republic has done excellent work keeping the planets together after all the hardship under the Word of Blake onslaught. But eventually, the Star League must return as the leader of humanity in the galaxy."

Radick's staff downplayed his intent to criticize The Republic, but in a street interview later that day, Countess Campbell responded in direct challenge to his comments and his staff's clarification. "To say that Prefect Radick has made a mistake," she said, "is to minimize the impact his words will have, especially to [Clan populations within The Republic]. The Star League's time is past; perhaps his time is past as well."

Although aides report that Prefect Radick has been aware of Countess Campbell's remarks since the day after she made her statement, he has declined to comment about them. Several reporters questioned Radick about the incident at the fund-raiser, provoking his response. Radick said, "Legate Campbell needs to be reminded of her position. I am well within my right to challenge her to a Trial of Grievance."

By the Clan traditions in which Prefect Radick was raised (Radick was raised in Clan Wolf), warriors can settle a dispute in single combat, known as a Trial of Grievance, to prove which is the injured party and due their measure of retribution. Prefect Radick's challenge stands on the supposition that even the slightest suggestion by Countess Campbell that he is no longer worthy of his position undermines his authority and encourages other subordinates to disrespect his office or, again by Clan traditions, challenge him for leadership.

Countess Campbell maintains that her statement was made with political intent, as befitting her noble title, not as a critique of Prefect Radick in his position as her superior in rank. (Although Campbell is commissioned as a Legate in a different Prefecture than Radick, she is still expected to maintain a respect for his higher rank and office.)

"I would never impugn Prefect Radick's office or his personal military accomplishments. I responded solely to the suggestion that The Republic of the Sphere will not stand, a position that any good citizen of The Republic would find questionable. If he feels slighted, I invite him to Northwind where we can discuss matters in a calm and civil manner."

"Political obfuscation," said Prefect Radick today in response to Campbell's attempt at reconciliation. "She hopes to hide her insubordination behind hereditary titles and courtesies. Second-guessing her superiors is a privilege Legate Campbell gave up when she became a warrior, a soldier, and a commanding officer within The Republic. I demand satisfaction."

## StarCross Orders DropShips, Windfall for Ankaa

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Republic News

07/02/3132

TANTRIL, ANKAA—Just a week after Jacob Bannson’s announcement that his corporation would be acquiring DiNapoli Industries, StarCross Starlines has placed an order for twenty DropShips from DiNapoli’s Ankaa production facilities, to be delivered over a span of four years starting in late 3133. This deal, reputed to be worth more than ten billion C-Bills, marks a comeback for the recently flagging DiNapoli divisions and a financial windfall for the world of Ankaa.

“This deal concludes a seven-month search to find the right firm to build our ships,” says StarCross CEO Takeo Runde. “With the strength of Bannson Enterprises behind DiNapoli Shipyards, we have absolute confidence that our ships will be delivered on time with no difficulties.” Enthusiastically, Runde added, “Quite frankly, Jacob Bannson made us a deal we simply couldn’t pass up.”

Of course, StarCross has had difficulties in the past. While profits from interstellar tourism are rapidly increasing year after year, bringing even more players into the field, expenses are also climbing rapidly. StarCross, like most other major travel agencies in The Republic, is faced with an aging DropShip fleet and operations costs that are spiraling out of control. Worse, StarCross was forced to pay more than a billion C-Bills in unexpected costs during its last short-term contract with DiNapoli—one in which DiNapoli delivered only five DropShips.

“I simply reassured Runde and his board that with the resources at our disposal, we could deliver those ships without delays or cost overruns,” said Bannson Enterprises CEO Jacob Bannson. “I’m looking forward to our partnership with StarCross. I don’t want to get too far ahead of myself, but I think you will see more good things to come of this relationship in the near future.”

The markets certainly seem to think this contract bodes well for both companies. In fact, it almost seems that any time Bannson speaks, his portfolio goes up—for the second straight week, Bannson Enterprises stocks reached all-time highs.

StarCross Starlines was founded in 3084 as a small co-op of DropShip and JumpShip captains in response to Devlin Stone’s orders to mix the populations of Republic worlds. Since, StarCross has grown into one of the ten largest travel and moving agencies in The Republic.

Bannson Enterprises, following its acquisition of DiNapoli Industries, is one of the most diversified corporations within the entire Inner Sphere. Its divisions produce both consumer and industrial products ranging from Tri-Vids to fusion reactors to AgroMechs. Additionally, Bannson is well on its way to grow even larger as its military divisions gear up to build a new series of BattleMechs and combat vehicles.

## House Liao Leadership Petitions Republic for Return of Ancestral Worlds

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07/05/3132

GENEVA, TERRA—Acting on behalf of Chancellor Daoshen Liao, Mandarin William Chen formally petitioned the Republic for the return of worlds formerly part of the Capellan Confederation. Addressing the Senate, the Mandarin launched an unprecedented tirade against the Republic and its founder, Devlin Stone. A partial transcript of his speech follows.

"The Confederation has long been the smallest of the Great Houses of the Inner Sphere and our neighbors mercilessly exploit that fact. The Succession Wars ate away at our borders until the perfidious Hanse Davion sought to destroy our proud nation at his own wedding 100 years ago. We fought back, slowly recovering stolen worlds until only a handful remained beyond our grasp. And then these worlds and others were taken from the Confederation by Devlin Stone and his associates under the pretext of rescuing them from the Word of Blake. Tikonov. Shensi. New Canton. Liao. These are worlds of the Confederation.

"If the Republic really believed this self-evident truth and honestly upheld the ideals of equality it espouses then it would return the worlds it stole. The honorable Sun Tzu Liao acquiesced to Stone's extortions as the price of rebuilding the Inner Sphere, that one day the Republic would end its 'protection' of Liao worlds. His Celestial Wisdom, Chancellor Daoshen, believes the people of the Confederation have waited long enough."

Exarch Redburn addressed the Senate later the same day but did not refer to the Mandarin's demands, instead continuing with his scheduled address concerning the recent economic developments in Prefecture Three. However, his press secretary, Ilya Moran, briefed a select group of journalists at Republic House in Geneva.

"Mandarin Chen ignored a number of issues relating to the Confederation's claim, negating it under both Republic and Confederation law. Firstly, the worlds he claims for House Liao once formed part of the Terran Hegemony, seized by the Confederation after the assassination of First Lord Cameron and the war against the Usurper, Stefan Amaris. Secondly, many of the worlds seceded from the Confederation in 3030 to form the Tikonov Free Republic, subsequently entering voluntary union with the Federated Commonwealth. In the wake of the FedCom civil war and the Word of Blake Jihad many petitioned the Republic for membership, and the remainder joined after amicable negotiations between Chancellor Sun Tzu Liao and Exarch Stone. The Treaty of Tikonov states this clearly and unambiguously. Indeed, it strikes me as gross opportunism, that the Chancellor—who is fully conversant with these facts—should direct Mandarin Chen to abrogate a treaty whole-heartedly endorsed by his own grandfather. Indeed, Sun Tzu Liao gave Exarch Stone his heartfelt blessing for the creation of the Republic of the Sphere, citing it as the 'birth of a new era.' Of course, Chancellor Sun Tzu was not entirely selfless in his acquiescence—the worlds that comprised the Republic bore the brunt of the fighting in the Word of Blake assaults and the Republic oversaw the reconstruction efforts and population relocations. Is Chancellor Daoshen cynical enough to want 'Liao' worlds back now that the Republic has met the cost of their rebuilding?"

When asked if Exarch Redburn would make a formal response to the Liao demands, Moran responded, "I have the Exarch's full authority to respond in this matter. Our position is clear and the legal considerations are laid out for all to see in the Republic Formation Treaty." No member of the Cappellan government was available for comment.



## **House Steiner and Exarch Redburn Announce Trade Pact**

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07/05/3132

GENEVA, TERRA—In joint statements issued on Tharkad and Terra, House Steiner and The Republic of the Sphere announced a new trade deal that will bolster the media of both nations. Donegal Broadcasting and the Republic Broadcasting Service will enter a strategic partnership to form the Inner Sphere's largest media concern. The two companies will remain fiscally independent but will grant each other preferential access to program material, giving each an unprecedented range of programming. The two companies will also collaborate on a series of new ventures, including a news service that is set to rival that of ComStar Interstellar News Network, and a sports service covering events on both Solaris and Blair Athol.

Exarch Redburn cited the deal as a sterling example of the profitable partnerships between The Republic and its neighbors that were possible in this new age of peace and prosperity. The deal has not, however, received universal acclaim, drawing criticism from broadcasters outside the partnership who feel they will now be forced to pay premium prices for popular shows such as the Skye Games and Immortal Warrior: Vengeance. Donegal CEO Albrecht Stanton quickly sought to quash such rumors. "The partnership deal announced today allows Donegal and RBS to share programming but is not intended to hinder sales to third parties."

## **Victor Ian Steiner-Davion: A Life**

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by Gus Michaels  
Merchant Merriman Books  
C32.99  
Reviewed by Brandon Corey  
07/05/3132

There is no denying that Victor Ian Steiner-Davion is one of the preeminent figures of the 31st century and more than deserving of a comprehensive biography. Alas, this book hardly serves. Michaels, whose earlier works include a unit history of the Wolf Dragoons, a biography of Natasha Kerensky, and an insider's narrative of ComStar's doomed Operation Scorpion, is an unabashed Steiner-Davion apologist who claims to have both perspective and detachment concerning the subject. The book's very acknowledgments put the lie to this claim, as he thanks the former First Prince for his cooperation in compiling this turgid, overwritten paean.

While this book does manage to supply endless and often stultifyingly detailed stories about Victor's military career and political dealings, it dilutes this useful material by quoting liberally from interviews with friends and allies. These interviews, as well as excerpts from records made at the time, utterly whitewash Victor's roles in a variety of activities that remain mysterious to this day. While it has been roundly rumored that his sister, Katherine, was complicit in the death of their mother, the very fact that he did not have her tried and punished for her crimes suggests he was treating with her as an unindicted conspirator to one who was less fortunate. They both escaped retribution for Melissa Steiner's death, but only Victor proclaims his innocence. He doth protest too much, but Michaels accepts these protests. Moreover, he does all manner of bodywork on them so they take on the appearance of validity.

Where Michaels does succeed, despite his overly florid style, is in providing insight into the relationship between Victor and Omi Kurita. Theirs does seem to be a truly tragic love story, and Victor's pain at Omi's death is brought into poignant relief in this biography. While the churlish might point out that what goes around comes around, even the most black-hearted Davionophobe could not help but shed a tear over Victor's losing his lover and later discovering she had secretly borne his child. That father and son were united later in life is a truly wonderful event, and this reviewer was so touched he had to set the book down.

But, as the demands of the job would have it, he also had to pick it back up again. Victor's role in the formation of The Republic of the Sphere is covered in exquisite detail. The phrase "too much information" did roll around in my brain, though the inside look at events did clarify tendencies that we see in evidence even today.

There will certainly be better books on Victor Davion in the future. There have to be; the law of averages states this. Until then, however, this comprehensive lionization of a failed politician will have to suffice. Victor may have outlived his contemporaries, but this is good. Wading through this book would have surely slain them, one and all.

## **Campbell Welcomes Sandoval to Borderless Security Conference on Northwind**

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AP-HPG News Services

07/09/3132

TARA, NORTHWIND—Countess Tara Campbell, Legate of Northwind, today welcomed Duke Aaron Sandoval, Lord Governor of Prefecture IV, as keynote speaker at the Cross-Prefecture Defense Conference going on this week. Northwind, where Lord Governor Sandoval arrived last night, is the last stop on Sandoval's diplomatic tour before he returns to Tikonov.

"This conference has been in the works for the better part of a year, and with Prefect Tormark's recent exposure of the 'Mech smuggling ring, it's clear that the time has come for better coordination of The Republic's resources," Legate Campbell said. "Recent events make it imperative that we work with world leaders in adjoining Prefectures to protect our people and our borders. When I heard the news, I immediately began to work with our program board to revise the conference agenda. Lord Governor Sandoval himself contacted me en route to the conference to discuss revising his address to reflect these new developments. I was delighted to discover just how committed he is to our purpose."

Sandoval's staff confirms that the Lord Governor spent the last hours on his DropShip revising the comments he'd prepared before he departed Tikonov. "The subject of this conference has taken on a new urgency," Sandoval said in his address today. "Prefect Tormark's revelations bring into sharp relief the necessity for a stronger, more unified security system. Though The Republic has enjoyed unprecedented goodwill with our neighbors, we have only to reflect on our history to be reminded that constant vigilance is the price we must pay for continued peace." Sandoval will stay on Northwind for the duration of the conference, and an extra two days for private meetings with Northwind's Governor Daniel Campbell as well as planetary business leaders.

"We made good progress today," Campbell reported. "Though I can't discuss any specifics, I am at liberty to say that Prefectures III and IV are united in this effort. Lord Governor Sandoval's leadership in this matter has already proven to be pivotal to our discussions. Dozens of worlds from the other Prefectures have promised to coordinate intelligence and supply military backing as needed."

Legate Campbell and her staff started planning the conference to discuss security issues with other planetary defense leaders last year. Seventy-nine Governors and Legates from Prefectures II, III, IV, V, and X are in attendance at the conference, including the Legate from Terra, who was also said to represent Exarch Redburn's interests.

Called to Elbar by the conclusion of her investigation into a black market 'Mech smuggling ring, Prefect Katana Tormark was unable to attend the conference. Tokada Imurra, Planetary Legate of Ozawa, who was planning to attend the conference with Prefect Tormark, is appearing in her stead. Sources say that Prefect Tormark may address the conference via HPG transmission, but this report has not been confirmed.

## Redburn Postpones Ceremony Honoring Radick

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07/09/3132

GENEVA, TERRA—Exarch Damien Redburn today announced the postponement of a ceremony to honor Prefect Kal Radick for his service to The Republic. Citing schedule conflicts, the Exarch assured reporters that the ceremony would be rescheduled. Redburn denied that Prefect Kal Radick's recent statements about The Republic, including calling it a "provisional government," affected the postponement. He also denied that Radick's challenge to the Legate of Northwind for a Trial of Grievance was a factor. In the wake of Radick's comments about The Republic, Countess Tara Campbell said that "the Star League's time is past; perhaps [Radick's] time has passed as well."

Other observers are less certain about the reasons for the postponement. A source near the Exarch's advisory group reports that the Exarch was furious when he saw Tri-Vid of Radick's recent interview, calling the Prefect a loose cannon. Redburn's spokespeople deny any punitive intent on the Exarch's part, calling the postponement "unfortunate, but necessary."

Prefect Radick was unusually guarded in his response to the postponement. His office issued a statement expressing regrets, and calling for unity among all Republic citizens and residents. When asked about his opinion in an unrelated press conference, Radick responded, "According to Exarch Redburn, an untimely conflict prevented the ceremony. I don't know what that conflict is, but I understand conflict. I haven't had a chance to speak with Damien today. I presume the Exarch is a busy man. I hope he finds time for it soon."

Since his comments regarding the "nearly inevitable" return of the Star League, the political climate in The Republic of the Sphere has been described by many insiders as more tense than usual. Radical conservative members of the Senate have called for Radick's removal on grounds of treason.

Most vocal in their criticism are members of the prominent Republic political party, Sons and Daughters of Devlin Stone (SDDS). The SDDS filed a holovid press release with news services.

SDDS Spokeswoman Akiko Lancaster said, "Radick's disloyalty to Devlin Stone's work has caused more disunity than his precious Star League could ever reassemble. Word of Blake zealots began ruining human worlds when the member planets of the previous Star League disbanded because they admitted their own irrelevance! Stone removed that regime, and created a government that brought peace and stability to hundreds of billions of people. To want a return to the foolishness of the Star League is the height of ignorance."

Planetary Governors and Senators of Prefecture IV have shown less outrage, ostensibly because of more frequent exposure to Radick's blunt political style.

Senator Bran Tucci (Rio) said, "Every few weeks Kal says something that somebody takes the wrong way. Frankly, I wouldn't ask the Prefect to deliver a graduation address without expecting some sort of political slipup. I don't understand what all the fuss is about."

## **Sphere Knight Levin made Paladin**

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by Rene O. Collman, ComStar

07/09/3132

REZ, KERVIL—Sir Jonah Levin, Knight of the Sphere, was made a Paladin of the Republic at the Temple of All Paths in Rez, capital city of Kervil, this morning. His appointment and ascension comes in the wake of Paladin Isabella Druchet's announcement three months ago that she was stepping down due to ill health.

Sir Levin's ascension to Paladin was not unexpected. Coming to Devlin Stone's attention after the battle for Kurragin in 3110, Jonah Levin was the only officer to survive that bloody assault. Knighted in 3111 and granted a boon from Exarch Stone, Levin made a request for aide to the survivors of the men and women who died on Kurragin, a request that showed not only a sense of justice but a strong social consciousness as well. "Levin's Survivors" have prospered, contributing many times over their share of service to the Republic.

With twenty-one years of service behind him, Levin, 50, is one of the veteran Knights, a Mentor, and Exarch Redburn's Knight-icton of humility. He is also the first Jew to be made a Paladin of the Sphere. Conflicting sources suggest that the death of Levin's youngest child either delayed or confirmed his appointment. Yael Miri Levin died only two months short of completing her five years of service to The Republic in preparation for her citizenship. Jonah Levin requested two months' recusal of duties to finish Yael's service so that her death certificate would reflect her citizenship. It is a service he has performed eight times during his long career, but the first time it was necessary for a family member. It made Levin's ascension a time for reflection as well as celebration.

So today, Sir Jonah Levin, still mourning a daughter and having paid his respects to Paladin Druchet, waited on a formal dais in the non-denominational chapel where he had spent the night in meditation. The seven attending Knights of the Sphere filed in first, including Paladin Kaffyd Op Owens who stood in for Exarch Redburn. They stood at seven cardinal points in the first circle. The second tier approached and surrounded Sir Levin, including important members of Kervil's nobility and high officers from Republic units on Kervil and three nearby worlds. Immediate family and friends made up the third and last tier. Republic, comrades, and family.

Such are the loyalties of a Paladin.

The ceremonial sword, carried from Terra at the order of the Exarch, was born into the ascension by Jonah's wife, Anna. Last to arrive, she was escorted through the third tier by their eldest son and through the second by Kervil governor Madison Hasaki. Sir Op Owens accepted the ceremonial sword, the same blade Devlin Stone acquired during his escape and flight from the Word of Blake reeducation center. He used it to re-knight Jonah Levin and raise him, this time as a Paladin of the Sphere. Levin requested, and was granted, an addition to the traditional ascension ceremony, recitation of the Jewish prayer celebrating and blessing new beginnings. It was deemed by celebrants and guests alike a fitting conclusion to the ceremony.

## Tormark Prepared to Testify Against 'Mech Smugglers

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07/09/3132

OZAWA—Today Prefect Katana Tormark, en route to Ozawa, met via scrambled HPG linkup with a select group of world Governors and Legates, as well as Lord Governor Aaron Sandoval, regarding the black-market 'Mech ring that she, along with a special task force, exposed on the borders of Prefectures III and IV. An official who spoke on condition of anonymity says that Tormark implicated at least a dozen top leaders of various public and privately held interstellar trade companies and organizations.

On June 27, Tormark led a precision assault against what has been called the "nerve center" of a 'Mech black-market ring on the world of Elbar, just outside the borders of Prefectures III and IV. The assault resulted in the arrest of a number of smugglers and the disappearance of many other suspects, some of whom hold high positions in Republic-based corporations and trade organizations. These officials' names are being withheld. Nearly a billion C-Bills worth of 'Mechs and 'Mech parts were confiscated in the raid. The exposure of the conspiracy has led to heightened policing of borders Republic-wide, along with careful monitoring of all interstellar trade.

Sources say that during the HPG net conference, Tormark stated a readiness to publicly testify against those who were seized in the action. She stated that interrogation by the Order of the Five Pillars revealed that a group of " ... coconspirators have been planning mass treachery. This 'Mech-smuggling ring we exposed is only a small part of something much larger."

Tormark allegedly said, however, that before she testified publicly, she wanted first to confer with the Paladins. "There are several in the Senate who will be implicated," she is quoted as saying.

Tormark has been receiving death threats since the ring was exposed. "You can't shake up a snakes' den without a few of the snakes lashing out," said one of the Prefect's close associates. Most threats have been quickly dismissed, but today Tormark received a "credible" threat, only minutes after her declaration.

When questioned at an unrelated press conference, Exarch Redburn would neither confirm nor deny any meeting between the Paladins and Prefect Tormark. "I have great faith in Prefect Tormark and her special intelligence forces. We will meet with her to discuss her findings as soon as is practicable. It looks as if she has averted a disaster, and I look forward to seeing this distasteful business rooted out of our peaceful Republic."

Duke Aaron Sandoval had no comment about specifics, but said, "Despite our recent interpersonal difficulties, I have a great deal of respect for the Prefect and what she has accomplished in this situation. She has rooted out a very real danger to our planets and our people, and for this I am truly grateful. We'll work closely with each other to prevent another incident of this magnitude from occurring again. It is my hope that we'll soon be able to return our focus to peacetime pursuits."

## Exarch Redburn Halts Trial of Grievance

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07/10/3132

GENEVA, TERRA—Today, Exarch Damien Redburn ended the ongoing tension between Prefect Kal Radick (Prefecture IV) and Legate Tara Campbell (Northwind), not with a clash of BattleMechs, but with the voice of reason. In response to what he perceived as a challenge to his authority recently, Prefect Radick directly challenged Countess Campbell to a “Trial of Grievance,” military contest of arms.

“Prefect Radick and Countess Campbell both understand that the stability of the Republic must always take precedence,” Exarch Redburn said in a brief statement to the press. “Personal conflicts should never be allowed to disrupt the rule of law and justice.”

This “personal conflict,” as Exarch Redburn described it, began with Kal Radick’s statement in front of an assembly of planetary leaders. In this statement, he implied that the Republic must someday give way to a return of the historic Star League. Countess Campbell took issue with this idea, and events escalated from there as press releases flew back and forth between Tikonov and Northwind. Prefect Radick challenged Legate Campbell to a Trial of Grievance, a Clan tradition by which injured parties settle their dispute in single combat.

“No matter what her stated intentions,” Kal Radick said in one of his interviews last week, “Legate Campbell has undermined my authority.” Throughout their verbal sparring match, Prefect Radick refused the Countess her noble title, always referring to her military office.

Countess Campbell’s greater decorum lasted until four days ago. “Prefect Radick voiced his own political view, and I voiced mine. That is what happened. But if he wishes to challenge our right to free speech in the Republic of the Sphere, I’ll be happy to meet him in Trial and show him what Highlander dedication and patriotism is all about.”

Kal Radick’s subsequent demand that she travel to him, on Tikonov, for such a match was refused.

“By his own traditions,” Countess Campbell noted, “the challenger is only allowed to set the terms of actual combat. Augmented, with BattleMechs, or unaugmented hand-to-hand with a weapon of his choosing. The challenged party sets the venue, and I prefer to bring Prefect Radick here to Northwind.” The local MechWarrior Academy Proving Grounds were to be set aside for any contest. “I think that future soldiers and officers of the Republic would benefit from such a display.”

Prefect Radick agreed. “The consequences of insubordination should always be swift and easily understood,” was his public reply. Countess Campbell’s following press release clarified her earlier statement, calling it a “display of apparent insecurity.”

The Trial of Grievance was set to go forward by the end of this week. Media requests to cover the Trial flooded government channels, including requests from corporate sponsors on Solaris VII, the Game World, which wanted to negotiate exclusive gambling rights to the event. Shortly thereafter, the office of the Exarch stepped in and negotiated a private end to the public dispute.

Neither Prefect Radick or Countess Campbell have issued statements concerning the aborted contest, leaving all press matters to Exarch Redburn’s staff. A confidential source within the Exarch’s staff paints a less-than-rosy picture of the situation.

“Prefect Radick and Tara Campbell both accepted a light dressing-down,” the source confirms. “No permanent marks will appear on their records, though. All they have to do now is stay quiet until it all blows over. That’s all.”

Solaris odds are running at three-to-one, against.

## **Campbell Announces Support for Rosse Military Budget Proposal**

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07/11/3132

Kev Rosse's call for increased military spending received an unexpected boost today when Legate Tara Campbell of Northwind added her voice to his. "Senator Rosse's call to upgrade the Republic's military is both wise and prudent. As the Senator stated, we should not be complacent in our hard-won peace, and the deployment of new military equipment will underline our commitment to the Republic and discourage 'adventurism' by our neighbors. We need to continue the ongoing upgrade program, ensuring that designs such as the M1 Marksman Tank and Mad Cat III are deployed where appropriate, replacing their older kin and increasing our ability to meet potential challenges."

The agreement between Rosse and Campbell surprised many, as the Legate has frequently criticized the Nova Cat Senator's hawkish policies. Before the formation of The Republic, Northwind was frequently the target of aggression and its people are skilled fighters. Indeed, the world's martial tradition dates back over a millennium to pre-spaceflight Terra via the Black Watch troops that served both Star Leagues so well, though Northwinders have more often sought to maintain peace than to take the battle to their enemies. They regard conflict as a last resort, but as Legate Campbell and her kin demonstrate, battle is not something they shirk when required.

Several commentators have called the aligned interests of Rosse and Campbell a "marriage of convenience," and one that will struggle to survive the political rigors ahead. "Though their interests are aligned superficially," said one, "their rationales are different. Rosse plans to fight a looming enemy, while Campbell seeks to defend the high ideals laid forth by Exarch Stone. One is looking for a fight, the other simply to retain an edge. I wouldn't imagine the partnership to last more than a few months."



## Earthquake Rocks New Kyoto, Ozawa

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07/11/3132

OZAWA—New Kyoto was left in ruins by a severe earthquake measuring magnitude 8.2 last night. The quake ripped apart most of downtown New Kyoto, where tens of thousands are still missing in the rubble of high-rise apartments.

The quake struck at 11:37 P.M., while many residents were sleeping. In the eastern half of the city, more than twenty square blocks have been reduced to rubble. In other parts of the city, gaping rifts remain in the streets and shattered foundations of buildings.

Government buildings were also leveled, and the fate of many planetary leaders and officials is unknown. Minister of Agriculture Seiki Kubota is the highest-ranking government official to have appeared after the collapse. Kubota was several thousand kilometers away inspecting farms when news of the quake reached him. As the highest-ranking leader currently available on Ozawa, Kubota has claimed emergency powers. He has placed the city directly under planetary jurisdiction and declared martial law over the entire province.

Many structures in outlying areas were also flattened by the tremor. Extensive damage has been reported as much as 200 kilometers away in neighboring Raiden City. Windows rattled and pipes burst in buildings nearly 500 kilometers away.

Rescuers have been at work all night in New Kyoto and its suburbs, as well as other Ozawan cities affected by the quake. Concern about aftershocks has limited most search attempts to aerial efforts, though some individuals are reported to have proceeded into the affected areas in 'Mechs and on foot looking for survivors.

For twenty years scientists have warned New Kyoto residents that a quake was due. Seismologist Petra Cosimov of the Ozawan Geological Survey Commission said, "We knew New Kyoto was built on a major fault line. Buildings there were constructed to high earthquake tolerances. But never in our wildest nightmares would we have predicted a quake of this magnitude. No one could have predicted this. It's horrible."

In an official announcement, Prefect Katana Tormark said, "This is a terrible tragedy for the citizens of New Kyoto. My sympathies, and the sympathies of The Republic, go out to families who have lost loved ones. The Prefecture is pleased by Minister Kubota's quick thinking, and we pledge any aid needed during this time of trial." Prefect Tormark has been off planet, resolving issues connected to the shutting down of a black-market 'Mech ring just beyond the borders of Prefecture III. She is expected back on Ozawa shortly. Representatives of the Prefecture are expected to survey the damage today or tomorrow.

A hotline has been set up for family members of quake victims. More information is available at the ComStar Disaster Resource Center. Officials ask that only family members call use hotline. Friends and other concerned citizens who want to donate or volunteer are asked to send food, blankets, and money to the Interstellar Red Cross. For more information, please contact your local chapter of the Interstellar Red Cross.

## Immigrant Citizenship Coalition Pushes Senate to Ease Citizenship Requirements

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07/11/3132

GENEVA, TERRA—Following the recent comments of Wolf Colonel Katrina Ward and ongoing demonstrations across the Republic, the Immigrant Citizenship Coalition (ICC) today called on the Senate to speed the process by which residents of the Republic are granted citizenship. The group's spokesman, Sebastian Myrna, made his request at the Senate Select Committee on Citizenship constituted at the behest of Prefect Kal Radick (Prefecture IV).

"As it stands," Myrna said, "the system for granting citizenship is biased toward warriors and the wealthy." According to the guidelines set forth by Devlin Stone's Military Materiel Redemption Program, individuals—usually MechWarriors—can turn in a 'Mech in exchange for citizenship, or a wealthy individual can claim Property of Merit by his ownership of significant areas of land or major corporate interests. In effect, such individuals gain instant citizenship by dint of their military history or wealth and assets. Residents of the Republic without such assets must do five years of service to the Republic to qualify for their citizenship. This period is reduced if both parents are citizens.

"This system is fine for the wealthy, and for individuals whose families have established citizenship over one or more generations—the service period is reduced. The rest of us," Myrna stated, "don't have such luxuries, so it appears that we have one rule for the rich and privileged, but another for the rest of us. Is this the egalitarian state Devlin Stone promised?"

"Those of us without wealth are willing to serve the Republic to earn citizenship," he continued. "But the inequalities of this system send a negative message to those who immigrate into the Republic, implying that they are less welcome than those born on Republic worlds, placing an extra hurdle in their path before they can gain acceptance. And what of those displaced by the Stone migrations [as a result of the Resettlement Act of 3082]? Their willingness to uproot themselves and relocate into often alien and hostile territories were acts of genuine patriotism and selflessness, but many Stone migrants and their descendants remain residents facing the same rigors as others to gain citizenship. Is this fair for those who have given so much to the Republic already?"

Myrna outlined the Immigrant Citizenship Coalition's three-point proposal for modifications to the present system. The ICC proposes:

- A three-year, rather than a five-year, period of service to the Republic.
- A grant of probationary citizenship halfway through service, including voting rights, with confirmation of status dependant on completion of the required term or the recommendation of a board of inquiry should outside forces such as illness or accident force withdrawal from government service. Crimes committed by the candidate any time during service would automatically negate any service already completed and disqualify any future applications.
- First choice of service assignments for Stone migrants and their descendants.

Myrna's proposals received a cool reception. "I understand—and even applaud—the ICC's motivations and the desire to promote fairness in the system," said Senator Lissa Ruchenko, "but the demands are too extreme. The proposed service period is too short to create a sense of obligation to and patriotism for the Republic that is only right and appropriate for citizenship. The concept of probationary citizenship is open to abuse. I can foresee a situation where some individuals might seek to exploit such status and perpetrate fraud to get around service requirements. The demand for early voting rights is simply unreasonable. I'm sure that the committee will give the matter careful thought, but I think the ICC's proposal as it stands is a non-starter."

## Tri-vid review: Revolution's Fire

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07/11/3132

There have been many documentaries and biographies of Devlin Stone's life – those aspects of it that are documented, at least – but all have been dry and humorless recitations of dates and facts. *Revolution's Fire* doesn't just break this mold, it shatters it, finally presenting the larger-than-life character in a format that does his life justice. *Revolution's Fire* is an epic movie, in the same vein as *Hero's Trial*, Ferris' flawed 29th century biopic of Aleksandr Kerensky. Like that film, it tells the story of the events that have shaped the modern universe while remaining an intensely personal story.

As with all tales of Stone's life, it begins on Kittery in Word of Blake reeducation camp RBMU 105, showing in harrowing detail the suffering imposed by the Blakist zealots that drove Stone (played with gritty intensity by Jackson Kieslowski) onward. The tale then moves on to Stone's first meeting with David Lear (Tudor Reese successfully playing against type with the appropriate gravity—this is a landmark performance), their escape from the camp, and the establishment of the Kittery prefecture. The battle scenes are some of the most intense ever committed to tri-vid, largely recreated from gun-camera footage from the actual battles. Audiences raised on the sanitized violence of the *Immortal Warrior* series or the *Joe Merc* show may find the scenes harrowing, but interviews with veterans of Stone's campaigns testify to the authenticity of the battle sequences. The last third of the vid takes a slower pace, detailing the political, economic and military aspects of the Republic's formation.

Even at three hours, *Revolution's Fire* struggles to cover every aspect of Stone's life but director Luc Samuels and writer Amandine Jeunet have skillfully woven their story around the most important elements. Historical purists may argue with the choices – for example, Stone's meeting with Victor Steiner-Davion and his wife gets only a brief nod while his confrontation with Sun-Tzu Liao gets a full fifteen minutes – but all serve to drive the story forward. Samuels admits that some of the events shown in the vid, such as the romance between Stone and Lin Murakami (the beguiling Nathalie Ito), are largely dramatic license based on little or no historical information. Though noticeable to students of Reformation history, these fictional elements serve to create a cohesive narrative that draws viewers in and keeps them absorbed for the entire movie.

Overall, *Revolution's Fire* is an enthralling, thrilling and moving vid that will appeal to a broad range of audiences. Highly recommended.

## **Bannson Universal Unlimited to Cut 15,000 Jobs**

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07/16/3132

Tantril, Ankaa—Less than two months after bringing DiNapoli Industries' 180,000 employees into his own fold, maverick tycoon Jacob Bannson is bidding almost ten percent of DiNapoli's family a not-so-fond farewell.

Bannson Universal Unlimited spokesman Rudolph Heisl announced early today that the company would be shutting down five DiNapoli divisions on two different worlds as a part of a cost-saving measure. "Mr. Bannson acquired DiNapoli because he believed then, as he believes now, that DiNapoli has a potential that has not yet been reached. Unfortunately, there exists in every organization some fat and gristle. The board is simply cutting some of that away, eliminating or re-focusing redundant departments so that the whole of the organization can grow." Heisl went on to list several Bannson Enterprises departments and offices that were likewise being restructured because of similar organizations within the former DiNapoli Industries.

That final bit of news was of little comfort to DiNapoli employees on Bharat and Yangtze.

"He doesn't care about us, or anyone else for that matter," says Dwight Warner, a 19-year veteran of DiNapoli who just received his pink slip. "He has the gall to call us 'fat' after we've worked our asses off to make DiNapoli the best company in the Republic? He says he worked his way up the ladder. Well, I say prove it! Show some humanity!"

Warner, and thousands of other DiNapoli veterans, are not only up in arms at Bannson's move to eliminate their divisions – all manufacturers supplying light machines and other mechanical devices to DiNapoli's heavy manufacturing divisions – but also at the less-than-generous severance packages. The average DiNapoli employee has far less than five years of service in, resulting in compensation that few would call adequate.

"BUU is one of the largest companies in the Inner Sphere, yet with the pittances they are doling out to the people they are abandoning, they should be jailed," remarked Brotherhood of Sphere Workers president Asher Dolnitz. "Even their relocation and retraining offers are ludicrous. How could anyone expect these men and women to accept such terms with dignity?"

Replied Heisl, "Our compensation packages are designed to encourage these people to find new positions, be it within Bannson or elsewhere, not to swell the unemployment rolls indefinitely."

No matter what former employees might have to say, the markets are definitely showing their continued support for Bannson, whose stocks have continued to rise for several weeks now.

Quoth Bannson, "I'm not out to be loved, and I'm certainly not out to run a shoddy business. I'm out to build the best Bannson that can be."

## Scientist Pierre Cormier made Knight of the Sphere

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07/16/3132

GENEVA, TERRA—Noted scientist Pierre Cormier was granted honorary knighthood yesterday by Exarch Damien Redburn. The ceremony on Terra honored Sir Cormier for his lifetime of scientific achievement in the fields of neurology and cryogenics.

The foundation of much of Sir Cormier's work was laid during his graduate days. At a relatively young age, Cormier isolated areas of the brain that responded poorly to cryonic treatment. He spent several years synthesizing inhibitors and chemical treatments to protect sensitive areas of the brain during cold sleep. For the last few years, Sir Cormier has worked with chemical and cryonics companies to make improved cold sleep treatments more commercially available throughout the Sphere.

Today, cold sleep is used in over a dozen applications including space travel accommodation for those who experience transit disorientation syndrome (TDS), long-term care of terminal disease patients, and violent prisoner transport. Experimental uses of cold sleep technologies include study of the live human brain and simpler storage of cloning tissue. Greater availability of cryogenic treatments and related technologies is estimated to save 4 billion lives across the Inner Sphere in the next five years alone.

In his comments on Cormier's work, Exarch Damien Redburn said, "Hippocrates, Salk, Crick, and Marsden are names that every medical student reveres, and rightly so. Today I am honored to add Sir Pierre Cormier's name to this exalted list of doctors and medical pioneers for his achievements in human health and welfare. Our generation and the generations to come thank you for your efforts, Sir Cormier. We pray that your ingenuity and humanity will continue in equal measure."

Cormier appeared emotionally moved after the knighting. He was joined by his wife and three children at the ceremony.

Sir Cormier joins the distinguished line of scientists and artists who have been made honorary knights within the Sphere for outstanding achievement, most recently including the knighting of Sir Eduard Bioucek for his work in music composition.

## **Duke Aaron Sandoval Concludes Diplomatic Tour**

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Returns to Tikonov in the wake of Borderless Security Conference  
AP-HPG News Services

07/18/3132

TIKOGRAD, TIKONOV—Duke Aaron Sandoval concluded his diplomatic tour and returned to Tikograd today following the close of Northwind's Borderless Security Conference. Sandoval's tour took him to Terra, where he announced the closing of significant technology agreements between Tikonov's Earthwerks Ltd. and several corporations on Prefecture III and Prefecture X worlds, including two on Terra, and to Northwind for the conference, where seventy-nine governors and legates from Prefectures II, III, IV, V, and X were also in attendance.

"I'm very pleased with the results of this tour," Sandoval said at the press conference held after he returned to his administrative offices in Tikograd. "Not only did this trip improve trade and business for Prefecture III's technology sector, it presented us with an opportunity to improve and broaden our security efforts. We have opened channels of communication between the intelligence agencies in five Prefectures. This might be the most important cross-galaxy work since the founding of the Republic."

In a flash poll taken on seven worlds in Prefecture III, including, Ankaa, Basalt, Mirach, Schedar, Sheraton, Tikonov, and Yangtze, Sandoval's approval rating has skyrocketed to 78%, a level unheard of since the earliest days of the Republic. Sandoval's appeal crosses several significant demographic sectors. This tour has lassoed him support from not only his usually-strong conservative base, but also from the technology sector, often a source of irritation to his old-school connections.

When asked if his work on the security conference in concert with Northwind Legate Tara Campbell might have a positive effect on the recent chilly relations between himself and Katana Tormark, Prefect of Prefecture III and Campbell's direct superior, Sandoval was sanguine. "Prefect Tormark has a loyal and effective officer in Legate Campbell, and I can't help but believe that her loyalty to Prefect Tormark is well-placed. Prefect Tormark and I agree to disagree on several issues, but we agree that our first priority is whatever's in the best interests of the Republic."

Lord Governor Sandoval will finish out the week tying up business at his administrative offices before taking a week's holiday at his family residence.

## Senate Debates Rosse Military Budget Proposal

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07/18/3132

GENEVA, TERRA—Today's Senate meeting in Geneva broke new ground for the Republic of the Sphere. For the first time in since its formation, the Senate debated measures that would increase rather than decrease the Republic's military spending. Kev Rosse, Senator for Prefecture III, was the bill's sponsor, calling for real world increases in military spending, allowing wide-ranging upgrades of the armed forces and the creation of several new units. Prominent figures across the Republic, including Prefect Kal Radick of Prefecture IV and Northwind's Legate Tara Campbell, publicly came out in support of the bill. The proposal received a mixed response from the chamber.

"While I acknowledge the desire and even the need to upgrade our military," said Senator Alycia Rousset of Prefecture VII who is also Duchess of Augustine, "I cannot in good faith vote for a measure that would increase the tax burden on our citizens and residents. I would suggest instead that the military fund its own upgrade by managing its resources better and taking steps to minimize the waste that is endemic in the military-industrial complex."

Senator Alice Syrmar, a long-time foe of Rosse, was less diplomatic and reiterated her opposition. "I will not pander to the militaristic fancies of a Clansman, particularly one who believes the powers-that-be grant him visions of the future." Her attacks on Rosse's spiritual beliefs drew a rebuke from the Exarch – her second in as many months – but many in the chamber appeared sympathetic with her opposition to an increase in military spending.

"Why should we waste money to strengthen our military when there is no credible threat?" asked Hermann Colgar of Vega.

Only Rosse spoke unequivocally in favor of the proposal. "Peace is not maintained by weakness," said the Senator from Prefecture III. "It is precisely because of the threats we cannot foresee that our armed services need to be reinforced. Do not forget that the greatest military disasters of the last few centuries came upon their victims unexpected: The Amaris coup, the Fourth Succession War, the Clan invasion, the Blakist Jihad. We have no greater enemy than complacency—the recent discovery of a black market BattleMech smuggling ring clearly illustrates this—and I would urge the chamber to think long and hard on the risks involved before denying this motion."

Rosse's speech won over enough of the attendees that the proposal wasn't summarily dismissed, but the vote fell short of a simple majority, let alone the two-thirds required to enact the proposal as a Senate Special Financial Directive in this fiscal year.

## Travel Profile: The Romance of Northwind

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07/18/3132

Situated only 35 light years from Terra, Northwind has long been stop-off point for travelers, but in recent years the capital of Prefecture IV has become a tourist destination in its own right. The world's Scots-Irish heritage has survived the Succession Wars, the Blake Jihad and the Reformation and has become a major factor in the tourist boom.

The capital city of Tara is the principal destination of visitors, its buildings a mix of the old—some, like the Hall of the Clans, date back to the 22nd century—and the new, like the thirty-year-old Prefectural Assembly. The Montgomery Institute is without doubt the prefecture's pre-eminent modern art gallery, containing noted works by McRae, Ito and Starling. The luxuriant grounds surrounding the Institute are a popular venue for walks and picnics; the paths winding through the arboretum are a favored venue of young couples. The centrally located Highland Royal Hotel in the heart of Tara is the ideal base for exploring the city, with 500 well-appointed rooms, the well-regarded Stuart Restaurant and courtesy shuttles to major sites in the city and the spaceport.

Equally popular are the rolling heather moorlands of Strathconnor, at the heart of the New Lanark continent, whose late-summer blooms transform the black and green hills into a riot of purples and yellows. The Tilman Gorge and the Willesdon Falls are the best-known natural features, each attracting tens of thousands of visitors each year particularly in the high summer. The Dunmore Hotel at Willesdon provides superb views over the falls, and organizes walks and pony treks around the area, including an indispensable stop at the Star League fortifications of "the castle," now classified as a historic monument. The Dunmore also features a popular health spa for those preferring more sedate vacations.

The best-kept secret on Northwind is the Argyle Islands, the windswept and desolate—but fiercely beautiful—archipelago surrounding Halidon. Though lacking in the technological or cultural amenities of other destinations, the Argyles are ideal for those desiring to escape the modern world and experience a lifestyle that has remained nearly unchanged for a millennium. Sailing and diving are popular pastimes, with the Loch Kinnis holiday village a basic but comfortable venue with a twice-daily shuttle to Halidon Port. Loch Kinnis is particularly suitable for those seeking to add an adventure element to their vacation, but is not appropriate for children under 12.



## An Interview with Senator Kev Rosse

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07/23/3132

His recent calls for rearmament have made Galaxy Commander Kev Rosse, Senator of Prefecture III, one of the best-known figures in the Republic of the Sphere. Standing 193 cm tall and weighing 70 kilos, Rosse's physical presence lives up to his media image, yet surprisingly little is known of the man himself. We are therefore grateful that the Senator has taken time out of his schedule to answer a number of questions.

**Q:** You were raised according to Clan traditions. How have you adapted to life in the Republic?

**Rosse:** I was born 13 years after the founding of The Republic, so I have never known life without it. As we all know, however, there were those outside of The Republic who were not content allow us the peaceful co-existence that we all sought, and even while I was in my sibko I knew war.

**Q:** So you were inured to battle from an early age?

**Rosse:** All members of the warrior caste undergo martial training, though the Nova Cat's outlook has changed over the years.

**Q:** How so?

**Rosse:** The Clan regimen insulated us from the horrors of all-out war. The last century has taught us the true nature of such conflicts and to avoid them where possible.

**Q:** You're hardly a pacifist though, are you?

**Rosse:** No, far from it. The military has a vital task to play in the defense our society, a role that has declined since the Reformation.

**Q:** Hence your recent call for rearmament.

**Rosse:** Rearmament is perhaps too strong a word, but yes, I believe the Republic should bolster its military.

**Q:** Given that The Republic is not at war, what's your reasoning?

**Rosse:** War is not the sole prerogative of the military; it has a preventative role as well, discouraging others from exploiting what they might consider weakness. If we do not take action, the future of the Republic will be grave.

**Q:** You know of a threat to the Republic?

**Rosse:** Not in the way you mean. My vision quests have, however, shown me the stark future we face if we do not act.

**Q:** A number of people have dismissed your visions as flights of fancy. How do you react to such individuals?

**Rosse:** Everyone has an individual path to enlightenment. I must take the visions that come during a vision quest seriously, and I must act upon them in a way befitting their gravity. I do not force my beliefs on others, though I will explain them to those who ask. People are free to think what they will.

**Q:** Some of your fellow Senators derided the proposal, even going so far as to attack your beliefs.

**Rosse:** Matters in the Senate chamber occasionally become ... heated.

**Q:** Senator Alice Syrmar was reprimanded, was she not? Do you think that was appropriate?

**Rosse:** A code of behavior governs the Senate. It is a forum for political discussion, not one for making personal attacks. The Republic is based on equality and freedom. Deriding someone for his spiritual beliefs, cultural heritage or ethnicity contravenes those rules, and the Exarch used his prerogative as leader of the chamber to reprimand the Senator.

**Q:** Do you think that had an adverse affect on your proposal?

**Rosse:** Many Senators dislike the idea of expanding the military, and my arguments failed to convince sufficient numbers.

**Q:** Will you re-propose?

**Rosse:** If a measure receives more than 25% of the votes, Chambers rules allow a Senator to reintroduce it to the Senate, but not within the following two months. Given the number of votes my motion earned, I will certainly bring up the matter again.

**Q:** And you need a two-thirds majority to pass the measure?

**Rosse:** Only to have the proposal enacted immediately. A simple majority will allow its inclusion in the budget for fiscal '33.

**Q:** And do you think that's likely?

**Rosse:** I believe people will see the wisdom of this proposal.

**Q:** Senator Rosse, thank you for your time.

**Rosse:** Thank you

## Unions Unite in Protest Over Job Cuts

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07/23/3132

TANTRIL, ANKAA—Coming shortly after Bannson Enterprises' announcement that it would be closing five former DiNapoli Industries divisions on Bharat and Yangtze, eight major Republic unions banded together today to deliver a message of their own to Jacob Bannson. That message: "The working man will no longer be your doormat."

Mere hours after learning that Bannson would be closing five DiNapoli divisions, the leaders of the Federated Laborers Organization (FLO) and the Brotherhood of Sphere Workers, unions representing more than 90 percent of the 15,000 laid-off DiNapoli employees, began to coordinate their efforts against DiNapoli. Within a day, though, their burgeoning grassroots campaign against tycoon Jacob Bannson grew into something much larger.

"We had long known that Jacob Bannson, contrary to what his publicists want us to think, is the enemy of the working man," said FLO spokesman Muhammad Treibek. "The messages we received from union leaders throughout the Republic prove that unequivocally."

A few days were all that labor organizers needed to prepare their strategy. Beginning yesterday, the eight allied unions, representing tens of thousands of workers, issued statements condemning Bannson's move and demanding he reinstate those jobs or else face the "fury of [their] combined strength."

For his part, Bannson seemed unworried during a press conference today. "My responsibility is to my stockholders and to the Republic as a whole. Excellence is our primary mission. No one can make us compromise that mission because of illegal threats." Bannson later said, "The unions want to focus on the fact that we eliminated jobs, but what they don't want to admit is that those divisions were unprofitable and that we are doing everything we reasonably can to find these loyal employees new positions."

Though Bannson stock took a sharp hit following the unions' releases, it has steadily climbed back up since Bannson's press conference.

## JumpShip Farstar Disappears En Route to Combine

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07/25/3132

SADALBARI—In a press conference today, the Republic Transport and Safety Bureau (RTSB) reported that StarCross Starlines has officially listed the Farstar, a Starlord-class JumpShip, as missing, with as many as 400 passengers and crew—notably Senator Caressa Tarn-Manoj of Acamar (Prefecture V) and Hans Halruar, power forward for the all-Terra soccer team, the Atlantics—and several million C-bills in cargo. The merchant vessel makes regular jumps between Prefectures and also has routes into both the Draconis Combine and the Federated Suns.

As per its filed jump path, the Farstar departed Ozawa and made a scheduled stop at Sadalbari, where it picked up the Joshua, a Monarch-class passenger DropShip. Thus fully laden, it then was scheduled to jump from Sadalbari to Matar in the Combine. A week after the vessel was scheduled to appear in the Matar system, StarCross contacted the RTSB.

Emily Morgan of Sadalbari said her husband Randy, 37, was on the Joshua on business for his father's art gallery, Morgan Friar, Ltd. Mrs. Morgan was visibly shaken after the announcement. "Randy's made this transit twice before and there's never been any trouble. I can't believe it," she said. "Where could they be?"

According to the manifests transmitted to StarCross headquarters before it departed Sadalbari, in addition to the Joshua, the Farstar carried three Buccaneer-class and two Mammoth-class cargo DropShips. Our investigation, however, has uncovered a discrepancy in that report. According to Captain Russell Barton of the Hasek, a Merchant-class JumpShip that was in-system when the Farstar departed, the Farstar was carrying only a single Mammoth DropShip, though the Farstar carried its full compliment of six DropShips. Captain Barton reported that he could not determine what class of DropShip the other ship was, but it was not a Mammoth.

When asked about this discrepancy in the press conference, RTSB spokesman Erin McDonough dismissed the question out of hand, stating the captain of the Hasek was simply too far removed from the Farstar to make it out clearly.

If the Farstar has met with tragedy, it would be the first such vessel lost in the Republic since the Jade Pillars in 3103; the RTSB was formed in part because of that disaster.

When asked what they felt the most likely scenario was, McDonough said, "It's still too early to tell. Sadly, we fear the worst." Because every populated planet within a thirty-light year radius of the Farstar's jump capability had already been contacted, with no sign of the missing JumpShip, the RTSB "would have to move forward under the assumption that the vessel had suffered a catastrophic mid jump-drive failure."

The Kearny-Fuchida jump drives that make interstellar travel possible can malfunction, though this usually occurs right before or right after a jump, as the drive powers up or is powering down. Such occurrences are rare. The most common drive malfunction is helium seal failure. Each drive is suspended in a tube of liquid helium. If the seals blow out, the vessel is completely stranded. Nevertheless, if a JumpShip drive fails mid-jump—as was the case with the Jade Pillars—the JumpShip is completely destroyed, with all lives lost and little wreckage left behind. Whether or not this was, in fact, the fate of the Farstar has yet to be determined.

When asked to comment on the disappearance of the Farstar, Captain Barton said, "The folding of space is a tricky thing. A malfunction is a possibility, but until you've got evidence, I'm not willing to guess one way or another."

McDonough reiterated that regardless of initial impressions, every effort would be expended to track down the vessel as quickly as possible.

## **Knight-Errant Marcus Randall made Knight of the Sphere**

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07/25/3132

GENEVA, TERRA— Yesterday in a private ceremony in Geneva, Knight-Errant Marcus Randall was raised as a full Knight of the Sphere. By the Exarch's decree, Randall was promoted with full honors, succeeding Knight Siyanda Assanti, recently killed in action. Born in the city of New Taos on Markab in 3104, Marcus was the first of three children born to Helena and Charles Randall. Displaying an early aptitude for combat, Randall joined the military at age 18 and quickly advanced through the ranks, earning high marks in infantry, vehicle, and 'Mech combat.

Randall's military career brightened when he was appointed to Markab Special Forces duty in 3126, operating one of the military's few remaining BattleMechs in defense and anti-terror scenarios around the globe. During Special Forces duty, Randall was decorated seven times, earning the Scarab of Honor, Markab's highest military award for bravery and service beyond the call of duty. According to the record, Randall ejected from his 'Mech in combat, risking dispossession to organize and lead an infantry rush that resulted in the capture of two illegally modified IndustrialMechs operated by anti-government terror forces.

At age 24, Randall received commendation and was promoted to Knight Errant, representing Markab in the Knights of the Sphere. Much of his record is classified during this period, but Randall continued to receive commendations for his service. Four years later—among the shortest times ever for promotion to Knight— Paladin Gelaina Kelso sponsored Marcus Randall for Knighthood for his exemplary service to the Republic and courage under fire.

A public reception celebrating Sir Randall's new position will be held later today. Family members, government officials including the senator from Markab, and several knights currently in Geneva are expected to attend.

## The Colossi of New Rhodes

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07/25/3132

"Rocks," he said. "We're going to see rocks?"

My husband, while an experienced traveler, doesn't seem to get out much. Headed to New Rhodes III to see the famed Colossi, he couldn't imagine a thing to do. "I can look at rocks here," he said. "What is there to do there?"

A fair bit, as it turns out.

The Colossi of New Rhodes III have been wonderland of geological study since the formations were discovered in 2259. For much of its inhabited life, the Colossi were scientific oddities: huge rock formations in a line across most of a continent, shaped like abstract art splashed with colors that you'd swear don't belong on rocks.

You might even be right. Our guide, Alphonse Longo, who holds two degrees in geology, informed us that much of the substance of the Colossi arrived when meteors from outside the galaxy impacted the planet roughly 2 million years ago. The meteors brought chemicals and minerals completely foreign to New Rhodes III. The Colossi were formed after millennia of wind erosion mixed and revealed the minerals trapped in the ground.

For most of its 900-year human habitation, New Rhodes III has been home to families of nomads and a small but voracious scientific community. The recent boom of scientific tourism, however, has suddenly made New Rhodes III one of the Republic's most popular and lively destinations.

The vacation begins at the landing pad, with a 5-piece band playing traditional New Rhodesian folk music. A quick carriage ride later, we arrived at our hotel, the Broken Rock Cottages (C169 per night), a series of cottages carved out of boulders near the Broken Rock formation.

By day, guides lead half- and full-day expeditions to see the Colossi from different altitudes and angles. There are about 350 formations in the Colossi chain, in every color you can imagine: neon greens, vivid blues, and yellows that would shame a canary. You'd need to stay here two weeks to even see them all, unless you toured by helicopter. Don't do that. Instead, pick an area and spend some time there. The rocks change colors in different light, and subtle gradations are revealed at different altitudes. We found it much better to get to know one area in depth, and attend the geological lecture-lunch offered every day. Studying one set of formations helped us understand the entire chain better than a scattershot tour might have done.

At night, festivals occur every weekend from February to July, locally known as the cool season (in the hot season, temperatures hover around 40 degrees Celsius). Under double moons, the Colossi light up with a starkness you couldn't find by day. We went during the New Flowers festival, traditionally the time of year when the temperature cools enough for flowers to bud. Music and revelry goes on until daybreak. Learning traditional New Rhodesian dances is practically a requirement for visitors. My husband, reluctant to say the least, was nearly dragged by three locals to the fire to learn the steps. But 30 minutes later, he was smiling and hoofing it with everyone else.

Watching my husband dance around the fire under the looming Firebird formation, lit up to reveal its shocking orange color, I thought, Yeah. We're just here to see rocks.

## **Redburn Makes Cautious Statements About Military Budget Proposals**

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07/30/3132

GENEVA, TERRA—Recent weeks have seen a flurry of pronouncements and statements on military matters but the Exarch has, until now, refrained from commenting on the matter. With emotions running high in the Senate and a promise from Senator Kev Rosse to revive the proposal at his earliest opportunity, last night Exarch Redburn finally made direct reference to the matter in an effort to calm the chamber. His remarks were frequently interrupted by applause from different factions in the room.

"The Republic was born from warfare, the horror and bloodshed of the Jihad," Exarch Redburn said, "and we must be ever-vigilant to avoid a repetition of that nightmare. We cannot, however, allow ourselves to return to the mindset of the Succession Wars, where violence was an accepted mechanism for settling disputes. That mentality condemned the Inner Sphere to centuries of warfare.

"It was Von Clausewitz who stated 'war is a continuation of politics by other means,'" he continued. "It shouldn't be, and the Republic's efforts to eliminate private arms have gone a long way toward realizing Devlin Stone's dream of lasting peace. I appreciate the argument for modernizing our military—but I can see no merit in expanding the size of our armed forces. Our neighbors have spent centuries at war with each other and only our commitment to peace prevents them from seeing the Republic as a threat. An expansion of our armed forces would, most assuredly, be seen as provocative even by those we call allies, while those with whom our relations are less good," a reference to the recent political wrangling with the Capellan Confederation, "might regard such a move as a move toward war.

"In seeking to avoid war, we do not want to provoke one. We cannot afford to allow alarmist calls to cloud our judgment. Indeed, those making such pronouncements should exercise restraint and reflect on their actions. Are their short-term private agendas worth the risk of triggering yet more wars in the Inner Sphere? We should lead by example, the senate an example to the people, and the Republic a guide to the Inner Sphere."

At this point, the Exarch paused. His final statement on the matter followed. "I will not allow this body, august though it may be, to squander all we have worked for."

This statement was the first time in the Republic's history that the Exarch has threatened to use his power of veto over the Senate. Neither the Exarch nor members of the senate have been available for comment.

## **Sandoval Sends Tomorrow Technology Bill to Prefectural Senate**

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07/30/3132

TIKOGRAĐ, TIKONOV—In an ongoing push to achieve and sustain an edge in the technology sector, Lord Governor Aaron Sandoval today proposed a massive new program of education grants and school subsidies for agricultural worlds in Prefecture IV.

"Earlier this year we focused our attentions on immediate trade and technology deals," Sandoval said, referring to his recently completed trip to Terra, where he announced the establishment of new business relationships. "Now we need to make a commitment to supporting the future that such deals will create. To this end, I'm sending a proposal to the Prefectural Senate today providing funds and a framework for educational guidelines and funding to benefit those worlds most in need of support for innovation and technological growth."

Sources in Sandoval's Education Cabinet say that the proposal, which Sandoval is calling his Tomorrow Technology bill, is the most far-reaching high-tech education proposal ever seen in Prefecture IV. Given that this region's most influential politicians have always been concentrated on technology, the implications of such a statement are huge.

"As part of this project, we're granting forward-thinking industry special tax breaks to supply know-how and internship programs for schools in their districts, and we're making education a more attractive career for technical experts looking to share their expertise," Sandoval said.

"We're very excited, of course," said Suzanne Bhadaue, Director of the Ingress Education Network. Ingress, mainly an agricultural world, would benefit immediately from this bill if it passes. "With world-over academic averages lower than 70 percent of the other worlds in Prefecture IV," said Bhadaue, "such support is indispensable to Ingress' future."

A science professor at the University of Mirach, speaking on condition of anonymity, expressed doubts about the program. "It just sounds too good to be true. I've seen promises like this before, so I'll believe it when I see it."

There was criticism from other quarters as well. Milton Maxwell, Superintendent of Schools in the Balestone province of Ronel where mining is the main regional industry, said, "This bill is a house of cards and its limited scope only pushes the problem from one world to another. No planet can be defined by its overriding industry, and no planet's needs can be easily provided for by one solution. I'd say the same if this bill were exclusively for mining planets, though God knows we could use the help."

Insiders say that they expect the debate on the Tomorrow Technology bill to last for at least two months.



## Communication Blackout Cripples Liao

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ComStar Primus Considers Policy Changes

08/01/3132

LIAO—The hyper-pulse generator (HPG) communications hub station on Liao (capitol of Prefecture V) shut down on Monday, leaving residents across the planet in a communications blackout for more than 3 days. Republic officials estimate business losses in the trillions.

ComStar acolytes worked around the clock to repair the station. According to Rayburne Belzer, Chief Engineer of the Liao station, the blackout was an “unfortunate accident.” Belzer would not comment on the reason for the station’s failure, though eyewitnesses report that a column of smoke rose from the station compound for several hours Monday morning. Meanwhile, nearby Velden Memorial Hospital reported three ComStar acolytes treated for burns and seven treated for smoke inhalation.

The economy took a sizeable dip as offworld communications halted during the three-day blackout. Nearby systems suffered under the load of redirected transmissions from the high-capacity hub on Liao. Communication node sites such as the one on Genoa were swamped with data traffic during the blackout, causing noticeable information delays in systems near Liao.

The entire HPG network consists of transmit and receive stations on most inhabited worlds. Stations are classified as either “A” or “B.” Class A stations, such as the one on Liao, are the main hubs of the network. Class B stations are generally located on less populous worlds, and act as the nodes of the system.

Based on the same principles that allow JumpShips to instantly travel between stars, a hyper-pulse generator transmits signals across a distance of up to fifty light-years. Each station normally transmits on a set schedule. Messages are processed serially and placed in a queue until they can be transmitted. Each station transmits all the messages it has been paid to send to all other stations within its range. Those stations then add their own messages to the batch and pass them on to the next stations in line and so on, until the messages reach their final destination. Though sending thousands of copies of the same message around the galaxy may appear inefficient, it is the most efficient use of ComStar’s resources and provides back-up copies of messages in the event of a shutdown or information loss.

Communications failures have occurred before, but never to this extent. The religious zeal acolytes typically bring to their work and mandatory redundancy on every system has provided uninterrupted service since Primus Dwight Kurstin’s brief term of service in 2901 when insects chewed through critical wiring at a class B station on Skondia.

“We’ve never seen this kind of malfunction before,” said Belzer. “We are all duly chastened at the failure in our duty to preserve Star League technology and provide humanity with open communication. My staff and I will be doing penance until Primus Koenigs-Cober arrives to survey the facility and pronounce atonement.”

Primus Lisa Koenigs-Cober is expected to arrive within the next few weeks to inspect the situation. Primus Koenigs-Cober assured business leaders who lost business during the blackout would receive reparations for their losses.

Meriwa Agdeppa, Communications Aide to the Exarch has also spoken with the Primus. Agdeppa is reportedly concerned about the Republic’s communications infrastructure should something like this happen again, and there has been talk of Republic regulation of HPG system.

Primus Koenigs-Cober has been quite adamant about ComStar’s autonomy, and despite this incident, remains staunch. Speaking from her DropShip, she said, “This is our sacred charge. Though we respect the Exarch’s wishes, Liao’s generator is operable again and communications have returned to normal. The shutdown was regrettable, but an isolated incident. It will not happen again.”

The Primus added, however, that this crisis pointed up weaknesses in the system’s method of operation that could withstand review and revision. A change in policy regarding the method for backing up messages and information could be in place as soon as next week. “News organizations across the Inner Sphere regularly back up the information they transmit via the HPG network in their own facilities in the event of disasters or transmission trouble,” the Primus said. “There may be lessons to be learned from these institutions.”

An official in the Lord Governor’s office on Liao commented, on condition of anonymity, that “ComStar’s autonomy maintains a monopoly on communications that has long been the subject of debate in government backrooms and corporate boardrooms, and this incident shines a pretty bright light on the situation. It’s ridiculous—we’re held hostage by ComStar’s religious zealots, the same people responsible for the Word of Blake. Stone may have pardoned them later but it’s hard to forget who’s who in all this. Maybe this business will give the government a wake-up call.”

## "For Clan and Honor" Milks Soap Opera Dry

--Garret Deloray, ComStar FilmNews Today

08/01/3132

Like so many of the recent Clan-flavored tri-vids popping up in the media, "For Clan and Honor" is just another remake of Romeo and Juliet. Sure, there's no shortage of honorable motives and unstoppable MechWarriors duking it out on the battlefield, but this film is just another space opera writ large and painted in the faded colors of lost glory days. Again I ask: Why the sudden resurgence of interest in the Clans? Furthermore, why bother with a script as contrived and performances as wooden as these?

The quick version (spoiler warning): "For Clan and Honor" is the first installment of a Clan Jade Falcon family saga set on some unnamed Republic world--seems that the director, good old manipulative Joe Bruckson, decided not to check the directories to see where Jade Falcon is living these days. Anyway, this tri-vid is the story of a young freebirth factory worker (rather shallowly played by the otherwise delightful Ann Ralston of "Slipping Away" fame) who fights tradition in order to marry for love rather than following the genetic plan laid before her on her day of majority.

The man she loves, who just happens to be a truebirth MechWarrior (played by action-star Placard Johannsen, who seems to get his lines via earpiece), somehow falls in love with her at a 'Mech christening ceremony. Did the Clans really have such ceremonies? I guess it's possible, though unlikely in the manner depicted by Bruckson. So the star-crossed lovers decide to run away to another world where the Jade Falcons aren't cohabitating with the Republic. Of course, Johannsen's superior (old character-actor Rick Azura in the only performance worth watching) catches on.

So when the two young lovers pack their bags and make a run for the local starport one night, Azura and Ralston's parents (actual birth parents) stop them at the gate of Johannsen's bunkhouse. Meanwhile, Johannsen's father (oh, did I mention that he's a genetic descendent of Aidan Pryde, himself?) learns that his genetically engineered son is about to foul their bloodline with freebirth genes, and vows to end the union before it begins.

Through coincidence and directorial intrusion, the parents find one another and engage in a duel. Naturally, Johannsen's father kills Ralston's dad, but her mom whisks her away before the man can kill Ralston, too. Johannsen thinks his lover is dead by his father's hand, so in a fit of self-destructiveness, he signs on to a 'Mech unit shipping out to do battle against some rogue Clan unit, vowing to take the honorable route to reunion with his lost love. Oh, and in a scene designed to put a stake in your heart, his father forces him to mate with a genetically perfect MechWarrior (former porn star Akitta in an appropriately stiff turn) before he can pilot a 'Mech.

The tri-vid ends there, with an image of the young man shipping out, a tear in his eye as the ship rises toward possible death, then a quick cut to a similar image of a creaky old dropship lifting Ralston and her mom into the sky, as well.

Such tear-jerkers may be the stuff of which gross proceeds are made, but they're certainly not destined to make a director's artistic reputation. Bruckson's success with features like "Tomorrow's Promises" and "Terran Horizon" were at their best when the director used a light touch and an engaging script. With "For Clan and Honor," he's used a heavy hand to milk the soap opera genre dry.

## Senate Prepares for Summer Recess

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08/01/3132

GENEVA, TERRA—After a grueling session of heated debate over increased military spending, the Senate is winding down toward the summer recess. Many senators claim a feeling of relief to be escaping the intense atmosphere of the Senate chambers, but tempers still flare and emotions run high.

Some senators have begun making vacation plans. "I'm looking forward to spending some time fishing at my secret pond on Cylene," joked Senator Edgar Malawi of Prefecture III. Other senators also talk of reuniting with family on their home worlds.

Senator Kev Rosse of Prefecture III is less jovial. "The defense budget proposal was defeated, but we're still hoping to convince enough senators to give it another look next term. In the meantime, we still have a job to do," he said. Rosse drafted the proposal, and has been a strong proponent throughout the debate.

Senator Alycia Rousset of Prefecture VII, one of the leaders of the proposal's opponents, remains similarly focused. "It's a shame some senators don't feel comfortable that their peers can exercise good judgment. For now, Republic citizens can rest assured that the Senate continues to represent their wishes."

As senators return to their home Prefectures, many will face concerned constituencies.

"Next stop is a meeting with the Legate and Governor on Corridan IV to reassure them that their civil funding won't be cut next fiscal year by the hawks," said Senator Alice Syrmar of Prefecture IX.

Many senators will only quickly debrief with political leaders in their home Prefectures, however. As Colin Freward of Prefecture VIII said, "It's been as ugly in here as it has on any battlefield. Most of us are just ready for the R&R."

## The Color Falls of Mallory's World

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– James Yoshimora, Republic News

08/01/3132

Residents refer to them as “color falls.” Physicists call it aurora borealis. Visitors describe it as “stunning” and “beautiful.”

Mallory's World is known to many as the breadbasket of Prefecture III, and certainly offers travelers many unique opportunities for sight-seeing. Its historic locations and Succession Wars battlefields, including the canyon where Federated Suns Prince Ian Davion died in 3013, offer the history buff a wealth of destinations. But for even the casual traveler, the highlight of a visit to Mallory's World is the incredible light show that happens on an almost nightly basis.

Starting shortly after sunset and extending all the way to the presunrise hours, people all over Mallory's World view extraordinary light shows in the evening sky. These light shows encompass all the colors of the spectrum and are often so bright that streetlights are not necessary. In fact, because of the brilliance of these displays, residents commonly close their curtains at night rather than during the day.

A number of common solar phenomena power these spectral pageants every night, though their intensity comes solely from the rare combination of these phenomena. Astronomers recognized centuries ago that Mallory's World possesses a strong magnetic field. That alone, coupled with the system's high content of gasses and space dust, produces a visible “ring field” around the planet that seems to rise and fall every evening. That isn't even the half of it, though.

The system's sun is a powerful, hot and, in many respects, unstable star. Storms and solar flares constantly erupt on the star's surface, expelling tremendous geysers of charged particles and gasses into the system. The atmospheric effects on Mallory's World, when the planet's orbit brings the world into the paths of these solar flares, are simply incredible.

While the effects are visible from all over the planet, sometimes even during the day, there are a number of spots where the auroral light shows are particularly striking. Perhaps best known is Craggen's Peak, a mountaintop within the Grand Fenster Range, yet there are several better spots. Natives to the world constantly rate the Semapan Islands as tops, especially with their warm weather and active volcanoes.

True aurora gazers, however, make the trek to Mount Rendell. From there, during the day they can see one of the planet's most scenic mountain ranges, covered in green and white. At night, the rainbow birds take to the skies and seem to dance within the clouds of light, adding their own shimmering colors to the mesmerizing prism in the skies.

## Clan Wolf Declines ICC Bid for Alliance

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08/06/3132

GENEVA, TERRA--As part of a continuing bid to reduce Republic citizenship requirements, the Immigrant Citizenship Coalition (ICC) formally proposed an alliance with Clan Wolf in an open letter today. In the letter, ICC Spokesman Sebastian Myrna said that "the political and moral strength of our cause" combined with the "honor and power of Clan Wolf" could create a dynamic new force to be reckoned with in the Republic Senate and on the streets of its many worlds.

"Our combined strength could not be ignored by Republic bureaucrats," Myrna said, "who continue to build the Republic on the backs of our exploited non-citizen members and the work of unacknowledged generations. Together, we can achieve our goals. Apart, they think of us as disorganized rabble."

Both the ICC and Clan Wolf have publicly argued against Republic citizenship requirements for more than five years. Clan Wolf representatives, recently and most notably Star Captain Katrina Ward, have accused the Republic of treating their warriors as "second-class citizens," and has demanded reparations while the ICC has proposed a controversial set of modifications to the current system.

Despite similar goals, Wolf representatives seemed unwilling to ally themselves with ICC reformers. After brief discussion by Clan leaders, Khan Seth Ward of Clan Wolf issued a response to the ICC letter. In the response, Ward said, "Some members of Clan Wolf feel very deeply a betrayal of trust by the policies of citizenship instituted by Devlin Stone. Internally, Clan Wolf takes the matter very seriously as we work toward a resolution. However, this is an internal Clan matter. Until we reach resolution, no member of Clan Wolf is anything less than a fully loyal member of the Republic, as befits an honorable Clan. If Clan Wolf concluded that the Republic had treated us unfairly, we would not be interested in an alliance to reduce an unfair system to a less unfair system. We would accept nothing less than the full equality espoused by the Republic charter."

Galaxy Commander Kal Radick, Prefect of Prefecture IV, was equally dismissive of the ICC's alliance proposal. "I think the standards are clear," Radick said. "The Republic has too much rhetoric as it is. We don't need to be clogging channels with more squabbles." Radick was included in the Clan Wolf discussion and had no comment on Khan Ward's statement.

Myrna expressed disappointment at Clan Wolf's refusal. "Certainly both our cases are weakened by our separation. The Republic will continue to abuse its position if no one stands against it. The ICC will continue to work for fairer citizenship rules in the meantime, and look for allies where we can find them."

## DropShip Carrying Four BattleMechs Hijacked

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08/06/3132

SHINONOI--Two days ago the DropShip Mathis was hijacked en route to a Republic armory on Dabih. The Mathis was carrying four BattleMechs at the time. The hijacking was reported when the 15 crewmembers of the stolen DropShip were found drifting in space in the Shinonoi system (Prefecture II) in two escape pods.

The crew of the Mathis, a DropShip owned by Harambe Manufacturing, is being treated for injuries and mild dehydration sustained during their 36-hour ordeal. All are listed in stable condition and two have been released from the hospital. Gareth Hackard, a systems engineer traveling with the shipment, was released earlier today. Hackard reported that he saw little of his attackers, but they were organized and efficient. "We don't know how they got on board," Hackard said. "Those of us below assumed that we had left the JumpShip in the Dabih system. We were very surprised to find out we were in Shinonoi. They moved around the ship efficiently, and immobilized us in the 'Mech hangar with riot foam and some kind of knock-out gas. When I woke up they had locked us in an escape pod. Some of the crew had been beaten very badly."

No one has claimed responsibility for the hijacking, and authorities have declined to comment or speculate on potential suspects. The current whereabouts of the Harambe DropShip and the 'Mechs aboard are unknown. Harambe Manufacturing is not a familiar name to many outside the 'Mech production industry, but is well known in the personal transport vehicle industry. Three years ago, Harambe began to branch out into 'Mech production, but industry analysts say they were unprepared for the increased competition of the 'Mech production field.

Now, what was once a thriving manufacturing company has posted losses for six consecutive quarters. Harambe was counting on its fledgling 'Mech production facilities to pull the company out its slump. Although insurance will cover some of the monetary losses, Harambe will likely file for bankruptcy as a result of the hijacking, and might face legal challenges from families of the crew.

Jacob Bannson, owner and CEO of Bannson Industries, expressed disappointment at the news. "This is a terrible blow not just to Harambe, but against the entire Republic. Four BattleMechs is a sword hanging over any of the less-protected planets in the Republic. Something must be done." In response to the news, Bannson announced that the recently-acquired DiNapoli Industries would be redirected for BattleMech manufacturing. Bannson further revealed that he was in negotiation with Republic military officials to fulfill the contract on behalf Harambe.

"The defense of the Republic is paramount," Bannson said. "We must do whatever we can to provide for the common defense against potential aggression, whether from these lost 'Mechs, or future dangers." Harambe CEO, Okolo Harambe, was unavailable for comment.

## **A MESSAGE FROM TOWNE CHIEF SACRIST**

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08/14/3132

Hello, I'm Giovan Benetti, general manager and chief sacrist of the Towne ComStar relay station. By now it is clear that something has gone terribly wrong with ComStar's hyper pulse generator (HPG) newsfeed. Briefly, last week, the HPG signal became garbled. Soon after, communications from all other HPG relay stations ceased.

Though our acolytes have stabilized and reconfigured communications equipment to broadcast directly from our Towne station, we do not have any new information. Engineers from our relay station are currently traveling by DropShip to the HPG hub station on Ozawa in an attempt to learn more. The situation with ComStar communications has been distressing to many, not least of all the dozens of clerical engineers on Towne who consider it our sacred duty to preserve Star League technology and open communication for all humanity.

Therefore, in an attempt to keep communication lines as open as possible, in their wisdom, Towne elders have chosen to begin planetary and local broadcasts. Acolytes, as well as unordained reporters, will begin reporting information on and within Towne until our brothers and sisters send word from Ozawa.

During this interim period, acolytes are working on reconfiguring broadcast equipment to reopen archived material on this site.

Finally, with the loss of continual HPG feed, we are sorry to inform you that we cannot update the Republic map in realtime. We are working on this as well.

We suffer and hope alongside each of you in this confusing time. We expect our brothers and sisters to return from Ozawa within a few weeks with good news. Until then, our duty must continue. As always, we take our charge with utmost gravity, and are committed to serving the greater cause of communications and technological preservation for the benefit of humanity. Please contact our communications service department with any questions. Thank you for your cooperation during this trial, and accept our contrite apologies for failure in our duty.

## HPG Goes Down, Cause Still Unknown

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08/20/3132

PORT HOWARD—Almost two weeks after the mysterious HPG signal loss, tensions remain high across the planet. Investors remain hopeful, but many businesses flounder without access to offworld resources. Meanwhile, the emotional toll is mounting as Towne struggles in silence, cut off from the rest of the Republic. It is still unclear how far-reaching this signal failure may be.

Geleina Devis' story is a common one. This mother, 43, is worried about her daughter, Zabibi, who studies dance at a university on Terra. "We talked every day before the silence. Now, I just don't know. She could be hurt or dead and I just wouldn't know."

Across the globe, the tension has resulted in tens of thousands of assaults, and rioting in some cities. According to reports, the city of Alkmeenon looks nearly abandoned due to the martial law and overnight curfews in place for the next week.

Many businesses are paralyzed, particularly the mining and construction industries which rely on the regular shipment of IndustrialMechs and Mech parts for repair. Without access to the Republic stock market, economic regulators across Towne have no way of gauging the larger economy. An inflation freeze has been put into effect as a short-term solution, holding all prices and values at their current rates until a longer-term solution is found.

In some communities, the silence has brought neighbors closer together. Communities on Mount Yimsha have banded together in the evenings, talking and playing musical instruments now that new evening entertainment programs no longer arrive from other worlds. "I never knew we lived next to such interesting people," said Serge Feldon, a Yimsha resident. "Even after the silence ends, I hope we keep doing this."

This banding together, however, revealed a darker side as interviews with residents continued. Towne, despite its Federated Suns heritage, includes a large population of people with ancestral ties to the Draconis Combine as a result of Devlin Stone's immigration policies. Another Yimsha resident, Sybil Boyd, said, "It's good to know I can depend on my neighbors, but I won't go into the city. All those snakes just worry me. I don't feel safe and I certainly won't take my kids down there." Boyd may have been referring to an attack two days ago on the Federated Suns History and Heritage Center in Yimsha City by a group of youths of Combine descent. "Snake" is a pejorative term referring to people of such political and/or ancestral affiliation.

ComStar acolytes sent on an emergency mission to Ozawa are expected to reach the JumpPoint today. They report through radio transmissions that the mission is going as planned. They have enough supplies to last for six months in the DropShip. Whether or when a JumpShip will arrive to pick them up is a source of nervous conversation among local ComStar engineers. If they are picked up on schedule later this week, they too will be cut off, just like the rest of the Republic.



## DropShip Arrives, Brings First News From Off-World

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10/28/3132

This morning, the commercial DropShip Danny Cunningham landed shortly after 9:00 AM, carrying with it news from outside the Towne system. This is the first news received from offworld since the HPG network went down more than two weeks ago.

Captain William Swaine says, "We were en route to the Ozawa system's jump point when the attacks on the net apparently happened. By the time we reached the jump point, people were going crazy over the open comm channels, wondering what happened to the HPG."

The details provided by Captain Swaine helped the whole picture come into focus. Ozawa's HPG network went down at approximately the same time Towne's did. Furthermore, at the Jump Point, Captain Swaine heard from ships arriving from both Addicks and Deneb Kaitos that there were problems with HPG communications on those worlds as well.

"At first, it was just a few captains asking questions like 'Has anyone had problems with the HPGs lately?'" says Swaine. "Pretty soon, everyone sitting at the Jump Point was getting in on the speculation. Then we heard the news from Ozawa – the markets were going south and business was all but stopping."

This is the first confirmation we've had on Towne that this problem is affecting more than just our own system. Preliminary reports from other ships at our jump points seem to indicate that this problem might be even more widespread than originally thought. Second- and third-hand reports are saying that HPGs within both the Draconis Combine and the Federated Suns have also mysteriously gone silent or been physically attacked. We have not yet been able to confirm those rumors.

Says ComStar spokesperson Dana Myers, "It is clear that this problem is larger in scale than any of us first expected. Rest assured, our order is working hard to fix this problem and will restore communications shortly."

Not everyone believes her, though. "What has ComStar done for us?" asks local politician Joe Nakamura. "They've got a monopoly on communications. They could be pulling this stunt just to raise their rates!"

Until more reports arrive from offworld, we'll all have to sit patiently and wait. We will, however, bring you news as soon as it comes available.

## War Touches Addicks

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11/03/3132

"This is Robert Mueller, reporting live from the Weyland Industrial Complex, just outside of Neo Carthagia. Approximately three hours ago, we witnessed a DropShip land some twenty or thirty kilometers away. While we were unable to determine exactly where that ship landed, it very obviously did not come down anywhere near a city or an industrial DropPort.

"So far, Addicks Aerospace Control has released no information about this ship. Sources inside the AAC to indicate this ship was not a scheduled arrival and that it broke out of traffic patterns at approximately 9:13 A.M. Those same sources have also told us that the ship did not transmit any 'MAYDAYs' and that they are not currently tracking any distress beacon signals.

"The entire area, however, has been declared off-limits. We are told that Legate Victor McFadden, under advice from Captain Tara Bishop—who is here under the direct authority of Prefect Tara Campbell—issued the decree himself and that an elite team under the command of Captain Bishop are looking into the matter.

"This situation is just the latest in a long string of mysterious circumstances that have haunted Addicks since the HPG network went down. Prefect Campbell has urged... wait... We're seeing something in the distance. There's a cloud... we definitely can see a BattleMech moving in the distance! Zoom in!

"It's hard to tell from this distance who they are. They seem to be going pretty fast, though. There's some tanks, too, and... No! < unintelligible transmission >

"...out of here! We've been caught in the middle of a war, here! Can we get an identification on..." < unintelligible transmission >  
"...looks like the sign of the Dragon's Fury on at least one of those 'Mechs. And... it seems... Prefect Campbell's Highlanders are defending against this... < unintelligible transmission >

"We definitely see... ..and apparently Captain Tara Bishop is leading the Highlander defense. No! Look out!" < unintelligible transmission > "She's bAcJDDU6AshCMY49RTf+IfYW+4/uW2Q

## Conspiracy Unmasked

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11/05/3132

Ever since the HPG station here went down, the only question that anyone has been asking has been "how?" But that isn't the question we should be asking; instead we should be asking "who?" Who did this, and why did they do it?

I've heard the party line coming out of ComStar – we can't explain the loss of signal, our equipment is working just fine, we'll have this fixed in a matter of days. Bollocks! They know exactly who did it and why. Because they did it themselves!

EO224-15B of 3082 mandated that interstellar communications within the Republic of the Sphere remain at a constant price, a measure that Devlin Stone enacted to ensure that the Citizens of the Republic could remain in contact with their friends and relatives as they migrated throughout the stars.

Fast forward to 50 years later. ComStar hasn't been able to raise their prices in half a century, and they're feeling it in their bottom line. At the same time, even before the HPG network went down, Exarch Damien Redburn is slowly losing grips on the reigns of the Republic. His Citizens are learning to rebel and he can't even keep a leash on people like Kal Radick, who talks about the return of the Star League as though The Republic will fall any day. Radick is a Prefect for heaven's sake! So, he needs some way to unite the people of the Sphere, a way to be the hero, just like Devlin Stone was. Enter ComStar.

Think about it. Why else haven't we heard from Redburn? There's been more than enough time to send JumpShips from Terra to give us an update. Besides, how else can you explain the downing of the ENTIRE HPG network? Only ComStar has the knowledge or ability to do that.

Just watch. Once Redburn's had the time to eliminate his competition, ComStar will miraculously fix the HPGs, but "owing to the huge repair expense" will double and triple their rates overnight.

Just watch and see.

F. M. Luder  
Williams Bay

Note: The opinions expressed here are not necessarily that of ComStar, the Republic of the Sphere or the government of Towne.

## Voice of the Dragon Controls Towne HPG Station

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11/06/3132

"People of Towne, this is the Voice of the Dragon, supporters speaking on behalf of the Dragon's Fury. At dawn this morning, Voice of the Dragon troops staged a brief action to gain control of the HPG station in Port Howard. VoD troops acted with consummate professionalism and achieved their objectives quickly and efficiently. Regrettably, shots were fired during the operation but those wounded in the assault are receiving appropriate medical attention. The station's ComStar HPG technicians have not been harmed and will remain here for the present to operate the systems and to discourage any rash action by Governor Oscar or Legate Jurik.

The Voice of the Dragon has not taken the decision to act lightly, but the activities of the local authorities and the self-serving attitude of the Republic government left us with no choice but to take matters into our own hands. Were we to remain silent and conform to the laws of the land we would be perpetrating an even greater injustice, something our conscience and honor would not allow. We must do our duty, no matter the price. Despite the Republic lies you may have heard about the Dragon's Fury, we have no desire to harm the people of Towne, nor do we wish to plunge the planet into civil war. Instead, our current objectives are to lift the veil of secrecy the Republic's apologists have put in place concerning events elsewhere in the Inner Sphere, unmasking the base propaganda spread by those seeking to protect their own positions and privileges.

As will become clear, the authorities have sought to manipulate the media for their own ends, allowing only that information which benefits them to be disseminated and distorting facts where rival groups are involved. Certain individuals have sought to deny the truth of what has been happening on Addicks and blame rebels, agitators and outside agencies for the events on our nearest neighbor. We cannot in good conscience allow the small-minded views of an isolated elite to govern what we think or how we view the universe. Their attempts to do so are clear signs of the Republic's dishonorable predilection for tyranny and its unfitness to rule.

For as long as we control this facility, the Voice of the Dragon will bring the uncensored truth to the people of Towne and our first step shall be to release details of how the Dragon can best serve the population."

## The Voice of the Dragon Speaks

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11/09/3132

People of Towne, this is the Voice of the Dragon, speaking to you from the Port Howard HPG station. We retain control of this facility in defiance of those who style themselves our betters and who seek to deny our right to be heard. You know of whom I speak and what they have done.

The Republic was a grand vision but in the years since Exarch Stone retired, it has begun to crumble. Many people gave their all to bring the Exarch's dreams to fruition, abandoning their homes, their nations and their livelihoods in search of a better future, sacrifices that have yet to be repaid by those who would rule the Republic. Those in power have taken away the glue that bound the peoples together – their culture and history – and yet they care not for the consequences that must be born by the people. Peace is a worthy goal, but at any price?

At the most fundamental level, the Republic has denied the population their right to be a people, replacing millennia of culture with a homogenized society with little room for deviation from the normal. It is a society of drones, where the individual's desires and rights are subsumed to a larger, amorphous whole. While working for the good of society is an honorable goal, it should be a willing and two-way process, not something individuals are forced to do. Compliance should be a matter of honor, not one of compulsion. In forcing their people into a mould, the Republic is destroying what binds the people together as a society. The Voice of the Dragon and Dragon's Fury seek to give the people back their heart, rebuilding the bonds of loyalty, duty and, of course, honor. We will give people a reason beyond greed to work together.

The values I speak of are not new – they have existed in various forms for millennia but only one nation has made the effort to remain true to them, a nation that has suffered grievously, first at the hands of its neighbors and then bloodied by the Clans and the Word of Blake. Even emasculated by Stone's Republic, the nation I speak of – the Draconis Combine – has striven to protect its own honor. We can learn from that determination and use it to forge a new future for ourselves.

Some have said that the Combine is a paper tiger – and it is true that its wounds are deep – but Duchess Tormark believes that the people of the Prefecture and the Combine can benefit from each other. The Dragon's Fury, can forge a new society that merges our dynamism and ideals with the heart and soul of the Combine. This will not be an easy process – many will fear our efforts and seek to stop us – and people will fall along the way, brought low by our enemies or lacking the strength to continue. But we will prevail. We will build a strong, unified society that will offer our children a bright future.

## **Towne Governor Announces "Siege... has come to an end."**

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11/16/3132

People of Towne this is your Governor, Renee Oscar. I am speaking to you this evening from the Republican Assembly building from where I have watched today's tragic events unfold. As you have all heard by now, the protracted siege of the ComStar HPG station here on Towne has come to an end.

At 3:15 am, Republican forces operating at my request and under the authority of Legate Jurik moved against the terrorists holding the HPG compound. The enemy had anticipated our resolve and had booby-trapped the southern approaches to the compound. So, our first personnel into action were sappers whose task was to neutralize the rebels' defenses and pave the way for our assault troops.

On the northern side of the compound such a stealthy approach was not possible due to the scaring caused by the car bomb the terrorists had used to gain entrance,. It was decided, therefore, to employ one of the government's BattleMech, a Legionnaire. It was never our intention to use this vehicle to storm the compound but rather to employ it to draw the terrorists' attention away from our other preparations. The 'Mech arrived on-station at 3:25am and the rebels immediately assumed the worst and opened fire with rifles and light anti-tank weapons, giving lie to their prior claims to abhor violence. The 'Mech and its pilot were unharmed, though as many of you have seen numerous local buildings were damaged by the assault. After this provocation, the Legionnaire returned fire with its autocannon, though MechWarrior Parilaud exercised extreme restraint in selecting her targets and did not pursue the rebel forces when they retreated into the compound.

If they expected to find succor there, the rebels were sorely disappointed. Having cleared the southern entrance of traps and sensors, Republican armored infantry used the distraction of the Legionnaire's approach to infiltrate the compound. Equipped with silenced weapons, their sudden assault overran the guards and the teams fanned out to secure the key parts of the facility. Though called upon to surrender, few of the terrorists were willing to lay down their arms and the Hauberk-wearing Republic troops had little choice but to use deadly force. Of the sixteen terrorists now known to have been involved in storming the compound, eight were killed in the firefight and three more died subsequently from their wounds. Two more are in critical condition while the remaining three are in Republic hands. They are currently being interviewed by the security services and are expected to stand trial for their crimes. Six Republic troops were wounded in the operation, none fatally.

While I abhor the wasteful loss of life, I hope this demonstrates Towne's resolve to those who would seek to impose their beliefs and undermine the legitimate authorities. Towne is part of the Republic of the Sphere and will remain so while any loyal to the Republic remain. The ComStar station is an indivisible part of that whole and an attack on the station is an attack on Towne, while an attack on Towne is an attack on the Republic. Though they styled themselves 'freedom fighters,' these 'Voice of the Dragon' were terrorists, no more, no less. Their bloody assault on the station and their brutal murder of Giovan Benetti during their takeover of the compound- something they conveniently neglected to mention in their so-called "truth broadcasts" - demonstrated their true colors. Those of you touring the compound this afternoon will see first hand their depredations as well as additional evidence of the terrorists' crimes.

Though a terrible tragedy, this crisis has demonstrated the staunch spirit of Towne, exemplified by several individuals who - though I know they deny it - are heroes of the Republic. Ann Parilaud's skillful 'Mech piloting gave us a decisive edge, while Major McInnery's armored infantry did sterling work in securing the compound. Nor must we forget the fallen: Josephe Connolly, Ric Liu, Lucy Adams and Giovan Benetti. As you know, this morning I exercised my executive powers to appoint Lev Bouzerau to succeed Sacrist Benetti as the head of the HPG station. The administrator is currently assessing the status of the HPG and its numerous sub-systems and hopes to report back on its status within the next few days.

## **Addicks Refugees Arrive on Towne - Report 'Addicks at War'**

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11/18/3132

TOWNE—Refugees from Addicks arrived on three DropShips today seeking asylum and bringing new rumors of war. The DropShips contained nearly 3,000 refugees from Hesperus, a suburb approximately 40 km north of Neo Carthagia on Addicks's southern continent.

The DropShips first appeared at 5:53 a.m. as three unknown blips over Hyborean orbital space. Aerospace officials dispatched escort jets to bring the DropShips down to land at the Price John Spaceport in Port Howard after establishing radio contact with the lead DropShip, Terrestria.

Governor Renee Oscar greeted the refugees personally and met privately with the leaders in a three-hour debriefing at the spaceport. Afterward, the refugees granted interviews to the press.

Malia Seneschal, pilot of the Terrestria, read from a prepared statement. "We're very happy to be alive, and thankful to the citizens of Towne for granting us refuge. Your hospitality is as generous as we had hoped."

Port Howard, a city of nearly 2 million people, has opened their arms to the refugees. Food, clothing, and offers of shelter have poured into relief organizations, though housing arrangements are still undecided for the refugees, who have been living on their DropShips for nearly three weeks.

Hesperus was a community largely populated by workers in the civilian aerospace industry. According to refugees, their city was evacuated in expectation of a military action between Dragon's Fury and Highlander forces.

Displaced and fearing further destruction, a team of pilots and engineers simply took three DropShips from a nearby conflict, two of which were Dragon's Fury ships. The refugees spoke of numerous reports of military action on the southern continent of Addicks in the days before they left. They reported having seen vehicles, infantry, and conscripted labor 'Mechs bearing Highlander insignia in several locations. The refugees did not claim to know why or how Dragon's Fury forces would attack Addicks. Before the HPG failure, Dragon's Fury was known to be led by Prefect Duchess Katana Tormark. This attack raises uncomfortable questions about Tormark's allegiances and intentions on a planet of key resources for the Prefecture.

Further, Neo Carthagia is an important center for offworld transport on Addicks. Control of the city gives an important military advantage over the entire southern hemisphere of Addicks.

Harmon Thompson, a mechanical engineer among the refugees said, "The emergency broadcast network mentioned tanks and infantry units before we lost radio, but I saw BattleMechs. This isn't a dust-up. This is the start of a war."

## Dragon's Fury Supporters Clash with Addicks Refugees

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11/25/3132

TOWNE—Addicks refugees in Port Howard rioted today in response to a demonstration by Dragon's Fury supporters. At least 30 people were injured, and damage is estimated at more than C\$200,000.

The riot began when local Dragon's Fury supporters paraded by the DropShips where the refugees are staying. The demonstrators carried signs, set off fireworks and chanted slogans such as "Dragon's Fury, Hai!" and "Katana cuts deep!"

The refugees attempted to drown out the demonstrators by shouting their own slogans, but the shouts quickly turned to violence. The refugees attacked and scattered the demonstrators, and the melee spilled over into the shops of the Port Howard Phoenix district. Rioters smashed windows and looted shops. Several residents of the Phoenix district were treated for minor cuts and contusions.

Republic police arrived on the scene shortly after the riot broke out. They fired rubber bullets into the crowd and flooded the streets with tear gas to break up the rioters and drive them out of the Phoenix district.

Malia Seneschal, de facto leader of the refugees, issued an apology after the incident, saying, "This was inexcusable behavior on the part of some of our crew. We deeply apologize to the citizens of Port Howard, and we will do whatever is in our power to make amends."

Cathy Brieri, a Phoenix district resident who watched the clash from her third-floor apartment, defended the refugees. "The Tormark supporters have just acted disgracefully," she said. "They were practically rubbing their [the refugees'] noses in it."

Other observers disagreed, however. Local resident Kuniko Ishigura, who was injured in the riots, was released from the hospital this afternoon. "These people are our guests, and look at how they treat us," Ishigura said. "No amount of name calling justifies this behavior. If this is how they react to adversity, why didn't they just stay on Addicks where the fighting is?"

Port Howard authorities are considering asking the refugees to move their DropShips to a more remote location to prevent further problems.



**11/27/3132**

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LISTEN UP PROLEZ!!! Your government is lying to you. Isn't it so convenient how this whole 'state of emergency' has happened? Almost like it was planned?!? Think about it!

Did you know that they did trial runs of 'unexplained' HPG failure in other prefectures before this one?

WAKE UP!! YOU ARE BEING MANIPULATED!!!! This 'emergency' has been in the works for months. Master Oscar is in control now. Master Oscar wants to control you. Master Oscar is the whole government out to make you a slave! The government wants you to be silenced. The government wants your money and your power without giving you anything in return. It's time for the people to stand up and not let it happen. You might not have guns, but you have rocks and most of all you have your VOICES!!!!

Have you talked to these so-called refugees from Addocks? Isn't it funny how they disappeared so quickly after their dropship landed? Can you say conspiracy? Can you say cover-up?

People all over Hyborea have seen 'Dozermechs converted. Converted for WHAT?!? There's no fighting going on here. Why would YOUR government spend YOUR tax money to make mechs ready to fight? Maybe if they expected a fight? Maybe if they PLANNED a fight? Maybe if they planned to fight YOU?

Look out b/c the next mech you see might not be working for you. Even if it has Towne government or corporate markings. Especially then. If you see a mech, TAKE IT! It could be your best defense when the stormtroopers show up in their special modified mechs to take everything you own!

SCARED? Well not enough. You might think we're crazy but we're here to show you the truth!! We've been inside the halls of power, we know what's going on, and we can show it to you if you're ready to have your eyes opened. Only when you have ALL the information can you make the best decisions for yourself! You'll see what's really going on! Find out the truth if you're not afraid, if you're not a puppet. We've set it up so Master Oscar can't shut us down, but it means we have to keep moving.

When you open your eyes and find out what Master Oscar really wants for you you'll be ready to fight back. REMEMBER: Isolation is the first step to brainwashing! Keep your eyes OPEN and your guns LOADED. Don't let them take away your RIGHTS! We'll be in touch again when we can let you know more TRUTH the government wants to keep to themselves. WATCH YOUR BACKS!!!!

Dom3 Cr/-\ck3r2

**11/28/3132**

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As promised, here's the proof - scan it while you can, they are hot onto us!

Dom3 Cr/-\ck3r2

In accordance with gubernatorial directive 2904-R, issued 11/21/3132, the Governor's Council for Law and Safety presents its recommendations for the state-of-emergency directives.

Given the government's right and responsibility to ensure public safety in the event of a mass disturbance—including, but not limited to, a state of war—we recommend the following preparations and precautionary measures be undertaken in exercise of extraordinary government function:

Place all Republic police and local law enforcement under command of the nearest military outpost (see attachment D for proximity determinants)

Place all active military personnel on standby

Notify all reserve military to report immediately to their training stations for assignment and/or deployment

Notify former and retired military personnel to stay in all-hours readiness

Commandeer and refit for combat all known civilian-owned LaborMechs

Planetwide curfew at 10 p.m., with changeover to sundown curfew on a continent-by-continent basis depending on local conditions

Repeal of appropriate sections of legal code, specifically:

443.8, regarding sale and possession of firearms as well as various combustible and energy-based munitions

605.4, pertaining to use of appropriate force by law enforcement during peacetime

605.9, pertaining to surveillance methods permitted for use on Towne citizens

Consider repealing the civil liberties delineated under civil code section 327.6.5: persons refusing to submit to civil authorities are subject to misdemeanor charges and forced isolation.

Locate detainment camps for dissidents within 100 km of all population centers with more than 50,000 residents

In the second stage of deployment, the council recommends the following actions be taken within six to eight weeks of initial deployment:

Mount propaganda campaign designed to promote patriotism, sacrifice and dependence on government.

Locate emergency hospitals in areas of low population or strategic importance (see attachment C).

Implement citizen-tracking legislation (pending jurisprudence review).

Begin rationing of inessential commodities, including, but not limited to, metals, meats and petroleum products.

Begin rationing of essential commodities, including, but not limited to, water, electricity and medicine.

Implement economic regulations stabilizing the value of the C-bill.

Further recommendations may follow this preliminary report. However, given the perceived potential of factional hostilities spreading to Towne, these measures would allow maximum population control utilizing current resources in two to four weeks. A more thorough report, including recommendations for redistribution of key personnel, military equipment and economic resources, is expected within two weeks. Further questions should be directed to council chair Loren DelRusco in the governor's office.

## An Address from Governor Renee Oscar

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12/01/3132

My fellow Towneites, I have prepared this address today to speak to you directly and from the heart.

Several rogue hackers have generated false reports designed to undermine public support of the government. Our communications infrastructure is fragile right now, and a few terrorists have taken advantage of this weakness. It's tragic that a few weak-minded individuals would try to drive a wedge between us at such a critical juncture, when we all need to pull together. We believe we have identified the individuals responsible, and we will put a stop to this divisive behavior, designed to prey on the uncertainty and fear plaguing us all.

In truth, these are frightening times. We've been cut off from our families and loved ones across the Sphere. Rumors of war are inevitable, but unsubstantiated. Humans haven't been this alone in the galaxy since the foundation of the Republic.

Until we learn more about how we were cut off and who is responsible, we have only each other to rely on. Now is a terrible time to invent allegations about a government conspiracy. Now is the time to look to the government—and each other—for strength and encouragement.

I'll be frank: no one likes to hear about martial law, and no one likes to be under it. Nevertheless, in times of emergency, martial law is one of the tools we have at our disposal to ensure public safety. It's an extreme tool, and it's not one we're willing to use now. But it is neither immoral nor unethical for a government to use martial law to protect its constituents.

Do we have a martial-law plan? Yes. All governments have contingency plans for emergencies. Preparedness is essential.

Do we plan to implement martial law? The answer is an emphatic NO. Not at this time. Despite isolated reports of rioting, we don't think further restrictions on Towne citizens is the correct response.

Rather, we think encouraging people to come together is the correct response. We think sharing information and resources is the correct response. I encourage all Towne citizens to pull together. We're all feeling cut off. Let's mend that feeling by connecting locally.

Many citizens live far away from their nearest neighbors, while some live all too close. If you've never met your neighbors, I encourage you to do so now.

To assist in this new openness, we plan to introduce a new government program: across the planet, we're declaring next week "Neighbor Week," a time to meet your neighbors and get to know them. Invite them over for a cookout or dinner. Arrange a community-wide event in your area.

Over the next few weeks, we'll be holding meetings at population centers across the globe. Government leaders will be available to listen to your questions and help you get answers.

Together we'll get through this difficult time and emerge stronger for the effort. Thank you for your cooperation and understanding during these stressful days. Our hopes and prayers are with you all, and with our loved ones throughout the galaxy.

Your servant,

Renee Oscar

## Addicks Families Divided

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12/04/3132

PORT HOWARD—Gemma Weatherstone misses her “Algie.” It’s hard enough to be separated from home when you’re a 7-year-old refugee from a war-ravaged planet. But when your pet gets taken away too, it can all just be too much.

Never mind that “Algie” (short for Algernon) is a 90 kg jensom lizard, an herbivorous reptile native to the southern continent of Addicks. The separation anxiety can be awful.

Several hundred of the Addicks refugees are experiencing that same anxiety, as the pets and domestic animals they brought onto the escaping DropShips have been in quarantine since their arrival over a month ago.

Many of the animals have been found with Kellington’s disease. Kellington’s is a degenerative nerve disease that doesn’t affect humans, but does affect other animals. Native Addicks animals are immune to Kellington’s, but Towne officials fear that they could be carriers, infecting local wildlife who have no such immunity. In 3120, Addicks game officials estimated that perhaps 60% of animal life on Addicks were carriers for Kellington’s.

Sources indicate that nearly 300 animals have been destroyed so far, and more are being tested every day. Bruxa Heffersen is a ranger working with the Port Howard wildlife authority to test and euthanize infected animals. “I hate to do it,” said Heffersen. “We all hate it, but it’s not a risk we can afford on Towne.”

Gemma’s mother and father, Alyssa and Ronald Weatherstone, are sad, but patient. They owned a petting zoo near Neo Carthagia. In addition to two jensom lizards, they brought goats, rabbits, and three dogs—all quarantined. “It’d be an awful shame to lose our beasties,” Ronald said. “They kept all the kids entertained on the trip out, and they’re just like family. Gemma would be torn up to lose Algie. We understand, but I sure don’t want to have to explain it to her if they put him down.”

Alyssa added, “It would be just one more thing we lost.”

## News From Ozawa

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12/07/3132

PORT HOWARD—Four DropShips from Ozawa touched down at Port Howard today, releasing several thousand passengers from the Prefecture's capital. The passengers and crew had numerous reports from around the Republic, giving Towne residents a first look at the larger Republic since the HPG system went down.

Passengers were in good health and good spirits, and seemed to have come willingly, in marked contrast to the handful of refugee ships that have landed on Towne in recent weeks.

Comments made by passengers as they disembarked suggest that though fighting among perhaps half a dozen factions has broken out on several worlds, the Republic is not entirely consumed with war and anarchy.

Minerva Stephanopoulis, 35, and her four-year-old son Jakob came for a vacation to visit relatives. Stephanopoulis is an accounts manager for a computer firm which supplies the Ozawan government.

"Sales are way up," Stephanopoulis said, juggling Jakob and a duffle bag, as she looked for change in her purse. "The government only buys computers like this when they've got some big push in production. We all just assumed it was a war production issue, but nobody knows for sure."

A middle-aged man who asked not to be identified confirmed that both Kal Radick and Aaron Sandoval were going to Ankaa to "secure materials" for Republic interests. Before the blackout, Radick had been a critic of the Republic, and was even accused of wanting to overthrow the Republic in favor of a reborn Star League.

Various reports indicate that Radick and Sandoval are at odds, and their respective forces are reported to have fought on at least two worlds besides Ankaa. Though inhospitable to humans, Ankaa is known for its various rare metal exports. In a military dispute, it would be a vital supply planet to fuel war efforts.

Gerhardt Purvis, 22, an engineering student at Ozawa Technological Institute, came back to be with his family. "First the earthquake pretty much leveled New Kyoto, and now this. I thought the universe might be ending. I mean, who knows? I decided if things were getting bad, I wanted to be with my family more than I wanted to finish my engineering degree."

Purvis also brought back news from the ComStar acolytes sent to Ozawa nearly two months ago.

Purvis says he met the acolytes through a notice on a community posting before he left. "They were asking for anybody going to Towne to contact them too bring messages back."

Purvis and other passengers carried identical holocube messages from the acolytes, confirming that the HPG system is down throughout the Republic. Acolytes from other B stations around the Ozawan hub have met in Ozawa and are working together to uncover the mystery of the blackout.

The acolytes have also arranged a regular message service to take daily news recordings on every commercial DropShip that leaves Ozawa. They speculate that the first of the recordings will begin arriving on DropShip traffic within the next few days.

## Towne ComStar Chief Announces New INN Feature

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12/09/3132

Citizens of Towne:

I'm Lev Bouzerau, new general manager and chief sacrist of the Towne ComStar relay station. After the initial confusion of the loss of the HPG system across the Republic, and especially with the loss of former chief sacrist Giovanni Benetti, some of us felt like we lost our voices. I'm happy to report that we've rapidly reconfigured our organization in furtherance of our sacred duties.

We've adapted to the current situation while continuing to meet our goal of keeping technology alive, and keeping Humanity informed, even if it's only our small pocket of Humanity.

Today, I'm here to present the next step in our efforts to keep information moving freely. In conjunction with several civil organizations and governmental agencies around the globe, we've established a public user input system on the grid.

One of our great concerns after the blackout was the risk of Towne's isolation from the Republic and the rest of its citizens and residents. I don't think it's too dramatic to say that loss of information leads to a loss of understanding, cooperation, and eventually civilization. Further, as conflict increases across the Republic and even here on Towne, we run the risk of finding ourselves at odds with each other.

With the lack of traffic from the HPG net, we have literally hundreds of tons of information storage equipment lying dormant. Since we can't use it to move information to you, we've decided to open it up to move information between you. Effective immediately, anyone with access to the Towne ComStar network can create a user log to record his or her thoughts, feeling, experiences, and observations. You can make logs personal or topical, and you can have as many logs as you want. Your logs can also freely interface with news reports to provide public commentary and additional reporting on issues.

In some ways, this is a feel-good maneuver. We want people to be able to share their hopes and fears and help foster a closer, stronger planetary culture. In this time of instability, it helps everyone to be able to find like minds and share our experiences. There is also a practical benefit to the creation of these logs. Rumors of military operations trickle in to our news center from around the globe, and some of those rumors have proven true. The fastest way we have to stay informed about these incursions is for each of us to be our own reporters.

Of course, no one is required to participate, but we think this opportunity will shore up solidarity and perhaps even seal up some rifts that have begun to grow in our communities. Please let us know what you think of this new initiative. Now, your voice is louder than ever.

## Comstar INN Updates

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12/16/3132

Citizens of Towne:

As I stated last week, we here at Towne ComStar relay station are looking to further bring our global community closer. To this end, we are implementing several new local features for our ComStar INN News feed.

The first, which appeared yesterday, is a weather report for your local area. This will be updated each morning with the current weather conditions. If you are in Port Howard, you will see the Port Howard weather, if you are in Kale Bay you will see that weather.

Second, starting today, we are providing access to the Towne Inquisitor to bring their unique brand of news to INN. As many of you are aware, the Towne Inquisitor writer's and editing staff are a little more adventurous with news gathering, bringing a new perspective on current issues. Today's first Towne Inquisitor article will be open to our viewers to comment on via the new **Towne Log** system I mentioned last week.

Finally, we will be presenting portions of the transcript from the popular Sunday morning news program "Sunday with Mahler", so those of you without vid access can see what the local personalities and politicians have to say on current matters.

We hope these new additions will not only provide everyone with as much information as possible, but bring our community closer together.

Thanks

Lev Bouzerau

## Devlin Stone Back From the Dead, On Towne

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12/16/3132

Two years after his mysterious disappearance, Devlin Stone is back among us. But he hasn't returned to his rightful place at the head of the Republic of the Sphere. No, instead he has come back under cover.

Reports of a tall man bearing an uncanny resemblance to the hero of the Jihad and the patrol on the Republic began trickling in to us mere days after the communications blackout. But now, with reports of war running rampant through the Republic, we can see that Devlin Stone has indeed returned to us. And instead of retaking the helm of the Republic, he is leading us to peace the same way as before—from the trenches.

Though he hasn't admitted to his true origins, he is preaching the very message of tolerance for others and contempt for despotism as he did some six decades ago—on the street corners, to park crowds and other public gatherings.

The man has changed his appearance, something he did quite frequently while in the public eye, but there is no doubt in our minds that our beloved Devlin Stone has returned.

Loyal reader Pierre Roedecker reports, "There's no doubt in my mind that it is him. I saw him speak in person to huge mobs of people every day straight for the past week. His message, his voice, his look—it's definitely Devlin. He's here to bring us back out of this dark age that has fallen. Already the people who have escaped the horrors on Addicks are flocking to him daily."

But why hasn't he taken his rightful place at the head of the Republic and stopped this wholesale warfare?

Dr. Everette Coolidge, a noted psychologist at the Towne Center for Mental Powers, sheds some light on the answer. "Humankind has the instinctive need to make war on and conquer their neighbors," he says. "Humanity also detests dictates handed down from on high—even the most law-abiding citizen doesn't like to be told what to do and when to do it. But give humanity a grass-roots cause, and we will all band together like the unstoppable force that we are. That's why he's leading from the trenches again!"

Watch here for continued reports on Devlin Stone's return to us.

### Towne Log

+ I saw him myself! This ain't no joke. He's back, and he's gonna lead us to safety.

:- Gunji

+ Yer all just falling for a lode of bunk. Devlin Stone is dead. Admit it and move on!

:- Gatekeeper55

+ No! Its true. Devlin Stone is back and he's here on Towne. Thousands of people have seen him and heard him! It's all starting here. Just watch! He only left us so that he could find out who were the weakest and who were the strongest. He's going to take the strongest and the most faithful and we're going to rule by his side over all you unbelievers and nay-sayers. Be careful what you say now. We have long memories!

:- Hop4evr

+ Hope, I was there yesterday. That group of thousands who "heard" him were there in the park for a jazz concert. I stopped and watched him for a minute before I went and found a nice shady spot as far away from him as I could. He's a lunatic who was literally foaming at the mouth!

:- Chungabunga

+ Hey, editors, do you even realize how dumb you are? Devlin Stone was like 3 meters tall. This guy was just shy of two meters and maybe 30 years old. Stone is dead and rotting on Terra!

:- MoroNpoLICE

+ Did anyone get close enough to smell that guy? Whew! Glad he was wearing that dresdenberry wine aftershave!

:- TimE

+ Scoff if you want, but the chosen will rule supreme with Devlin Stone. He will reform his Nirvana and rid the universe of the Succession Lord despots once and for all. Mark my words. Accept Him now or live the rest of your sorry lives in pain!

:- Hop4evr

+ I saw him, too. I think he's just pretending to be a bum so that the people listen to his message, not his voice.

:- Yulia

+ Hey, Hope, watch yourself. You're about a minute away from being committed! Hahahaha!

:- MoroNpoLICE

+ Consider the source of these rumors. The Towne Inquisitor does not publish what most would call serious journalism.

:- Chungabunga





## Peace on Addicks

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12/17/3132

After months of armed conflict, the battle for the control of Addicks has apparently concluded, with surprising results!

Weeks ago, we first learned that an unknown force apparently belonging to the Dragon's Fury landed on Addicks. Why they had landed there and just what their goals were was anyone's guess, but they immediately began clashing with Highlanders stationed on the world under the command of Captain Tara Bishop. The first shots not only ravaged industrial centers but also sent thousands upon thousands of Addicks' residents fleeing their homeworld.

The war on Addicks started just outside the city of Neo Carthagia, when the Dragon's Fury MechWarriors landed and ran afoul of a Highlanders reconnaissance force. The two sides immediately jumped into battle in the worst violence seen on Addicks since the formation of the Republic of the Sphere almost fifty years ago.

Reports from various sources indicate that, while the first battles for Addicks went badly for the Dragon's Fury warriors, they pressed on, pushing into the outskirts of Neo Carthagia. The two forces fought another bitter battle there, but the Dragons held the superior terrain, forcing the Highlanders to retreat into the city.

Rather than following them into Neo Carthagia, though, the Dragon's Fury goaded the Highlanders into a counterattack they were wholly unprepared for by firing on the city itself. The Highlanders attempted to crush the Dragons, but even their mad charge and fierce resolve weren't enough to break the Dragon attack. The Highlanders retreated from Neo Carthagia in shame, leaving the city to their enemies while they attempted to regroup and rebuild their flagging morale.

While the Dragons were not sharing their ultimate plans with anyone, their intentions became clear following their successes at Neo Carthagia. While brawlers continued to harry the Highlanders, the bulk of the Dragon's Fury forces concentrated in the world's recently discovered rich oil fields, apparently surveying the region to determine its true potential.

Despite the Dragons' attempts to keep the Highlanders off-balance, Captain Bishop regrouped and staged attack after attack on the Dragons. Though costly, their continued attacks did to the Dragons what the Dragons had attempted to do to them: keep them off-balance.

In the end, Captain Bishop and her Highlanders were victorious, though their losses made the fight for Addicks extremely costly and painful. The Dragon's Fury forces left the world just a few weeks ago, their destination unknown.

After the Dragons' departure, Knight Stephanie Hoover landed on Addicks to put an end to the fighting and to put citizens' fears to rest. With the Highlanders assisting in the rebuilding efforts, Knight Hoover traveled the world to assess the damage and to address the world's population. She was greeted by throngs of grateful residents almost everywhere she went, though there were pockets of resentment in St. Randall and a few other cities, no doubt fueled by Dragon's Fury agents left behind on the world.

According to news articles and broadcasts brought from Addicks, the cleanup is well underway, and reconstruction efforts in Neo Carthagia will be finished within the year. Knight Hoover has already promised generous Republic assistance and will report to the Exarch herself the horrors she witnessed on the world.

A number of recent incidents on our own world can be traced directly to the Dragon's Fury, including one just a few days ago that involved Dragon supporters and refugees from Towne. Those incidents have remained isolated, however, and government officials, including Legate Renee Oscar, continue to emphasize the need for calm in this time of crisis.

### Towne Log

+ Yeah. Stay calm. Right. Oscar knows what's going on and so does this Knight Hoover. Notice how the Knight didn't show up until after the fighting was done. You think that was a coincidence? The Republic is behind this all!  
:- FMLuder

+ Okay, FM, I'll play along. So is the Republic behind the attacks, too?  
:- Kurious

+ I saw the riot in Port Howard myself! It was the refugees who started it. They were the ones who threw the first punch. I saw it myself and there's tri-vid out there to prove it, but you won't see that on any ComStar or Republic newsfeed!  
:- Focks

+ I'm not sure who to believe here. I've seen the studies and I know something about the technology. There should be no way the entire HPG system could go down, at least not without our friendly-neighborhood hooded clerics knowing just what the hell is going on. There's just too many coincidences going on, here. Now the Knights are pretending to get involved?  
:- Jamjam

+ And who would have thought the same thing sixty years ago? Coincidences do happen. I saw that tri-vid from Port Howard. It didn't show anything but some bottles and other debris being thrown. The riots here didn't start 'till we heard about the attacks on Addicks. And all we've got here are second-hand reports. Cool your engines. Otherwise these idiots in office will declare

martial law, and you know things will go to hell in a handbasket when that happens!

:- Chungabunga

+ Hey, FM, where can I D/L a copy of that T/V?? U got any other kul vids 2?

:- BlakDuke

+ Oohh, you know, the Knights are nothing but Redburn's enforcers. She's probably just there to make sure the secret warehouses are still intact. You know there's still gotta be FedCom-era equipment hidden on Addicks, and the Republic doesn't want anyone to find out. Hell, that's probably why the Dragons were really there!

:- Hippee

+ As much as I hate to agree with Hippee, he does have a point. They've been finding old FedCom bunkers there for years...

:- Chungabunga

## Republic's Richest man Leads Charity Efforts

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12/21/3132

Jacob Bannson, CEO of Bannson Industries, announced today the formation of a relief agency for those made homeless due to war in Prefecture III. The Common Relief Agency (CRA) will be headed by Jacob Bannson, but several interplanetary corporations have pledged aid to the agency including Harambe Motors and several other Mech and vehicle manufacturers in Prefectures II and IV.

Bannson has frequently styled himself the champion of the common citizen, despite his sometimes ruthless record of boardroom behavior, including unpopular layoffs and downsizing in certain economic sectors.

Despite this, the Republic's richest man has contributed large sums of money to numerous charitable causes, making him a figure of controversy in many circles. The CRA effort is his latest attempt at being the benefactor.

The announcement came at a press conference where Bannson personally appeared to present the formation of the agency.

"The poverty and sorrow created by the growing military aggression was too much to bear," said Bannson. "The nobility across Prefecture III have so many other concerns. I knew that businesses had to step in and help. The Common Relief Agency will provide for the common welfare where governments have more pressing duties."

He then called for other businesses, especially those in the military-industrial complex, who might be seen as war profiteers, to contribute to the agency. "We who stand to profit from war rest at an uncomfortable crossroads. To show that our priorities are aligned truly, I encourage all businesses to contribute to the CRA."

Bannson was quick to point out that the CRA would be an independent, non-profit organization, governed by a board unaffiliated with Bannson Industries. "I want to make my intentions clear in this matter," he said. "This is not for me. This is for the people who need help."

Bannson has been criticized for heading the effort, since reports from several skirmishes indicate that Bannson sponsors one of the major factions in the fighting. Bannson representatives deflect criticism by saying that their forces act in a defensive role, protecting towns and settlements when other factions threaten civilians.

"Bannson Industries does field military forces in a peace-keeping role, and we are proud to be able to protect people this way," said Bannson spokesman, George Hartley. "However, neither Mr. Bannson nor any other clear-thinking Republic citizen can condone threatening lives for the sake of expansionism or political ideals. When someone disagrees violently with this stance, individuals with the resources must act to prevent the strong from rolling over the weak."

## Ankaa Targeted

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12/23/3132

Anqabad, Ankaa — The violence that has apparently gripped worlds across the Republic of the Sphere has come now to Ankaa. While whispered rumors have troubled us ever since the HPG network went silent, the true terror of these dark days had not yet touched our world. Exarch Redburn's assurances that the Knights of the Sphere would keep the peace calmed our fears. But no longer.

A few days ago, 'Mechs belonging to Galaxy Commander Kal Radick and his Steel Wolves landed and immediately secured sites here in Anqabad and around the world. Within hours, it was obvious why they had come. They had not come under the banner of the Republic or at the behest of the Knights of the Sphere. Instead, they had come to claim our DropShip factories for themselves.

We were afraid, but they did not interfere with our lives or threaten us with violence. These Clansmen sought to control our industry, and to many who were bitter about Jacob Bannson's takeover of DiNapoli Industries and his shoddy treatment of its employees, they seemed like saviors of sorts.

But then the Swordsworn came, and brought with them greed and destruction and chaos. And war.

The Swordsworn dropped into our beautiful city and assaulted the Steel Wolves. Neither force cared for this world's people or the hardships they would put us through. Neither cared for the innocent lives they would take during their battle for control of the DiNapoli DropShip factory.

The fighting here in Anqabad lasted for hours, and by the time it had moved on, hundreds were dead and thousands injured. We can still hear the battling off in the distance as rescue crews search through the rubble for survivors—rubble that was already scoured by recovery teams for both combatants. But they were looking only for their own survivors. They barely gave anyone else they found a second glance.

And what are the Knights of the Sphere doing? By all accounts, we have a Knight-Errant here on Ankaa and even a full Knight. Are they interceding in this war on our behalf? Are they leading the charge to end the fighting? No. Even Legate Allan Slowinske is strangely silent, something that he has never before been in his years serving our world. Only Governor Anton Judae has come forward to call for an end to the fighting, if only for the sake of Ankaa's people.

It is now clear what is going on in the Republic of the Sphere. The chaos that spread like wildfire after the crippling of the HPG network is spurring regional leaders and factional chiefs to take more power for themselves. These attacks on Ankaa stink of a power grab. The same holds true for the fighting that has been confirmed on Addicks and the rumored battles on a dozen more worlds.

We've always been subject to the whims of the powerful. That's why we have been saddled with war for so many millennia. Those who have no power want it, while those who already have power want more. So they will fight for it. And all the while the common people are caught in the crossfire. Devlin Stone thought he had banished the desire for power from our nature, but it only went into hibernation as humanity recovered from the wounds of the Jihad.

Where is the Republic to defend its citizens now, when they need it the most?

### Towne Log

+ I got that story and the attached tri-vids from a friend who sent it via courier. That story was scheduled to be printed in the local Anqabad newspaper but was inexplicably pulled, as were all related stories and vid-feeds. Apparently the government of Ankaa thought that it was too charged or threatened to incite unrest. So, under the emergency powers granted by the Exarch, they banned it from publication. But, as hard as they may try, they can't stop the truth from being told!

:- Ranier

+ Oh, dear God! The dark time truly is upon us! This is the sign that Devlin Stone was waiting for!

:- Gunji

+ This is just the next step for Redburn. He's declared his State of Emergency and he's goaded two of the most powerful factions in the Sphere into an unprovoked attack on an otherwise peaceful world. Hell, his Knights probably had agents deep in both of those organizations and goaded them into the attacks. Just wait. Once he's got a full-blown war started, ComStar will miraculously "fix" the HPG network and he'll step in as the new savior of Humanity—with ComStar acting as his army!

:- Kemosabe

+ Redburn doesn't have the intelligence to pull off an operation like that. His granddad, maybe, but not him. Look at who's attacking: the Wolves and the Federated Suns—or at least their little puppet powers. It is the Clans who are behind this all. Who knows where the Spirit Cats are going to fall in all of this, but the powers that understand are already moving to secure their positions when this is all over with.

:- WetWillie

+ The time has come, brothers. Devlin Stone is among us. It is time we all listened to what he has to say before it is too late.

:- Hop4Evr

+ Oh, not you again! Don't you ever give up? Grow up and smell Stone's rotting corpse. This is war that is going on, not some supernatural rapture!

:- Gatekeeper55

+ The vids that go along with this story certainly appear real enough, and this just looks too elaborate to be a hoax. Maybe by itself, but not with the fighting on Addicks, too. Something is definitely happening—something we really don't want to be in the middle of!

:- Chungabunga

+ The peculiar thing is that the Legate and the Knights were so silent on Ankaa. What's the deal?

:- Jamjam

+ I've just heard some more interesting news from Ankaa. Apparently the Knight that was there is missing. Now, some say that he left the world before the Steel Wolves got there, but others say he was kidnapped or executed. And, even more interesting, Legate Slowinske was found dead in his house, apparently a heart attack. That was certainly convenient for many...

:- Ranier

+ Oh, man. A Knight and a Legate? This is nothing like I thought. It's bigger than we can all possibly imagine. They need the DropShips to complete their plan, but they must have needed a distraction to get the Knights and the Legate out of the way, so they fabricated this attack to cover their tracks... Oh, this is bad...

:- Hippee

+ They must not have been willing to go along with the Exarch's plans. Who knows where they will strike next?

:- FMLuder

+ This certainly isn't good. Putting aside all the wild speculation, the Republic is in a crisis that it probably can't handle itself. Even if it is only some local powers making grabs at power. And if, and I mean if, it is the Clans... there's only one power that has ever been able to fight a coordinated campaign during a complete communications blackout: House Davion. We need their help. We need it now!

:- Lancer

+ Please, spare us your Davion First rhetoric. We don't have the time for it!

:- Dolen

## Exarch Damien Redburn Speaks

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12/31/3132

We received this communiqué from Legate Renee Oscar last night. It was delivered to her personally and authenticated by verigraph. It is a message from Exarch Damien Redburn to the people of the Republic of the Sphere. The text of his tri-vid message is reprinted here for all to read:

Ladies and gentlemen, friends and relatives, Republic citizens.

A strange and terrifying darkness has descended upon us, bringing with it chaos and uncertainty. Everything we have been taught to trust has been torn asunder. Worst of all, not only have our own lives been turned upside down, but so have the lives of all of our friends and relatives. Where once those closest to our hearts were mere days away, now they stand lost to us across a vast sea of blackness.

And where once we could rely upon the Senate and the Knights of the Sphere to respond immediately to crises, now we must all fumble about in the dark, relying on thirdhand rumors to bring us news of this disaster that has apparently befallen all of humanity.

Life as it was mere weeks ago is, unfortunately, no longer possible. The HPG network that has served humanity for so long is no longer functional. The only way we have left to communicate with each other is through the so-called Pony Express.

As a result, I am forced to declare an official state of emergency. I do not take this action lightly, but I feel common decency demands I do it.

You, the citizens of the Sphere, will notice few changes in your day-to-day lives. The trains will still run, and you will continue to do business. But until HPG communications are restored, I am granting extended authority to your legates, prefects and governors. They will act on behalf of myself and the Senate to ensure that your lives are not disrupted any more than they already have been.

Furthermore, I am directing the Knights of the Sphere to visit each world and take whatever actions they deem necessary to keep the peace that we all have known for so long. Some of us have chosen to break that peace, and I am putting them on notice: we will not stand for it. The Knights will end your reign of terror and once again save the citizens of the Sphere from the evil dark.

Our Paladins will lead the Knights as they move to protect the Sphere from the predations of our neighbors. They have my complete trust as well as that of the Senate. Where you see them, you see us. Where you hear a command from them, you hear a command from us. They will ensure the darkness that threatens all of us does not harm another human being.

I am dispatching this message to every world within the Republic of the Sphere, to every world bordering our Republic, and to the capitals of every nation within the Inner Sphere and Periphery. I am also dispatching hand-picked couriers to every Republic world and foreign capital. These individuals will remain the lifeline between us. If you ever need assistance, seek these individuals out.

I bid you farewell, my friends, but only for now. The Republic stands strong. It is a testament to your will and courage. We will persevere and emerge from this darkness stronger than ever.

### Towne Log

+ I told all of you naysayers that Terra hadn't forgotten about us. Redburn is on top of things. Now that the Knights are involved, the problems we keep hearing rumors about will go away!

:- Michi

+ Michi, take your head out of the sand for once. Redburn doesn't have a clue as to what's going on. He as much admits so. But he's scared. You can tell if you've watched the vid of his little speech. He's scared, so he's doing what any scared leader would do—put on a blustering show. If things are so bad that Addicks is being hit and even we're having problems here on Towne, there's got to be more going on elsewhere. My bet is that the Sphere is being invaded. Maybe one of the Clans is making a shot at Terra...

:- WetWillie

+ The Knights will take care of any problems. They always have and they always will!

:- Yulia

+ Redburn knows there is a problem but he doesn't realize the solution yet. Devlin Stone picked a worthy successor, but Redburn does not have the insight that the Protector does. But that does not matter. Devlin Stone will lead us right from this world and crush those who would hurt us!

:- Hop4Evr

+ The Knights of the Sphere are a joke. They'd never be able to hold back a concerted effort to invade the Republic, especially without being able to coordinate their actions via HPG. No. We're all sitting ducks. Redburn knows that but just won't admit that

to everyone!

:- Goobs86

+ Redburn is doing this all to make a power play. He declared a State of Emergency. So long as that remains in force, he's got virtual dictatorial powers. The Senate can't do a thing until Redburn gives those Emergency Powers of his up. Read the fine print of the declaration. It's available freely, if you look hard enough. I think he really is in on something with ComStar. How do you think the Marik Captain-Generals seized power back in the beginning?

:- Kemosabe

+ Damn! The Clans! Of course! Who else would have the ability to shut down the HPG network? ComStar could, but they're losing too much money. Destroying an enemy's command, control and communications networks is the first step in an invasion. A hundred regiments could be bearing down on us and we'd never know. Read your history books. The Clans did almost the same thing in 3050, only they struck so quickly that word of their invasion couldn't be passed along.

:- Chungabunga

+ It could be the Clans or it could be ComStar. Or some coalition between one or both of them and Redburn. But Kemo's right—whatever else is happening, Redburn is making a power-play of his own. That much is obvious.

:- FMLuder

+ I think you're all insane. The Exarch has never done anything to even suggest the possibility that he's doing anything underhanded. He's doing everything he can to keep the peace. Give him the benefit of the doubt.

:- Pooky



## Weather Balloon Frightens Howell

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12/29/3132

PORT HOWARD--The Towne Planetary Meteorological Service announced today that a weather balloon hovering at two kilometers was blown from its regular position, causing dozens of citizens in the Black Coast region of Howell to report UFO sightings.

Warrant Officer Issac Newton, forecaster at the weather station there said, "We use them because they go much higher than the eye can see."

Newton said that when rigged up, the instrument "looks like a six-pointed star, is silvery in appearance, and rises in the air like a kite."

In Howell, the discovery set off a flurry of excitement. Sheriff Jeff Willcox's lines were jammed with reports.

Newton, who made the examination, said some 45 weather stations across Howell were using that type of balloon, and that it could have come from any of them.

He said he had sent up identical balloons during the invasion of Kale Bay to determine ballistics information for heavy guns.

Service officials are asking that no one be alarmed. The balloon is not expected to interfere with any regular flight paths in the region. They are tracking the balloon and expect to have it recaptured later this evening.

### Towne Log

+ Onec again, the TPMS continues its tyranny of misinformation, keeping us blind to the truth. It was interestign that they chose to admit that there are those fo us who wait the Shining Ones return. Soon, they will reveal thmeselves. Then everything will change!!!

:- Shining1000

Shut up. I can't believe anybody still believes in this garbage. Look, if there were going to be nonhuman higher life, we'd have found them by now. History Lesson: Humans left Terra 1000 years ago, and we colonized every planet we could find. We're the highest form of life in the galaxy. There's no mystery. It's a weather balloon. Chill out and just get over it.

:- GTTorrance

+ Hey, take it easy on the guy. Crackpots need love too. Shining, get help, man.

:- HereAndNow200

I pity your small life.

:- Shining1000

+ What it really is is government cover-up of more DropShips touching down. War is breaking out everywhere, and by Crom, it's coming to sweet backwater Towne now. I hope everyone has water and food supplies stocked up.

:- MrCharybdis111

Or maybe it's a weather balloon hovering at two kilometers blown from its regular position. It was a UFO for a few minutes until someone IDENTIFIED it, and then it became an IFO. See how easily the mystery is solved?

:- GTTorrance579

+ Are you denying that non-governmental DropShips and war machines have been positively identified in several places all over the planet? Now who's deceived?

:- MrCharybdis111

Everyone in the Black Coast, listen to me! The mind control field is weakened in your area! The time is now to unite and overthrow Oscar's opporessive Towne regime! Rise up!

:- Smoothie7064

+ Why can't it just be a weather balloon? Why are you people so desperate for someone to lie to you? All right, look, I'm done posting here. I've got better things to do than try to talk conspiracy theorists into accepting that they're not important enough for anyone to care whether they wear tinfoil hats. I'm leaving now to go plot your downfall with my alien overlord masters. Bye.

:- GTTorrance

Jerk.

:- MrCharybdis111

## Spirit Cats on Towne?

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12/31/3132

VANARIUM RESERVE—Insignia belonging to the Spirit Cat faction of Clan Nova Cat (led by Prefecture III Senator Kev Rosse) was found early this morning by park rangers in the Vanarium Planetary Reserve. Vanarium is a desert reserve, meaning that little permanent damage was done to the local ecosystem, but this first tangible evidence of extra-planetary factional fighting on Towne had government officials and citizens alarmed.

Scores and scorches in the ground indicate that perhaps half a dozen vehicles and at least one `Mech engaged in battle. Scrub plants and a few rock formations in the area sustained damage, but as park rangers cleared the debris over roughly a square kilometer of ground, a little after dawn, they believed little damage had been done.

Chief Ranger Kaylee Hausen-Thwait oversaw the clean-up effort. "The most unusual thing we found was an enormous gun barrel and short sections of track from what looks like some halftrack vehicle of some kind," she said. "The place is littered with [ammunition] shells too. We'll probably never find them all. This one we found was absolutely huge. I've never seen anything like it."

Despite the carnage, Hausen-Thwait says that casualties were light. "We were surprised we didn't find any human remains. I don't see how a person in one of these vehicles could have survived. They either got out before the tank blew or someone went to a lot of trouble to reclaim the bodies. The lack of scavengers when we got here tells me they probably got out alive." Governor Jonathan Jurik has asked citizens to remain calm and in their homes. The Towne Defense Administration is on full alert for further incursions of Towne airspace. "We are confident in our military's response time and preparedness should attackers threaten a populated area.

So far, the verifiable reports of military action we've seen have been well away from inhabited areas," Jurik said. "If any more incursions should appear, we are ready to defend ourselves."

Former army Major Bryce Shorter, Towne ComStar military commentator paints a grimmer picture for Towne's military defense in case of assault. "What will we do? We're a sparsely populated, peaceful planet suddenly put in a wartime situation."

"Towne has minimal defense capability, but many attractive resources for potential invaders. I think the Towne military is responding properly to the situation, but our current state of defense is inadequate. If, say, former Legate Katana Tormark wants to make Towne a base of operations, I'm not sure Towne defense has the resources to stop her."

"The only thing we've counted on so far is that Towne didn't have anything anyone else wanted," Shorter said. "That might be a false hope."

## Travelers Flock to Towne

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01/01/3133

Despite the crisis that has apparently gripped the entire Inner Sphere and almost sent our world into economic depression, Towne is fast gaining a reputation as a tourist hot spot.

As we all know, Towne is a beautiful world with incredible sights that would take a lifetime to experience fully—and, of course, friendly and courteous people. Unfortunately, travel agents and tourists around the Republic never seemed to realize that—at least until now.

While the Republic of the Sphere is experiencing the kind of shakeup not seen since the Succession Wars, some people are taking the opportunity to go on an adventure of their own. But instead of facing the battles on Addicks or making their way to other standard vacation spots, many are finally heeding the call of Towne.

Apparently all those years of trying to quash the image of Towne as a backwater world filled with simpletons are finally paying off. In the past month, the number of tourist entrance visas has quintupled over last year, and that's just the beginning. Travel agents making the trek along with these groups claim that more and more people are looking for a way to escape the horrors of regular life, and one good way to do that is to escape to a quiet planet.

"I'll be honest. Unless someone used to live here or had relatives here, very few people ever looked to book passage to Towne," said travel agent Terram Golindras. "In fact, unless they had just read a history book on the First Succession War, most didn't even know Towne existed. But when people started coming to me looking for quiet, out-of-the-way worlds to visit, Towne was one of the first places I sent them to."

And the tourists responded with joy. Mr. and Mrs. Carol Radcliffe enjoyed their two weeks on Towne. "We didn't know what to expect, but once we saw how beautiful the Tereborian mountains were at moonrise and just how wonderful the ocean looked on the Rerani Coast ... I don't even have the words," Radcliffe said. "And my wife, ever the history buff, loved the chance to see the old Star League-era buildings in Uthan Hel." Mr. Radcliffe even said he "might be looking for a home here when we retire."

They weren't the only ones to discover the Rerani Coast. Hotels there are completely booked, and travelers are spending millions of C-bills in the surrounding areas. Intra- and intercontinental travel is up 75 percent, and charter flights are booked for months to come, with more than half of the reservations from travel agents, who came to experience the world firsthand before they send their customers here.

"I expect that in the next six months, I'll be sending a lot of clients here," exclaims Kim Kanjori, another travel agent. "I've prebooked hotels, tours and transportation for them. Sure, it's a bit of a risk to make these plans now, but I'm a betting man. I'd normally do this all by HPG, but now that that's not an option, I'd rather do business in person and get some things set up now than have to send clients here blind."

This sudden upturn in tourist business has done more than give a boost to a small industry. Its effects have trickled down through Towne's economy. Businesses once threatened with bankruptcy are, if not exactly thriving, at least keeping their doors open. Tamlin Jones, production manager for a local electronics manufacturer, explains. "Ever since the HPG went down, no one has wanted to make any more purchases than they had to," he says. "We went from full capacity just before the blackout to less than 20 percent a week later. We just had that many people cancel their orders. In the last month, though, we've climbed back up to about 60 percent. We're hoping to be at 75 percent next month, which will keep us going for a while longer."

"It's a sign that people are returning to normalcy," says Governor Jonathan Jurik. "I don't think that everything will return to normal until the HPG is back on-line, but until then, we can take back a little of our lives and even share them with our visitors."

### Towne Log

+ I've run a hotel and restaurant in Cabo for the last ten years, and I gotta say, business is better than its ever been. I don't know who did their jobs, but they did it right. I've done more business in the last month than I think I've done in half a year!  
:- RedSam

+ Of course, man, 'cuz people finally came to their senses and realized what a great place you got. Just wait 'till you crack the cases of the anejo this spring. The agave crop back in '27 was pretty good...  
:- BigMike

+ Oh, man, I can't wait 'till the Blow-Out this year!  
:- Reposado

+ This conversation is nice and all, but what about the facts that this article really tell us. How many of those so-called tourists are still here? Someone is just shipping in a bunch of foreigners and no one thinks that's unusual?  
:- Hippee

+ Leave it to Hippee to spoil everything. Man, can't you see that we're all benefiting from this? If we didn't have those tourist C-Bills, we'd all be looking for non-existent jobs!  
:- Chungabunga

+ RedSam, is Planetus playing the Blow-Out? Man, I gotta go one of these years, no matter what my dad thinks!  
:- Wolfie

+ Here are the facts as we know them to be so that you, too, can know them. The HPG Network goes down, with no satisfactory explanation from ComStar. Then we hear reports of fighting on Addicks. Not long after, riots and other civil unrest breaks out here on Towne. Then, almost magically, tourism jumps by 500% almost overnight. Someone is moving shock troops here under cover. I used to think that it was ComStar and Redburn working together. But the more I look at the evidence, the more that ComStar looks like the sole perpetrator. Look at the huge army they used to have. They want the power they once had back!  
:- FM Luder

+ Oh, boy. Here we go again...  
:- TimE

## Defense Industry Booming On Towne

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01/05/3133

KALE BAY – Citing rumors of war as close as Addicks and the uncertain state of the Republic, leading economist Tyler Stevinson urged investors to buy shares in any of the three defense contractors now forming on Towne, proclaiming every one a “guaranteed winner” for the foreseeable future.

“Just one year ago, if you had asked anyone here about the chances of heavy military industry securing a foothold on Towne, they would have told you to seek help,” Stevinson told INN at the Kale Bay Stock Exchange. “Today is an entirely different story; defense is a guaranteed winner, and the people of Towne want in on the market.”

Stevinson’s remarks came shortly after Whisper Vehicles, a local producer of personal hovercars and other ground-effect recreational and commercial craft, announced its intention to retool its industrial vehicle factory in Corsair Valley to produce hovertanks. The proposed new line of vehicles, which will include a locally produced variant on the popular Scimitar Mark II, is expected to generate more than 5,000 jobs planetwide and could go on-line within six months. This retooling plan follows a similar move earlier this month by Port Howard-based Morris Motors to begin its own line of infantry transports and the surprise formation of Antonelli Militechnologies, Inc. AMI, a military re-engineering firm that plans to offer military upgrade kits and refit services for all manner of civilian ‘Mechs, kicked off the local defense boom when it announced its incorporation in late August.

“The recent collapse of the HPG net and the standoff at our own HPG station have painfully reminded us of the supreme delicacy of the peace we’ve lived under for so long,” AMI founder and CEO Damon Antonelli told INN reporters last week. “Unfortunately, it seems the best-laid plans of men continue to go astray. I share with all my fellow citizens the wish for peace to come again, but if we don’t work to beat our plowshares back into swords, those hopes will end in the fires of war we could have helped keep in check.”

AMI, Morris and Whisper aren’t the only local businesses already turning toward the military market, however. Several local firearms manufacturers, particularly Kale City-based Kohlat Industries, have announced their own intentions to increase production and open new manufacturing lines in everything from heavy support machine guns to vehicular-scale missile systems.

“Though it may seem a pessimistic sign of the times, the fact is the market figures don’t lie,” says Stevinson. “Even Devlin Stone couldn’t take the thirst for war out of mankind forever. The smart investor should get on board, not only for the sake of profit, but for the sake of our world’s greater good as well. It’s win-win for everyone.”

## Interesting Times, Dangerous Places #344: "The Angel of Death"

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01/06/3133

Over the years, I have garnered something of a reputation with the armed forces of the various nations, lordlings and factions of the Inner Sphere and Periphery. For some reason, they seem to believe my presence heralds a coming conflict, regardless of what their political masters may be telling them. Some are good-humored about it; others downright hostile. On Mansu-ri, I was welcomed with beer and food, the Oriente soldiers willing to share all they had with this reporter despite the predations of the Andurien attackers. On Tapachula, however, I was forced to disguise myself as an old woman to avoid the attentions of irate soldiers, who believed my presence had damned their cause. Indeed, many soldiers call me the "Angel of Death," believing I must have some great insight that allows me to predict when and where conflicts will take place. There's no mystery, however—just a combination of far-reaching contacts and more than thirty years of experience as a field journalist. It certainly wasn't anything more that prompted my latest trip to Ankaa.

Renowned as a major site of heavy industry—the largest employer is DiNapoli Industries, a subsidiary of Bannson Heavy Industries—Ankaa is of great importance to the Republic. Even before I heard rumors of a campaign targeting the world, it seemed likely that one of the petty lords seeking to exploit the recent problems with interstellar communications would target the strategic resource. I was at Tybalt, returning from the recent contretemps on Shedar, when rumors of a Wolf strike force heading deep into Prefecture IV came to my attention. While there were plenty of other possible targets, Ankaa struck me as the most likely—a prelude to a wider war in the region. I quickly called in a number of favors and arranged transport.

That was how I came to be sitting in Anqabad, having sweet mint tea with a Nova Cat Sufi. On the surface, the serene aura of this predominantly Muslim world is unchanged, but in the suks people are already talking of the war that is looming ever closer. Rumors have reached me that the Wolves are inbound—the general populace is not yet aware of it, though many suspect—and will be here in six days, their long trek from the jump point a side effect of the system's intense white sun. Will Kal Radick's forces land a hammer blow on the pacifistic population, or will Ankaa simply be incorporated into the Steel Wolves' domain? As much as I would like to believe that blood will not be shed here, decades of experience have amply demonstrated the futility of such hopes.

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*INN is pleased to announce a syndication deal with Black Border publications for the rights to publish articles by famed political and war correspondent Cameron Shaw. Mr. Shaw is best known for his coverage of the ongoing conflict in the former Free Worlds League. His knack for being in the right place (or the wrong place, depending on your point of view) at the right time has put him in the thick of many of the great engagements of recent years. He reported from Albi on Manihiki as forces of the Regular Fiefs seized the city, and from Sophie's World when the Oriente Protectorate and Marik-Stewart Commonwealth clashed for control of that strategic world. He is known for his long-running syndicated diary "Interesting Times, Dangerous Places," in which he portrays the great events of our time with a mix of humor and pathos.*

## Interesting Times, Dangerous Places #345: "Avalanche"

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01/08/3133

"Once again, you appear where you are not wanted, Cameron Shaw."

It was not the most auspicious way to begin. The Wolves had been in Ankaa for three days, a largely peaceful occupation in which life went on much as it had before, when I ran afoul of one of their patrols. I knew the Wolves would want to "talk" to me if they discovered I was on world—the military never seems to like having journalists around; it rankles their innate secrecy, I suppose—and I took pains to keep a low profile while documenting the goings-on in the city. Eventually, however, my luck ran out, and I was picked up during a sweep of the Doha Suq. They knew my name and exactly where to look, so some little bird must have told them where I was. Hence my appearance before the invasion commander.

"Nice to see you too, Sadia Wolf," I replied. I had interviewed Star Captain Sadia Wolf eighteen months ago for a background piece examining claims that the Republic military had been staging covert operations in the Marik-Stewart Commonwealth. An aggressive hard-liner with the EI-imaging implants favored by the Crusader faction that sought to subjugate the Inner Sphere in the days before the Jihad, she hadn't liked me then either. "Many thanks for your hospitality." Her eyes narrowed, but she showed no other outward sign of emotion.

"I want to know who leaked our plans to you," she demanded coldly. She clearly didn't want to believe that an assault on Ankaa was an obvious choice for anyone seeking to dominate Prefecture IV. She seemed unusually tense and kept probing, but to no avail, and eventually she capitulated. "So no power sent to you Ankaa to spy on us, quineg?" I confirmed this, but still she was unsatisfied. "And you have no knowledge of the forces sent by Aaron Sandoval to seize Ankaa?" she snapped.

So that was what had been bothering her. Another of the lordlings—Duke Aaron Sandoval, Lord Governor of Prefecture IV—also sought to control Ankaa. His Swordsworn had already made a name for themselves on Tikonov. Was it coincidence or a response to the Wolves? Probably a combination. Sandoval would seek to restrict Kal Radick's advantages, and Ankaa was an obvious target. "It's news to me, though not wholly unexpected," I told her. "When will they arrive?"

Wolf didn't seem happy with me. Another commander might have locked me in the brig until the situation was resolved, claiming my presence represented a security risk, but her Clan honor disdained such underhanded dealings. If I was working for Sandoval—and she seemed to accept my assurances that I wasn't—then it would merely be another obstacle for her to overcome, a way to demonstrate her skill and resolve. "Be thankful that Kal Radick enjoys reading your work" was all she said as her attendants—a pair of hulking Elementals—escorted me from her presence and deposited me unceremoniously back on the streets of Anqabad.

Wolf hadn't answered my question about Sandoval's forces, nor did the Elementals seem inclined to talk. Instead, I made my way back to my lodgings and set about contacting my sources in the local militia. That proved harder than expected. Wolf had placed the small Anqabad militia under Steel Wolf control, and they seemed to be incommunicado. Nonetheless, I persisted, and after about five hours I was able to reach one of my contacts.

"I can't tell you much," he said, "but the Wolves are getting ready for something." I'd seen some signs of preparations at the Wolf compound, and there had been military vehicles on the streets of Anqabad all day. "We've set up a defensive perimeter around the city, but I have no idea where the invaders might strike. It could be any—"

A sudden ripping noise came from outside, rising to a roar before terminating in a dull boom. Communicator still in hand, I rose and peered out at the early evening sky. Several streaks of fire lanced down from the heavens before exploding into star shells of white material. As I watched, another drop-pod burst open, disgorging its battle-armored troops to join the 'Mechs already descending toward the ground on jets of flame.

"I think I can see where they're going to land," I told my militia contact. The Swordsworn commander had chosen to drop directly from orbit into the city, a tactic known as an Avalanche Drop: extremely dangerous, but one that demonstrated courage and determination. This was going to be an interesting fight.

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## Ecoterrorists Strike Helen

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01/09/3133

A holocube from our acolytes on Ozawa reports that ecoterrorists on Helen have vandalized or destroyed more than a dozen Forestry 'Mechs used for logging.

Unlike Towne, which has done an excellent job of weathering the economic firestorm that followed the HPG collapse, Helen's economy is reported to be unstable. The planet depends largely on tourism and resource exportation for income, and the fall of the HPG net has depressed both industries.

Helen is a verdant planet, with expansive tracts of hardwoods. In a mixed blessing, the burgeoning wars have kept logging and mining operations in better shape than the travel industry. However, this could change if any of the several radical ecological preservation groups operating on the planet become more aggressive in their efforts.

Alpine Resources Limited has been the largest target of threats and actions by radical ecological groups. Brett Turner, CEO of ARL, has been an outspoken opponent of these groups, accusing them of harming humans. He has publicly debated ecological spokespersons in the past, and he remains a strong proponent of aggressive exploitation of natural resources.

Commenting on the sabotage, Turner said, "We're all living on the same planet, and it frankly looks as if these ecoterrorists don't realize that.

"Given the extremities of our situation, I made the decision to break some ecological policies the company has had in place in the past. If we kept up this pace for 10 or 20 years, yes, we could be in danger of harming the ecology. But Helen is a vast, vast wilderness. That doesn't seem likely.

"And even if it is, the alternative is economic collapse, and I'm not willing to accept that when aggressively increasing logging production can keep thousands of humans from losing their jobs or starving.

"Many of these ecoterrorists would like you to believe that tourism can eliminate the need for resource harvesting. But it's difficult to encourage people to visit our planet when they're concerned about whether they'll still have a home when they get back. I'm all for tourism, and I'm as invested in it as anybody on Helen. But be realistic. Harvesting is not wrong. I would say that I'm doing something very right, and I'll keep it up for the good of the planet, and, more important, the people who live on the planet."

Helen's Daughters, a radical feminist ecological group, has taken credit for three of the recent monkeywrenchings, a term for the violent sabotage of resource-harvesting machinery. A statement posted anonymously to a news board on Helen's planetnet after the mass monkeywrenching said, "We womyn [sic] will not stand by to see our mother raped by moneygrubbers who claim to be working in her best interests. We will not be party to feeding wars on this planet or any other fought for foolish dominance or patriarchal oppression. We WILL do everything in our power to protect our mother. This is only the start of our efforts. This is not a warning. This is a threat. Stop raping our mother immediately, or more damage to your precious machines will result."



## Interesting Times, Dangerous Places #346: "Knife Fight"

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01/13/3133

The first moments of the Swordsworn's assault on the heart of Anqabad were very nearly my last. Grabbing my recording gear, I headed out into the city with scant thought for safety. A chunk of drop-pod flattened a nearby ground car, peppering the street with glass and metal. A man standing where I'd been moments earlier collapsed in a pool of blood. Others moved to help the fallen man, and I continued my journey into the maelstrom. It was easy to decide where to go: loud bangs and flashes marked the site of conflict between the Wolves and the inbound Swordsworn.

I'd gone about two blocks before I saw the first signs of combat: the wreckage of a militia Shandra that was still smoking after being hit by heavy-caliber weapons. There was blood on the pilot's seat—probably enough that he or she was dead—but there was no body. Presumably his comrades had extricated the driver and taken him to the militia first aid center about six blocks east. Another block down, a groundcar had had its hood crumpled by a massive blow. Though distorted by the engine block, the dent was clearly the footprint of a 'Mech—a big one, no doubt the same one that had totaled the scout vehicle. Then, a dozen yards up the street, a glint of light on moving metal caught my eye. I trained my camera on the spot and saw a militia trooper looking back at me. He grinned and lifted his weapon, waving me over.

I dashed across the street to the doorway where he stood. A whole squad waited just inside the building, their weapons at the ready. "You might want to steer clear of this area, Mr. Shaw," said the fellow who had summoned me, a sergeant whose name tag said Lee. "There're several squads of Hauberks tasked to clear houses and secure the district for the Sworders. They shoot first and ask questions later."

"You don't know me very well, do you?" I asked, smiling, and he grinned back. "So what's the situation?"

"A demi-Company of Sworders dropped right into the city center and are advancing into the government district," he said. "They're up against roughly the same number of Wolves, who are attempting to push them back. The situation is fluid, though most of the fighting is about three blocks over on National." I asked if he knew who the Swordsworn commander was. "Some Marik woman by the name of Jameson seems in charge," he said. "Riding a Ryoken. You heard of her?"

If only he'd known. "You could say that." He seemed intrigued, but he never got a chance to dig deeper. On the far side of the room, one of the troopers opened up with his rifle at a target down the street. "Battle armor coming up the left side. Half a dozen suits," the man shouted. More than enough to beat us, he didn't have to add. Lee turned to me. "You'd better get out of here, Mr. Shaw. This isn't going to be pretty. There's a back door over there that leads into an alley." I held out my hand, and he shook it. "Go now."

Snapping a last picture of the determined militia soldiers, I did. Sergeant Lee had already turned away and was directing the actions of his men. A man-pack laser aimed out the window, sniping at the approaching armored infantry. Even so, their chances were slim, and I wondered what would become of him and his squad. Just more statistics in this new war?

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## Interesting Times, Dangerous Places #347: "Impasse"

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01/15/3133

The sounds of battle raged all around me, but I was almost at National Avenue before I saw the first actual non-infantry combat. A Wolf Demolisher II was sniping around the corner of a building at a target I couldn't see, the return fire gouging divots from the buildings around the tank and raining debris onto the street. The tank's attendant infantry—a necessity in urban warfare to defend against the enemy's foot soldiers—had ducked behind their charge for cover. The Demolisher was clearly in bad shape: one severed track lay on the roadway, and numerous impact scars and burns marked its hull, testifying to the barrage of fire to which it had been subjected. Its turret squealed as it tracked left and right—the target was presumably maneuvering—in a way that suggested damage there too. Carefully, I edged up to the corner of the building and gingerly looked around it to see what the tank was facing.

Across the junction, a bird-legged BattleMech walked left and right, its quad weapons barrels tracking the Demolisher and spitting out a stream of shells. It was the Ryoken II Sergeant Lee had mentioned, and it clearly outmatched the tank. For a moment I wondered why the pilot was putting up with the tank's return fire when she could simply leave the crippled vehicle where it lay. Then I saw the flashes inside several adjacent buildings. Foot soldiers—I couldn't tell if they were armored, but Lee had mentioned Hauberk suits—attempting to seize control of the structures. The 'Mech was making sure that no Wolf infantry moved to challenge them, at least until their control of the building was secure.

This situation continued for several minutes, during which I was twice forced to duck for cover as shells detonated too close for comfort. But then the Ryoken became distracted by something else outside my field of vision and reduced the fire directed at the tank in favor of this new opponent. Whatever it was, the new enemy—presumably a 'Mech of some sort—was more of a match for the Ryoken. It struck me as a strange sort of justice that this Clan design was now being used by pro-Davion forces against the Clan-origin Steel Wolves. What would Katya Kerensky have thought?

Deciding on discretion, the Ryoken placed the corner of a building between itself and the Demolisher, though I could still see both from my vantage point. The 'Mech pilot was clearly weighing the odds. She could protect the infantry, or she could protect herself. Doing both would be a recipe for disaster, dividing her weapons and attention. There must have been a comm-link between the Ryoken and the troops in the building, because after a few minutes, battle armor started to appear at the doors and windows, sniping at the tank before leaping clear and moving to surround the 'Mech. I counted almost two dozen Hauberk suits surrounding the 'Mech, shooting at the infantry and the enemy 'Mech I couldn't see. Then, as one, they began to withdraw, firing as they went.

I learned later that despite her troops' success in seizing half of the city, Lieutenant Colonel Diane Jameson had ordered the withdrawal, knowing the Wolves were too heavily entrenched to be driven out with the forces she had on hand. Any attempt to push farther into Anqabad would not only have cost the lives of her troops but would also have jeopardized any chance of success on Ankaa. Instead, she would seek to rendezvous with her reinforcements. The question was, would Sadia Wolf and her troops give the Swordsworn the opportunity to mass against them?

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## Swordsworn, Highlanders Representatives on Towne

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01/18/3133

PORT ARTHUR – DropShips bearing the colors and insignia of the Davion Guards and the First Kearny Highlanders landed yesterday at the Prince John Spaceport outside Port Arthur, each carrying representatives from the Swordsworn and Highlanders factions, respectively. Planetary Legate Jonathan Jurik, upon confirming that both delegations have been received on Towne with open arms, has assured INN that the arrival of neither vessel heralds a looming invasion of this world, even as reports still circulate of the Highlanders’ recent victory over Duchess Katana Tormark’s Dragon’s Fury faction on Addicks.

“[The delegates] have each come to deliver word and present a forum for discussion on the state our two Prefectures,” Oscar told INN reporters in a press conference this morning, referencing Prefecture III, over which Highlanders leader Tara Campbell still claims the title of Prefect, and Prefecture IV, where Duke Aaron Sandoval and his Swordsworn faction are based. “In light of the breakdown of interstellar communications, it has become clear that acting in ignorance, or on the basis of half-truths will only create further panic.”

When asked to elaborate further on the identities of the delegates and the news on the Republic at large they have come to bring, Jurik identified the Highlanders’ primary representative as Captain Tara Bishop, whose forces recently defended Addicks from an attempted invasion by the Dragon’s Fury, and stated that the Swordsworn representative was Captain Ramon Mendoza. Jurik went on to say that the arrival of both delegates was kept from the media to prevent an incident at the spaceport.

“There was no fanfare, no red carpet thrown out, for either of them,” said John Chapmann, a tower watch officer for Prince John Spaceport, who witnessed the arrivals. “Instead, a pair of black hovervans simply skirted out to meet our guests as they debarked, and took off for the city. When the Highlanders dropped in next, it was like déjà vu, with the vans and all.”

The arrival of the two delegates proves to many that concerns about the breakdown of central authority throughout the Republic are very justified. The recent fighting on Addicks, just one jump from Towne, and subsequent arrival of Captain Bishop, largely credited with the successful defense of that world, brings what many hoped were rumors to stark reality. At the same time, the arrival of a representative identifying himself as part of the Davion Guards, of the Swordsworn faction that recently clashed with the Steel Wolves on Ankaa and elsewhere, further underscores the continuing factional splintering of the Republic. Leaders of both factions have come into direct conflict with their political and military partners in each Prefecture, conflicts that have already lead to open fighting on several Republic worlds.

Towne, however, is in no danger, according to Bishop, who agreed to answer a few questions by phone earlier today.

“As one of the few worlds in the Inner Sphere – as far as we know – with a functioning HPG, Towne represents an ideal clearing house to my people and my superiors,” Bishop said, “I can assure the people of Towne that we Highlanders have no intentions of upsetting the peace here. In fact, we have come in the hopes of securing it until the HPG crisis passes.”

According to Bishop, despite the breakdown of local authority, the Highlanders remain dedicated to restoring peace throughout the Republic in the name of the Republic, but she declined to comment on the ultimate intent of the Swordsworn representative, who could not be reached for comment.

“As far as I know,” Bishop told INN reporters, “Duke Sandoval’s men are declaring for House Davion, but if that’s true, the Republic and the Davions have enjoyed a peaceful relationship since the very beginning, and it’s just inconceivable to me that their goals would be anything less than assisting the Republic in its hour of need.”

Sources at the capital have told INN that each representative in turn has already met with Governor Oscar and Legate Jurik in private, but there is still no word on what was discussed in either meeting.

### Towne Log

+ That’s the biggest load of bull I heard yet from INN! First, they tell us the Cats have been fighting in our back yard, and then, they say we have Sandoval’s and Campell’s lackeys stopping over for milk and tea? The Republic’s going to Hades in a knapsack, and they want to say we’re in no danger? I was born at night, but it wasn’t LAST night, you know!

:- WetWillie

+ Has anyone here considered the possibility that this whole thing’s on the up-and-up? Maybe Bishop and Mendoza really are here to start some kind of dialogue. As long as people talk, nobody’s shooting, right?

:- Pooky

+ Optimistic, Pooky, but you really ought to read your history. Having your troops shooting each other while you’re sitting at the negotiating table provides an interesting underscore for political debate. I did like Bishop’s line, though, suggesting that Sandoval should tow the same party line as the Highlanders. I can’t put my finger on it, but something tells me she’s more “on the level” than anyone else in that article. Then again, I can’t say that this article really tells us anything at all.

:- Chungabunga

+ Okay, so let me see if I can get this straight. We have Sandoval versus Radick, Campell versus Tormark, and ... am I missing anybody?

:- Jamjam

+ Bannson's fighting Rosse over Ozawa. (Funny that Katana's nowhere to be seen on her old stomping grounds, eh?)  
:- FMLurder

+ Crudstunk! By the way I'm looking at it, then, that's six supposedly respectable leaders all going their own separate ways in the local area alone! If it's this bad here, what's the rest of the Sphere looking like? And if it's so hard for us to see, with our HPG working, how the hell is setting up shop for talks here gonna help anybody?  
:- Jamjam

## **Bannson Industries, PJEL, Vie for Bankrupt Norne Aerospace**

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01/19/3133

KALE BAY – In the ongoing race to claim the high ground in the interstellar shipping industry, Bannson Industries and local rivals Prince John Express Lines (PJEL) have both made bids for Norne Aerospace Corporation. Norne Aerospace declared bankruptcy early last month, citing sagging fourth quarter earnings that followed a series of deadly and much-publicized accidents involving their small fleet of converted Fury-class cargo transports.

The Bakersport-based Norne Aerospace offered regular cargo and passenger DropShip services to customers on Addicks, Helen, Murchison and Towne, and claimed nearly 3,000 employees in 3131, with a fleet of four cargo-converted Fury DropShips, one older Mule DropShip, and a dozen small shuttlecraft. However, disasters in recent months have critically damaged the shipping company's reputation on the market. The worst of these, the crash of the Sharon Morris near the Felkra continent on Murchison, cost the lives of all hands, dumped over 700 tons of hazardous petrochemicals into the local ocean, and was attributed to poor maintenance standards on the vessel. The bidding for the now-bankrupt Norne Aerospace opened yesterday, following the settlement of several lawsuits stemming from that August crash, with Bannson and PJEL making the highest offers.

The bid for Norne marks the first major effort by Port Howard-based PJEL to acquire another company's holdings since 3125, when the company acquired Towne Charters, a recreational tour line bankrupted by poor accounting practices. Norne Aerospace, however, represents the biggest acquisition for PJEL, though many believe the much smaller PJEL will not be able to compete with the Bannson Industries megacorporation. But the mood for PJEL remains optimistic.

"In the end, it's not so much about the money, as it is about the whole package deal," said Richard Harvey, vice president of PJEL. "Norne's executives have expressed their wish to keep their people employed and safe despite the unfortunate turn of events that's forced them to this point, and our package deal promises both."

Harvey went on to add that the PJEL offer includes a clause stipulating that no more than twenty percent of Norne's workforce will be cut in the buy-out, which includes the entire space fleet, dock crews, and administrative staff, and that shipments to worlds where hostilities are in progress will be aborted until calm is restored. The latter seems to be an acknowledgement of Bannson's own shift to a more aggressive policy, with recent fighting on Ozawa between BI security troops and the Spirit Cat faction.

Bannson executives, however, refute the implications made by Harvey.

"The way Mr. Harvey has it, one would think we were some kind of corporate pirates or something," quipped Klaus Lettig, local director of purchasing for Bannson Industries. "The conflict on Ozawa is not some noble squabble or political conquest, but a legitimate defense of BI's interests on that planet, made necessary by Duchess Tormark's recent departure from the area.

"As to the issue of layoffs, the fact is Mr. Bannson cares very much about the common man, and feels keenly the effects of having to let anyone go who can't help pull the company's weight. Unfortunately, no company – from the PJELs to the BIs – can stay afloat by just buying up other businesses on a whim, without being willing to drop a few redundant positions. That may not be the kind of thing all the employees want to hear, but rest assured, it's the best way to keep most of them employed."

Lettig adds that, should excess layoffs become necessary in the event that Norne Aerospace accepts his bid, Bannson industries offers a generous severance package to all affected Norne Aerospace employees, based on their seniority.

### **Towne Log**

+ Another buy-out from our friends at Bannson Industries!? Why doesn't he just send his thugs here, too?

:- Hippee

+ Don't tempt him, Hippee. There weren't any BI "interests" on Ozawa worth sending 'Mechs there over. I don't care what his money-grubbing Lyran Lettig says, Bannson's only looking out for Number One.

:- Kemosabe

+ I don't know what you all have against big corps. At least Bannson's a commoner, not some schmuck who got money, power, and an army because he was born into it. If he wants to carve out an empire of his own while the nobles and Clammers give into their old hatreds, more power to him!

:- RepMan

+ You're serious? You'd give free license to build a little empire to a guy who buys and sells people's futures? I've got two words for you, RepMan: DiNapoli Industries. I'd rather see PJEL get this one, just to give BI a reality check!

:- Kemosabe

+ I'm not so sure about that, Kemo. Norne went under mainly thanks to dumping all that jet fuel into the North Felkra Sea, but the whole problem really goes back to poor safety standards company-wide, and PJEL wants to keep most of those responsible? That's courting disaster.

:- Chungabunga

## Interesting Times, Dangerous Places: #348 "The Midnight Sun"

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01/20/3133

In the chaos of the Swordsworn's withdrawal from Anqabad, it wasn't much of a challenge to slip out of the city. There were a few hairy moments when I had to circumvent Wolf patrols (I'm sure Sadia didn't want me wandering around too much), but my local guide, who doesn't want to be named for obvious reasons, knew the best places to lie up and wait until they passed. The time taken in the endeavor almost cost me dearly—not in the physical or monetary sense but in the currency of my job: the story.

The Swordsworn didn't just disengage from the Wolves at Anqabad; they made a mad dash in an effort to put breathing room between themselves and Sadia Wolf's forces. Diane Jameson should've known better—the young officer I knew back in the League wouldn't have bolted that way—and I can presume only that she was rattled by the carnage in the city. Rather than winning her breathing room, this apparent flight convinced the Wolves that the Sworders were on the brink of collapse. This awakened in them the predator instinct of which many Clanners are so proud, particularly hardliners like Sadia Wolf—those who were once called "Crusaders." As with any canine, running prey made them only more determined to pursue, and by the time I was free of the city, the front lines had moved dozens of kilometers. It would be a struggle to catch up.

Luckily, some of the planetary militia, drafted into service by the Wolves as rear-echelon convoy security, were more than happy to give me a lift in exchange for a chance to hear news from elsewhere in The Republic. I expected a trip of a few hours, but as the battle lines moved steadily north, we were forced to journey ever onward. The soldiers provided me with food and shelter during the long trek—a degree of hospitality in adversity I'd hardly been shown in any of my prior travels. As ever, a few were ingratiating, wanting me to mention them in ITDP, but most were genuinely friendly and helpful, even if they didn't understand my reasons to voluntarily live my life in one war zone after another. That's something I've already discussed in the column, so I won't repeat it here, save to say that our discussions were lively and entertaining.

On the third day, by which point the warm/temperate climate had begun to give way to arctic conditions, we finally caught up with the trailing elements of the Wolf force and learned that the Swordsworn were attempting to take refuge in the icy hills and canyons of the Great Maze. Even my resources would be hard-pressed to get me into that frigid wasteland and support me for any length of time. The militia certainly didn't have the knowledge of or equipment for the arctic wastes, and so we parted company. I then began to seek the services of a local guide to take me to the fighting. Finding someone who knew the lands around the Great Maze wasn't a problem. Finding someone who knew the Maze itself, or who would admit to having this knowledge, given the military value of that information, was another matter. It was another two days, this time in less-hospitable company, before I found a willing guide whose fee was, in polite terms—not those I used when I first heard his demands—extremely outrageous. But now at least we were heading into the heart of the Maze, into the heart of the battle.

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## Interesting Times, Dangerous Places: #349 "On Thin Ice"

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01/23/3133

I've been to cold places before, but the chill of Ankaa's north pole seeped through all the protective clothing that my guide convinced me to wear. We drove onward through the starkly beautiful landscape, with towers and canyons of ice as far as the eye could see. From one vantage point, we could see flashes and palls of smoke in the distance that signaled our objective. I asked Ari, my guide, how far away the explosions were—they seemed to be a kilometer of two at most—and he shocked me by saying they were probably closer to 80 clicks, at least another day's travel. Ari wasn't the most talkative of people. In all the time I was with him, we probably spoke only a hundred words, but he was quietly competent, and I was glad for his skill.

It was late the next day when we encountered troops for the first time, a battle armor-suited patrol from the Swordsworn who recognized our sincerity and directed us to their encampment. The base was a mix of prefabricated structures and caverns carved into icy cliffs—a far cry from the public perception of a military encampment. But the construction materials were typical of the chaotic field camps I've seen over the years. A few words in the right ears quickly got us into the ad-hoc hanger, where technicians were crawling over a motley collection of 'Mechs. I could see a couple of upgraded AgroMechs and what appeared to be an unmodified miner, as well as a Centurion and the shattered remains of a Spider, its blue Swordsworn livery badly pocked and scarred, and its right jump jet and pseudowing torn away. No Ryoken though, I observed.

"Came up against a point of Elementals," said one of the technicians in response to my queries about the Spider. "Jackson was able to hold them off for a while, but not long enough." The 'Mech's cockpit was a blackened scar; the Wolf troopers had clearly gone after the pilot in a "headhunter" attack that had been introduced by the Clans when they invaded 80 years ago—a reflection of the relative value of machines and pilots. To the Clan's thinking—as the Steel Wolves still believed, apparently—there were always more warriors, but never enough machines. So the most efficient way of neutralizing a 'Mech was to take out its pilot.

"Yes, Elementals have been a major problem," said one of the pilots a few minutes after I'd been ushered into their ready room and handed a cup of steaming tea. "It's too cold for unsuited infantry to operate here, and many of our conventional 'Mechs are having difficulty in the low temperatures." I'd heard of petrochemical fuels freezing on worlds back in the League, another reason why the armed forces of the Captain-Generals preferred fusion-powered war machines. We've lost a couple of pilots to the cold, too." Because the average MechWarrior wore shorts and a T-shirt in the cockpit to ameliorate the effects of excess heat, I could imagine the problems that would ensue if one of them had to eject. "Yes, they have cold weather gear in the escape kits built into their ejector seats, but those are good for only a short period. And with all the anomalies and signal interference in the canyons, it can be hours before the SAR teams get there." Most MechWarriors were always on guard for the debilitating effects of heat, but the enemy here was the cold.

We chatted for a while, but eventually I steered the conversation to the present situation and the Swordsworn's status after the withdrawal from Anqabad. "We're holding our own," said the pilot I'd been speaking to. He suddenly became nervous and looked behind me. I heard a click as the hammer of a pistol locked back, ready to fire.

"You know, Cameron, I don't really want to have to shoot you as a spy," said a female voice, tinged with the accent of the Marik-Stewart Commonwealth.

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*INN is pleased to announce a syndication deal with Black Border publications for the rights to publish articles by famed political and war correspondent Cameron Shaw. Mr. Shaw is best known for his coverage of the ongoing conflict in the former Free Worlds League. His knack for being in the right place (or the wrong place, depending on your point of view) at the right time has put him in the thick of many of the great engagements of recent years. He reported from Albi on Manihiki as forces of the Regular Fiefs seized the city, and from Sophie's World when the Oriente Protectorate and Marik-Stewart Commonwealth clashed for control of that strategic world. He is known for his long-running syndicated diary "Interesting Times, Dangerous Places," in which he portrays the great events of our time with a mix of humor and pathos.*

## Interesting Times, Dangerous Places: #350 "Fight or Flight"

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01/25/3133

I turned, slowly, to face the too-familiar voice. "Hello, Diane. I didn't realize you were here." With the exception of her clothing—she wore the green and blue favored by the Swordsworn rather than the purples of the Mariks—she seemed little changed from when we'd last met. Where was that?

"Well, I see you've not changed much since Sadurni," she said.

"I thought it was New Delos?" I quipped, perhaps not wisely. The old Diane would've just scowled at me. I wasn't so sure about this pro-FedSuns incarnation. She now wore the insignia of a Lieutenant-Colonel rather than her old Lieutenants bars. I pushed. "Congratulations on the promotion."

"You've not changed," she said, easing off the hammer and sliding the automatic back into its holster. She pulled up a chair and sat down heavily. "But I'm serious about the spy thing. No freebies."

"Di . . ." She scowled and pursed her lips. I remembered that look and the temper it reflected, but pressed on anyway. "I may be after a story, but I have no desire to get people killed. I can't file anything without your assistance or until I'm back in Anqabad anyway, so why don't you just trust me?" For once, I added mentally. "Think of me as a historian rather than a journalist." She gave me a stony stare, then decided.

"Okay. No releases without my approval?" I agreed.

It appeared that the Wolves had pushed the Swordsworn back into the Great Maze but, as I'd already heard, the landscape played havoc with their sensors. In the close confines of the Maze, the Clanners were unable to bring their full might to bear on the Swordsworn. This gave the defenders a substantial advantage by allowing them to shift their forces to meet each Wolf assault and crush them, albeit at a price like the Spider I'd seen in the 'Mech bay. "And the present dispositions?"

"We're holding, pretty much. I think the Wolves have given up." She didn't know Sadia Wolf, and I told her as much. "Is the great Cameron Shaw taking sides?" she asked, a smile tugging at her thin lips. For a moment, I was back in the League, when both of us were somewhat younger and less restrained, but then reality took hold once more.

"If you'd read my columns, you'd already have an assessment of Wolf. She's old-school." Meaning her attitude and practices were more akin to those who led the Clan invasion rather than modern "enlightened" Clanners like Kev Rosse. I drained my mug. "You know she has EI?" EI was an acronym for Enhanced Imaging implants, devices that fed 'Mech sensor signals directly into the recipient's brain, usually at the cost of the user's sanity. That got me a raised eyebrow. "Again, public domain." I could almost hear the ideas rattling inside her brain.

There was a knock at the door. "Enter," Diane called. An orderly came in and handed her a handset. She listened for a moment, and then acknowledged the report. She turned back to me, her expression smug. "It appears that the Wolves have withdrawn. Not entirely, I'll admit, but far enough. Taking time to rest and repair." The smile faded from her face and her eyes locked on a point in space. She sat there for thirty seconds, which felt more like minutes, then suddenly stood and turned to the orderly. "Tell Goldstein to saddle up Beta. It's time we took back the initiative." She turned to me, and I really didn't like the look on her face. "You like being in the heart of the battle, don't you? You're about to get your chance again."

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## Elections Go On Despite Uncertain Times

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01/27/3133

PORT HOWARD-What promised to be an election year charged with debate over the rights of Clan citizens, increased military spending, and a looming crisis with the Capellan Confederation took an unexpected turn as the HPGs around The Republic crashed without warning. And yet, in every city on Towne and across the Prefecture at large, citizens went to the polls, turning out in near-record numbers to cast their votes in every race, from the sheriff of their local township to their planetary Senators.

On Towne, many of the early winners at the polls were challengers, mostly from the Towne-First party, rather than the incumbent Nationalist party officials, who have been traditionally favored. INN political analyst, Dr. Stefan Marshall, attributes much of this upset to the recent Republic-wide crisis and recent news of fighting close to Towne.

"Only months ago, anyone betting on Towne-First to gain seats in this election would have been classified a fool," Marshall said. "But events since last August have shaken people up. All the policies and the sense of certainty made possible by The Republic, to whom the Nationalists are most commonly connected, virtually vanished overnight, replaced by a sense of fear and paranoia. Suddenly, all the local issues, rather than the interstellar scene, became paramount in everyone's mind, especially if they related to defense and security, which are a major part of the Towne-First platform."

With only an estimated 50 million citizens of Towne's 614 million population eligible to vote, final results in the elections remain undetermined. Presently, Towne-First candidates are currently enjoying a 39 percent share of the planetary vote, with local Nationalists holding a respectable 26 percent, and Republicans at 22 percent.

In the Zamora province on Hyboria, Kelly Sherwood, Towne-First candidate for Zamora's Senate seat, has already accepted a concession speech from her incumbent opponent, Senator Philip Genakis of the Nationalist party.

"I wish my honorable opponent all the best, and congratulation her on a race well won," Genakis said before teary-eyed supporters. "A tough road lies ahead, and I don't envy anyone who must tread upon it."

On The Republic-wide scale, issues range from military budget proposals from Galaxy Commander Kev Rosse to the ongoing debate to lower citizenship requirements put forth by the Immigrant Citizens Coalition. Other matters, such as the recent push by House Liao for the return of former Capellan Confederation worlds and the sagging Republic-wide economy, were also on the minds of voters before the recent collapse of the communications network made all considerations virtually irrelevant.

Early indications from nearby worlds (information brought by JumpShips, meaning their reliability is somewhat suspect), including Quentin and Galatia, show a similar trend against incumbent Nationalists, with isolationists claiming over 35 percent of the votes on Quentin and a 43 percent majority on Galatia.

"The crisis at large has turned everybody inward," remarked Heinrich Robert, an aide to Governor Jonathan Jurik, who is known for his strong ties to the Towne-First party. "This isn't necessarily a bad thing, as we must all-for the time being at least-be ready to fend for ourselves until The Republic can again restore order and peace."

### Towne Log

+ GAAAAAAH! Head for the hills, boys and girls! Town-First is taking over! We're doomed! Doomed, I tell you!  
:- RepMan

+ Get a hold of yourself, will you? So your precious Republicans lost again? It's not like the rest of the planet wasn't already tired of their inane banter and constant push to put money in corporate pockets.  
:- JSBean

+ You know, as much as I hate the idea of siding with anything said by RepMan, I have to here. This ain't about the Republicans losing (again), it's about TF taking over in the planetary Senate. It's bad enough having a pro-TF governor, but if the entire legislature turns inward, we're gonna wind up cut off from every planet in the Prefecture by the time ComStar gets the lights working again!  
:- FMLurder

+ This is bad because? . . .  
:- WetWillie

+ Because the theory goes that any nation, world, or alliance that goes about sticking its head in the sand during a time of great upheaval is inherently doomed to either get a) wiped out by the next conquering army or b) wipe itself out while repeating the mistakes of the past. Oh, I just empathized with FMLurder. Oh, my aching head. . . .  
:- Chungabunga

+ \*Gasp!\*

:- FMLurder

+ Or maybe, just maybe, we'll survive the coming firestorms you doomsayers are all talking about. I think for a change the people of this ball of mud have finally done something right by voting in TF. Hell, look at the history books, even. Of all the Great Houses, Liao came out of the Jihad more or less okay because they didn't go about helping their fellow states, but took on

the WoBs alone.  
:- PhazeOne

+ Revisionist! The Cappies got dusted in the Jihad. They survived only because the rest of the allies were pounding the Blakies from every other angle.  
:- WetWillie

## Serpent Siren Sighted near Stygian Mining Platform

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02/02/3133

TRASCIO-The mining port city of Trascio, located on the southern edge of the Stygia province, was abuzz this morning with another sighting of the elusive serpentine sirens, who legends say led many of Towne's early offshore copper miners to watery graves. Vaguely resembling the mermaids of Terran legend, but with long, snake-like tails rather than aquatic fins, the so-called "serpent sirens" have been largely denounced as myth by most Towne residents, even as sightings continue to this day.

Over fifteen men and women were aboard Platform C110, a mining rig owned and operated by Tauranian-Hyborian Metals, when yesterday's sighting took place.

"It was beautiful, in a scaly, alien kind of way," said Harold Weasley, shift supervisor of Platform C110. "There was only the one, and she swam around kind of quick, but there was no mistaking the torso and the arms."

"There was this blur of green in the water," said Lorraine Hamilton, another employee on C110. "At first I thought it was just a large eel, but then I thought, 'We're too far offshore for one of those, aren't we?'"

Skeptics still dispute that what the miners saw really was one of the fabled serpent sirens. Noting a lack of concrete evidence after literally hundreds of "sightings" since Towne was first settled, including the current mass sighting, some refused to be convinced of the sirens' existence.

"I can't believe a bunch of grown men and women would cook up something so daft," said Herman Gardner, a resident of Trascio. "First, you'd think that any other sentient species inhabiting this world would make its presence known in the umpteenthundred years we've been here, but save for a few poor-quality pictures and grainy holographs, nobody can produce a shred of evidence there's anything other than seafood in those waters."

In 3035, a much-publicized expedition was led into the waters off Stygian shores to put the debate to rest once and for all, but after several months at sea, none of the scientists and oceanographers could locate either a single serpent siren or their undersea cities, which legend maintains are located just 500 kilometers from the shores of Hyboria. Despite this failure, however, professors across Towne remain intrigued by the debate. At the University of Towne in Port Howard, for example, Dr. Timothy Krandal, professor of astrology and astronomy, expressed his own wish to one day encounter a serpent siren.

"In over eleven centuries of space travel, we humans have never found an intelligent species, despite worlds upon worlds capable of supporting our kind of life," said Krandal. "And with so much of this world's deep oceans still largely unknown to us, and the mathematical improbability of ours being the only intelligent life in the galaxy . . . I think the chances of finding another civilization on Towne are worth exploring."

## Citizens Leap to Towne's Defense

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02/05/3133

PORT HOWARD--In a move that has already polarized the citizens of Towne, Governor Renee Oscar announced the formation of the Towne Defense Force, a planetary militia charged with the defense of our world against invaders. Recruitment and advertising started several weeks ago.

Legate Jonathan Jurik and leaders of the Towne Parliament joined Governor Oscar on the steps of the Capitol building this morning, flanked by two dozen officers in the uniform of the new Towne Defense Force. "We spent many long days and nights," said Governor Oscar, "debating the issue of whether our fair world needed anything more than an organized militia. But in the end, we knew that should what happened in Ankaa and Ozawa happen here, we must be prepared to better defend ourselves."

Parliament President Dwight Helleckson explained further. "We came to this decision only after a great deal of soul-searching. In the end, we realized that the closest assistance is weeks away--too long to hold out against the aggression that seems to be descending upon the great Republic."

Also present was Daman Zibler, who was appointed General of the Towne Defense Force. A decade-long Citizen of the Republic, the 62-year-old Zibler started his career with the Armed Forces of the Federated Suns as a MechWarrior, and advanced to the rank of Colonel before retiring and making a new life for himself and his extended family here on Towne. Said General Zibler, "There are those who will question my loyalty and my integrity. Make no mistake about it: I am a Citizen of The Republic. More than that, I love Towne. I left behind a life of war for what I had hoped was the first and last time. But I had forgotten that with liberty comes the duty to defend freedom. The freedom, indeed the very lives, of every one of us is threatened. So once more I put on the uniform, in your name, to protect my people."

Zibler's words brought a resounding cheer from the 5,000-strong crowd gathered outside the Capitol, but not everyone was happy with this announcement. Notably absent was Roberta Lee, chair of Parliament's Financial Committee, as well as two other senior members of Parliament--Cale Putin and Sarah Paymer.

In fact, all three held their own rally within Evermore Park at the same time as Governor Oscar's announcement. The rally was attended by several hundred vocal supporters, many carrying signs proclaiming their opposition to the formation of the Towne Defense Force. "The governor is falling prey to the hysteria that has fallen upon the common man," said Lee. "By doing so, she is doing all of Towne's people a disservice. This move is anathema to the lessons taught to us by Devlin Stone."

Lee's followers took command of Evermore Park for the rest of the afternoon, shouting chants like "Keep peace on Towne!" and "Don't give in--resist!" In fact, at press time the crowd of approximately 350 remains within the park, linked in a grand candle-lit circle of peace. Parliamentarian Putin reaffirmed his views to us just an hour ago. "Oscar's move flies in the face of everything we know and hold dear. By doing this, she and her supporters are showing everyone that they have lost faith in The Republic. The only thing that can come now is chaos."

But their pleas have apparently fallen on deaf ears. In just four hours' time, the Towne Defense Force has received the names of several thousand interested applicants--individuals who are willing to volunteer time and service to the defense of Towne. Recruiting centers are now beginning to open in every major city. Activate the link below to find out more about the Towne Defense Force and how to volunteer.

### Towne Log

+ I did a little background checking. This Daman Zibler is a stand-up man. He received the Davion Silver Sunburst and commanded a regiment in the Avalon Hussars, but he gave up all that after a battle on Warlock. He brought his entire family here and took up ranching, of all things. This isn't some bureaucratic sycophant. He's the real deal. And by the look of things, he's recruited some other quality officers to help him out.  
:- Goobs86

+ Yeah, I don't know what Lee's deal is. In fact, I don't know what she's ever done for us. How can you people in Creighton keep electing her as your representative?  
:- Dolenz

+ This didn't just happen. Oscar's had this planned for a long time. Probably from the beginning. She knows something she isn't letting on. Suddenly we've got a military here on Towne? And where is it? I've seen tri-vid taken over the past five hours, and there's about three hundred armed troops protecting the Capitol building and the old, abandoned Durallex factory outside of the city. There's something going on here. . . .  
:- TangerPik

+ All of those unmarked DropShips were bringing in outside troops and weapons. This is the next step in the seizure of power. Soon enough they will uncover the Mech companies they've brought in and unleash their stormtrooper legions. Watch them closely.  
:- FMLuder

+ I've got an interview with a recruiter tomorrow. Apparently, they'll be filling more classes of recruits this week and beginning their initial training next Friday.  
:- JimU

+ I think we'll see a nice bit militia growing up here in the next month or so. There's plenty of people with military experience who miss the life. It's something you never forget.  
:- LtBill

## Relic Stolen, No Suspects

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02/07/3133

PORT ARTHUR—Early this morning, an unknown group of thieves broke into the Towne Museum of Science and Industry. They passed up hundreds of incredibly valuable jewels, weapons from ancient Terra, and even a collection of early space-race equipment from the 24th century. Instead, they focused on an early Boeing Interstellar FB-312—a large VTOL helo that was but a mere curiosity in a side room off the early-industry display room.

The thieves entered the museum at approximately 0200 local time, disabling numerous alarm systems and apparently coming in through an electrical access tunnel within the museum's basement. The thieves then spread out, subduing the guard patrols and avoiding every interior alarm and tri-vid sensor.

Exactly what happened next is anyone's guess, though evidence seems to support this sequence of events: After entering the museum and subduing the guards, a smaller team entered the security office and deactivated or rerouted a number of security subsystems, while a team moved to the roof of the museum, climbed down onto the VTOL, and hooked supporting cables to it. While they were doing that, the individuals in the security office opened the sky dome above the hanging VTOL.

Sometime shortly thereafter, the thieves brought their own VTOL into the picture. Witnesses agree that sometime between 0345 and 0415, a VTOL swept into the city at treetop level and began to hover in the vicinity of the museum. It seems the thieves cut the supporting cables that suspended the Boeing Interstellar vehicle from the museum's ceiling and lifted it away beneath their own craft. The few witnesses to the final minutes of the robbery agree that a VTOL sped away from the area of the museum with what looked like a huge load swinging below it.

Towne Space Traffic Control received several complaints early this morning about a low-flying aircraft, but initial reports indicate this escape aircraft did not show up on radar long enough to track.

The rest of the thieves apparently left the complex in a number of ways. Surveillance images from nearby buildings seem to show several vehicles in the area at the time, including a dozen aircars and two moderately sized hover transports.

One of those surveillance sensors did capture some of the action on the far end of the museum roof, well away from the area where the ancient VTOL was housed. The sensor did not show the thieves' VTOL, though unconfirmed reports say that it caught ghostly images on the roof, possibly indicating the thieves were wearing sneak suits. Sneak suits are, of course, closely identified with the Draconis Combine's special forces DEST operatives, though their use has increased over the past century or so.

For the time being, authorities seem to be stumped by this theft. While the FB-312 is a relic almost 700 years old, its value is negligible next to some of the other items housed in the museum. Indeed, the craft would be of value only to historians and collectors of vintage aircraft.

Officials are expending a great deal of effort cataloging everything within the museum to determine if the thieves stole anything else.

The FB-312 belongs to the collection of an anonymous individual, but has been on display within the museum for the past 20 years. Little is known of the actual history of this particular VTOL, other than that it was manufactured on Terra in the mid-24th century. Authorities are looking into the possibility that the actual owner of the vintage aircraft was the target of this crime rather than the museum.

### Towne Log

+ Hippee? FM? Anyone wanna tell me how this is part of some grand conspiracy??! Somebody run out of black VTOLs?  
:- Trander9

+ Bored tonight, Trander? Haven't started a flamewar in at least two days, I see. . . .  
:- Chungabunga

+ You know, I've been to that museum about a thousand times, and I've always loved that machine. There's just something about it. Something cool, something romantic. I dunno, but it's a beautiful machine. I always wondered if they kept it in flying condition.  
:- Aeronaut66

+ I wrote a paper on the ancient machines in the museum while at university. I discovered some interesting facts about that particular contraption, namely that it's had a dozen owners over the past three decades, each on different worlds. The queer facts, though, are that some of the serial numbers do not line up with what they should be. At the time, I did not have the resources to track down those any further, but even then my uneducated guess was that it had been illegally traded a number of times before showing up in this collection.  
:- GSkapEsq

+ You know, as a kid I heard a bunch of different stories about that VTOL. I didn't really believe them after I grew up, but who knows? Maybe it was the personal transport of Lucien Davion.  
:- Pooky

+ I did some research over the past few days on the museum and its recent acquisitions. It seems that they brought in an unlisted shipment two days before the theft. I tried to track the shipment back to its source, but the trail ended at the spaceport. The museum brought in something so valuable that they kept it off of all cargo manifests and hired additional security—what the story didn't mention was that the security staff was at triple its usual strength. The VTOL theft was just a smokescreen. I'm betting that these commandos—this was an operation executed with military precision—got away with that crate in a truck while everyone was busy looking for the VTOL. Hell, they probably just dropped it out at sea!"  
:- FMLurder

## Enlistment Soars After Port Howard Drive

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02/09/3133

PORT HOWARD—With fears of war just around the corner, and the future of The Republic in doubt, the Towne Militia Enlistment Drive in Port Howard drew record numbers of young, able-bodied men and women eager to do their part to ensure the security of Towne. Officials at the capital city recruitment center reported earlier today that preliminary figures alone after last week's annual drive have increased seven hundred percent over last year, a surge not seen in the history of The Republic.

"Just last year at this time, we had only about 40 or 50 potential enlistees come through this office," said Captain Annabelle Kemiko of the Towne Militia, who heads the Port Howard Militia Recruitment Center. "Combined with similar figures planet-wide, we were looking at another below-average year for recruits. By yesterday alone, however, we'd seen over three hundred volunteers come through these doors, and I understand that other offices are seeing similar figures."

Kemiko attributes this rise to fears of war that continue to grip the people of Towne, especially after the recent surge in heavy fighting that has touched worlds as close as Addicks, Ankaa, and Ozawa. Last week's annual enlistment drive, however, may have boosted these numbers as well, with stirring speeches such as former army Major Bryce Shorter's impassioned call to arms for the future of Towne. The additional incentive, which would allow residents who serve a five-year military stint to gain full citizenship and voting rights in The Republic, has also been attributed to the increase, Kemiko added, who also noted the historic trend of rising recruitment numbers during election years.

Shorter, a ComStar military commentator and Towne native who has publicly decried the shortage of militia manpower in past interviews, cautioned that even with recruitment on the rise, today's enlistees won't be ready to protect Towne for many months to come.

"It's a sad state of human affairs," said Shorter. "To protect our peace, we must prepare for war. Our world is in grave peril, with hostile powers emerging all around us—including those we have yet to see. The Dragon's Fury, the Steel Wolves, and even the Spirit Cats and troops loyal to Bannson Universal have surfaced to hit worlds only a jump away. Sooner or later, it will be us, and we still haven't the strength to resist."

Whatever the reason for the rising figures, the Towne Militia is not complaining about the influx of new recruits, who may be called up to defend our world in what many feel will be dark times. Still, not everyone shares the militia's enthusiasm.

"Decades under Devlin Stone's benevolent, peaceful rule have been swept away by the people in power, and I'm not just talking about the Exarch, his Knights, or even the wayward Prefecture warmongers," Ricardo Montague told reporters at a Port Howard antiwar rally. "Right here on Towne, we see everywhere the preparations for war. Are we going to be invading some other peace-loving world now? Are we going to become the killers of other people's children? What will we tell Stone when he returns to see what we have become?"

"And as we raise this great army, who will tend the fields, and who will dig the mines?" cried another activist, known only as Lisa. "We have nothing anyone else wants and everything our own people need. We have no business in anybody else's wars—for any reason!"

### Towne Log

+ And once again, we hear the sabers rattle. I said it before, and I'll say it again: That Legate of ours will be the death of us all.  
:- Hippee

+ How's that, Hippee? All we got here are more people than ever wanting to sign up and defend Towne. Or would you rather have the next Dragon's Fury or Spirit Cat incursion happen in your own back yard?  
:- Kurious

+ And building our own little army here is supposed to stop them? We go raising troops, and some of our neighbors may consider us a threat. We don't have much that anybody would come fighting over, but if we get all militarized, you better believe someone's gonna want to pin us down, just to be safe.  
:- FMLurder

+ You sound more like Hippee every day, FML. The fact is there is an awful lot of industry here, including some new defense contractors. That's the kind of thing that'll really bring attention our way, not just some citizen's militia.  
:- Chungabunga

+ From the ashes of the order, Devlin Stone will return to bring us a better, stronger Republic. Can't you all see this is but a test, and only those most loyal to the Protector's dreams will get through this alive?  
:- Hop4Evr

+ Spoken like a Blakist freak, Hop. Stone would be rolling in his grave right now. . . .  
:- GM01379

+ I don't believe you people! People all over this planet are taking the extraordinary step of signing up, putting their lives on the line in case we ever do get attacked, and all you can do is blame it on political warmongering! You ought to be showing more



fragging respect than that!

:- LaneyHL

+ Oh? Did you sign up, Laney?

:- FMLurder

+ As a matter of fact, yes! What of it?

:- LaneyHL

+ It's worse than I feared. . . .

:- Hippee

## Interview with Ambassador Hasek-Davion

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02/11/3133

PORT AUTHOR, TOWNE--INN is pleased to present a section of the interview that reporter Jill St. Claire recently had with Ambassador Kym Hasek-Davion. Hasek-Davion is the Federated Suns' ambassador to The Republic of the Sphere, and was on her way back to New Syrtis when INN had the opportunity to speak with her.

At just 28 years old, Hasek-Davion is already a skilled diplomat, having lived her entire life within the Hasek-Davion family. She is, of course, the granddaughter of Duke George Hasek, famed leader of the Federated Suns' Capellan March during the FedCom Civil War and the Jihad, and sister to current March leader Alexander Hasek-Davion. As cousin to First Prince Harrison Davion, she spent much of her youth traveling between New Syrtis and New Avalon, and despite the friction between her family and the ruling Davions, earned the ambassadorial posting two years ago at the suggestion of Exarch Damien Redburn, if rumors can be believed.

The following is an excerpt of our interview with her.

**Q:** So this communications blackout is affecting more than just The Republic?

**KH-D:** That's correct. From everything we in the Federated Suns have been able to piece together--aided, of course, by The Republic's own intelligence agencies--the blackout hit the entire Inner Sphere within the span of just a few days.

**Q:** Has anyone at your New Avalon Institute of Science been able to discover either the cause of the blackout or a solution?

**KH-D:** Well, if they'd found a solution, you'd be talking to them right now, I suspect. From everything I've been able to gather, this blackout--and I'm calling it that because I'm not yet satisfied that it's a true attack in the strict sense of the word--came as a complete surprise to everyone, especially ComStar. And if . . .

**Q:** I'm sorry, but you're not sure this is an attack?

**KH-D:** Not in the strictest sense of the word, no. Think about it. It's been some six months since the HPG network went down, yet we still haven't heard any word about a renewed Clan invasion or a new alien power from the Periphery bearing down on us. Or Amaris come back from the dead to lead an army of darkness back to Terra to finish what he started 350 years ago. Yes, I've heard all the rumors and then some. Many of my own people think that the Capellans or the Kuritans are ready to pounce, to repay us for hundreds of years of alleged aggression. But no, this is a tragedy that has befallen us all, and it behooves us to work together to find a solution.

**Q:** What of rumors of Davion regiments massing to invade The Republic and the Capellan Confederation? We've seen reports . . .

**KH-D:** Absolutely unfounded. Oh, the Prince has certainly ordered some internal redeployments so that should one of our neighbors try to take advantage of us they will learn the depth of their mistake. But the Federated Suns and its Prince will not be the cause of a war. We never have been and never will. We will finish any fight brought to our doorstep, though. Look, I don't want to alarm anyone here. We're not expecting a war and we're not gearing up for one. We're just taking precautions, that's all. Just like is happening all over The Republic of the Sphere. I just saw a report that says a militia is forming on Towne, in fact.

**Q:** What can you tell us of your meeting with Exarch Redburn and the Senate?

**KH-D:** They are, of course, concerned. We all know about the difficulties on Ankaa, Addicks, and Ozawa. We met for several days with delegates from each of the major nations to determine what we could do. I'm pleased to say that representatives of the Great Houses, including The Republic and me, drafted a mutual nonaggression pact that we will take to our Lords for review. Further, I proposed a mutual defense treaty that would give your Knights of the Sphere some additional help in keeping the peace. Your Senate still has some details to work out, but before I left I signed a statement of intent to fulfill such a pledge. We all want to get through this dark time as simply and as easily as possible.

**Q:** And how is the Exarch?

**KH-D:** Concerned and troubled. There is much he wants to do, but he is limited because of the communications problems. There just aren't enough JumpShips to deliver all the messages he needs to send. I'm sorry to say that it will take some time before matters return to where they were six short months ago, but I can say with absolute certainty that Exarch Redburn is doing everything he can to ensure the continued safety of The Republic and her citizens. He is surrounded with the best advisors in the Inner Sphere. If there is any group of people who can end this darkness, it is they.

### Towne Log

+ What a load of bureaucratic doublespeak! She doesn't care about us any more than the Dragons or the Cappies! She'd have an invasion fleet here if she could!

:- Fight4Lif

+ Much as I hate to agree with you, all she spouted were half-truths and false platitudes. She knows more than she's telling and she's got plenty to hide. I wouldn't doubt it if all she was doing was scouting out Terra and the worlds in-between for likely

invasion targets. How many of her staff were Davion MIIO agents? How many regiments do they have ready to roll into The Republic?

:- PanzerGruppe

+ Anyone catch that line about how the Davions never started a war? Hello? Anyone ever heard of the Fourth Succession War?

:- JimEJames

+ Or the War of '39. Or the Victoria War?

:- DrWill

+ The war of '39? What was that?

:- 9T23

+ The Davions didn't start those wars. They were provoked into action by attacks that demanded retribution.

:- Goobs86

+ Nothin' like a closet Davion to spoil things.

:- Hippee

+ You know, I've twice read the transcript of the interview, and watched the whole thing about a dozen times. And you know what? She's scared. She's a politician, so she hides it pretty well, but she's scared and doesn't want to admit it. That whole response about there not being an attack--don't just read it. If you watch it, you can see how she's just stalling for time until she can come up with something. She didn't tell us a single thing in that whole interview. There's probably a whole Davion army waiting to descend on whoever caused this--once they figure out who it is. Until then, they're pumping everyone else for information.

:- Chungabunga

+ Chunga's on to something here. There's something bigger going on here, and she's trying to figure it out. Maybe her superiors know something more, and maybe the Davion Prince is just keeping her out of things because of who her father is. That there aren't already Davion troops pouring into The Republic tells me that they don't know where the danger lies. (And if there wasn't a danger you can bet they'd be here on Towne already, and that Addicks and Ozawa would've been gobbled up in the first strikes.) They're waiting and watching, and probably watching Redburn and ComStar closely. They know that whatever is going on, Terra is the key.

:- FMLuder

## Ghost Ship in Orbit

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02/13/3133

PORT HOWARD - Early this morning, Towne Space Traffic Control director Charles Pruecker informed the press that an apparently-unidentified DropShip had entered Towne orbit late yesterday morning. Approximately six hours ago, personnel from the Bannson Industries DropShip Kashmir Caravan docked with and boarded the ship, finding no one on board.

The Mule-class DropShip, the independent merchant ship Wopat, entered the Towne system twenty days ago aboard the JumpShip Ariel Maru and apparently made a low-G burn in-system. The ship entered a trans-lunar high orbit insertion, though all STC attempts at communication were ignored by the ship's crew. Director Pruecker indicated STC personnel made four communication attempts per hour for eighteen hours before he was forced to take additional action.

"The on-duty director was informed that an out-of-communications ship was entering orbit as the event was happening," says Director Pruecker. "Our controllers followed proper procedure and attempted communications every fifteen minutes. The ship's transponder was functioning normally, and our controllers verified two days ago that the DropShip was on-course to enter a safe orbit, which it did at 0948 Towne Standard Time. An hour later, I was notified of the event, which I passed on to Governor Jurik three hours later."

Throughout the course of the day, controllers and other ships in orbit, under direction from STC controllers, attempted communications with the ship. Though the Wopat returned none of these attempts, sensor readings and visual reports indicated the ship made a number of minor course corrections throughout the day to remain within its orbital slot.

Director Pruecker and Governor Jurik discussed the ship several times throughout the course of the day, and finally came to the conclusion that they needed to take action. "With the state of emergency that we are currently in, the governor and I made the decision to have the ship boarded," Pruecker explained. "We did not have one of our own government ships available for immediate assignment, so we offered a salvage contract to the Wopat."

Under temporary contract to the Towne government, the captain and crew of the Kashmir Caravan docked with the Wopat early this morning and entered her at 0833. A dozen personnel searched the entire ship but found no sign of crew or passengers. Details of the search are still sketchy, but apparently the crew's personal effects were still scattered about the ship normally. The borders found no sign of the ship's cargo, however, and even the ship's manifest was empty.

"The ship will be landing shortly," Pruecker continued. "State officials will treat the Wopat as a crime scene until they can determine just what happened. We are not assuming foul play, but common sense indicates something strange happened here."

The Wopat has been a regular on the Towne-Addicks-Ozawa shipping line for a number of years and is registered as an independent trading ship. STC reports indicate the ship entered the Towne system on the Ariel Maru, which made the jump from Addicks. The Ariel Maru is no longer in the Towne system, though. Government officials will make a trek to the Zenith Jump Point to interview the crew of the Czaban, another DropShip that made the jump into the Towne system on the Ariel Maru.

The investigation into the Wopat mystery will likely take several months. At the end, if the captain and crew cannot be located, the Towne government will sell the ship at auction. As a part of the government salvage contract, the crew of the Kashmir Caravan will make 10% of the proceeds.

### Towne Log

+ Reports of secret invaders on Towne, political backstabbing and now ghost ships in orbit? Is INN giving us news, or are they just going for sensationalist journalism? I, for one, am running out of patience with this news e-rag.

:- GregG

+ The ship just landed in Port Arthur. I watched from the top floor of the First Towne Centre building as it came down at the furthest DropShip pad on the government side of the spaceport. About two dozen security vehicles surrounded the ship and a couple of hundred cops formed a 100-meter perimeter around the ship. Is it just me, or is that a little excessive for an abandoned ship?

:- JamJam

+ I got my hands on a few internal government reports. They're not so much worried about finding out what's going on as they don't want anyone to get on board. They're covering something up here.

:- Goobs86

+ It's not a coincidence the government sent a Bannson ship to board the Wopat. Bannson has his hands in everything. He's part of this cover up, there's no doubt about it. What the story doesn't say is that another Bannson ship, the Logan's Runner, was inbound at the same time as the Wopat. What's more, the Logan's Runner entered orbit two days late without explanation, but arrived at the jump point a day before the Wopat. Both ships took a long parabolic entry into Towne, which means they passed each other out of the standard corridor traveled by every other inbound and outbound ship. Coincidences?

:- FMLuder

+ Look, the lead investigator is Lieutenant Tom Nordent. He headed up the investigation of the murder of David and Veronica Doura. There isn't more of a straight-shooter in the entire Towne government. He's not going to be a part of any cover-up and

won't give us any party lines. Just wait and see.  
:- Dorian

## Towne Arms Race

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02/17/3133

PORT ARTHUR – In response to reports of fighting all throughout the Republic of the Sphere and in expectation of expected needs, Connor Industrial Ltd., manufacturer of petrochemicals and heavy industrial machinery, has announced that it is retooling its Fairfax facility to produce artillery weapons and ammunition.

Connor Industrial president and CEO Frederick Connor said in a press conference yesterday, “we are living in very uncertain times. The peace that Devlin Stone brought to us is in danger. Freedom demands the participation of those who benefit from it. We must be able to defend the peace we have known for so long, but to do so we must have the tools we need at our disposal.”

Connor’s announcement is encouraging anything but praise from many of Towne’s citizens, though. Says Alexis Huang, president of the Citizens for Peace and Prosperity, “Devlin Stone experienced true evil and organized an army of light to put that darkness down. But he also knew that even his own army was inherently evil and wrong, so he disbanded it. Now Connor wants to bring back the very darkness that nearly destroyed it. And all for the love of money.”

Marilyn James, of the Hope Foundation, agrees. “Unless we do something, Connor Industrial will bring nothing but war and destruction to Towne.” Both organizations have banded together to block Connor Industries from opening this new factory. Already, they have filed six separate applications for injunction with the Towne Supreme Court, citing everything from zoning violations to safety concerns about the manufacture of explosive ammunition within the city of Fairfax.

To date, the courts have not agreed with these organizations, nor the dozen other groups that have also attempted legal action against Connor Industrial. Every injunction filed so far has been quashed by the Supreme Court, even three that were upheld by lower courts.

Chief Justice Pavel Gramstadt issued this statement yesterday following the court’s ruling on five cases yesterday, “the court has considered all of the facts presented in the Connor Industrial issue and found no wrongdoing on the part of Connor Industrial or its officers. Further, it is this court’s opinion that these charges are absolutely baseless. Any further attempts to block this company from operations will be considered malicious and may be turned over to the Department of Justice for criminal investigation.”

The citizens on the street don’t necessarily agree. “I don’t know who Gramstadt is working for,” thinks Rachel Koch, “but it sure isn’t for us.” Bob Reynolds thinks the same thing, “what is Gramstadt thinking? How can producing explosives within a major city not be dangerous?”

But no matter the outcry, Connor Industrial seems to be pushing ahead, ignoring a public that wholeheartedly rejects the notion that war is inevitable. Already the Fairfax plant has taken delivery on several shipments of chemicals and its forges are beginning to pour molten alloys. Yet that hasn’t stopped citizens from protesting the plant’s opening. Nor have increased police patrols prevented them from breaking into the facility and attempting to sabotage the plant.

“The only danger posed by this plant is to those who continually attempt to break in and sabotage its operation,” said Connor Industrial spokesman Ernie al-Drun. “We are deeply saddened by the three individuals killed last night in a chemical spill caused after they gained unauthorized entry into the plant and attempted to cut the lines feeding the mixing vats.”

For the time being, the Connor plant will continue to be a political hot potato. The company has apparently been in contact with Bannson Industries, who is providing additional corporate security while the two companies negotiate a transport and distribution contract. At the same time, activists remain on the offensive, organizing protests and other activities to block Connor Industrials.

### Towne Log

+ You know, I’m sick of these liberals who keep trying to impose their will on the universe. They say they’re all for free will and choice, but the minute that someone wants to cash in, they get all high and mighty. And Heaven forbid if we even bring up the topic of defense! We’re surrounded by different factions making a power play for the Republic and all these idiots want is some idyllic communistic society where we will never again have the ability to defend ourselves!  
:- CMike

+ Amen to that, brother!  
:- Goobs86

+ CMike, are you really trying to tell us that building more weapons or creating a new Army of the Republic is a good thing? You don’t think that will bring anything but the deaths of millions of young men and women? :-PeaceOut

+ And you think that sitting blindly by while conquering armies descend on our world is any better? We don’t have the tools we need to defend ourselves. I, for one, am not going to let my world be taken without a fight!  
:- CMike

+ That’s the problem with this universe. There’s too many people like you who only want to fight. Didn’t Devlin Stone teach us that peace is far better than war?  
:- Verde

+ Yeah, and didn't Devlin Stone fight the Word of Blake?

:- PanzerGruppe

+ Face it. Peace doesn't work. You think this has been a time of real peace? Have you been paying attention to what's been going on in the rest of the Inner Sphere? Name me a time when there's been real, lasting peace in the universe? It wasn't during the Star League times. And it sure wasn't during Devlin Stone's rule. The whole idea of swords to plowshares makes me laugh. All he did was prevent us from easily defending ourselves from the predators knocking at our doors now!

:- CMike

## Thousands Flock to See the Classics

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02/18/3133

CARLISLE – Where was everyone last weekend? The Carlisle Expo Center, of course!

The Galaxy of Classics show returned to Towne last month and has made the tour of the world, cumulating with the huge four-day expo this weekend that saw 130,000 Towne residents make the trek to Carlisle. With over 250 classic hovercars, some more than five centuries old, plus hundreds more vehicles of all types representing over a thousand years of development, on display, this was the largest show of its kind to come to Towne in recent memory.

“It was cool!” exclaims Jimmy, age 12, of Port Howard. “It was so neat, I made my dad take me back on Sunday!”

His father agreed. “I remember coming to see these shows with my own father, so naturally I brought Jimmy. And you know what? I don’t ever remember them being so exciting. When Jimmy wanted to come back for a second day, I had to think about that for about a second!”

Other show-goers expressed similar sentiments. “The Daikanti SuperDodger is something right out of the history books, and to see it running a slalom in the arena was just too much!” “Who says interest in hovercars is fading?” “I want that one, that one, that one, and those five over there, too!”

Graves Productions, the owner of the Galaxy of Classics show, puts on shows all over the Republic, and beyond, throughout the year, but owns only a small portion of the vehicles put on display. Normally, the company’s executives contract with collectors and new hovercar dealers to fill the show with vehicles of all kinds. This time, though, the producers teamed up with the organizers of four other major shows to put on an expo the likes of which has never been seen within the Republic.

The show filled almost a dozen major halls, featuring both civilian and military vehicles from over a thousand years of history. Three halls were packed with such classic hovercraft as the Jaretti Leaping Fang and the Fed-Talon Jaguar, while four more were filled with military vehicles of all sizes and kinds—from APCs to main battle tanks to fighters and even a few BattleMechs, including a Highlander and a Templar.

Of course, there were the usual features common to all of these expositions. Scantily-clad models, schtick shows (including a man dressed as a walking bat standing next to an ancient wheeled sports vehicle) and the entire hall filled with retailers selling their dubious wares.

Showgoers knew what they liked, though, and flocked in droves to the two eastern halls. There, producers had set up several large networks of simulators that allowed patrons the chance to fight one another in BattleMech combat. With the chance to fight in the great arenas that made Solaris VII famous centuries ago, people stood in lines up to four hours long for a fifteen minute chance at fame. The simulators were such a hit that show organizers kept those halls open 24 hours a day for all four days, and still the shortest lines were two hours in length.

“This was certainly the most profitable show we’ve put on here on Towne,” said organizer Kyle Graves, “and we’ve been doing this for thirty years, now. This is the first in a long series of shows that we’ll be putting on throughout the Sphere these next few years.” When asked about when he’d return with this show, Graves responded, “Towne’s people have always treated us well. It may be a while before we can get the entire show back here, but I think it’s safe bet that we’ll be able to put on smaller-scale shows on an annual basis. It’s just a matter of how long it takes us to get about two dozen more of those simulator networks constructed, you know?”

### Towne Log

+ My God! I couldn’t have cared less about the rest of the show, but those simulators were INCREDIBLE! >BR?: -Jones

+ Anyone else notice the men with dark suits and sunglasses wandering through the crowds in the military expo?  
:- Gr8Tr

+ Anyone else catch that goof in the bat getup and cape? Was there anything more lame than that? 20th Century Jetcars? Did they even have jets in the 20th Century?  
:- FuzionBom

+ The race on Saturday night was pretty cool. Seeing that Jaretti crash in the fourth turn of lap 179 was painful, though! Jonsey’s right, the simulators were pretty good, too!  
:- Fokum

+ Gr8Tr, you know they were recruiters, right? They’re looking for people to fill their ranks. But they were also looking for people like us who want to uncover their conspiracies. You didn’t talk to any of them, did you?  
:- Hippee

+ Why did they have to bring those instruments of evil along? Weapons of war have no place in a show that supposedly caters to families and children. And what of those “game simulators?” Are we now teaching our children to fight and kill before they are even out of primary school?  
:- PeaceOut



+ Just because you don't like that stuff doesn't mean that others can't. If you don't like it, don't go. It's that simple. I, for one, enjoyed seeing literally a thousand years worth of history!

:- Grundy

+ I used to pilot a 'Mech in the Sword of Light, and I've got to say, those were the best simulators I've ever seen. The only thing they could have done to make it more realistic was to hook up cooling vests and heaters. And you know what? The sim cockpits had the hookups for them!

:- DragonMan63

## Acolyte: Spirit Cats Claim Ozawa, Clash with Bannson Security

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02/20/3133

PORT HOWARD--Finally transforming rumors into fact, an Acolyte from ComStar's Class B station on Ozawa, arriving via DropShip from that beleaguered world, has confirmed a clash between forces bearing the insignia of Galaxy Commander Kev Rosse's Spirit Cats and on-site security troops loyal to Jacob Bannson, head of Bannson Universal Unlimited and one of The Republic's wealthiest industrialists. In addition, the report confirmed that the Spirit Cats defeated Bannson's troops to claim the capital of Prefecture III for themselves.

The invasion, apparently launched just a few weeks after Duchess Katana Tormark's sudden abandonment of both the world and her post as Prefect, began with a ritual batchall, a Clan custom in which the attacker states his forces and intentions, while requesting the same of the defending commander, Acolyte Damon Bradley told INN.

"The Spirit Cats' commander, Star Colonel Rikkard Nova Cat, announced his intention to claim Ozawa on behalf of his commander, Galaxy Commander and Prefecture III Senator, Kev Rosse," said Bradley during a briefing at Port Howard. "The Bannson commander, Captain Diana Jones, apparently did not respond to the ritual challenge, but did oppose the Spirit Cats as soon as they grounded, which was at the Petre Hills outside Sapporo, Ozawa's capital city."

Bradley then described the fighting for Ozawa, including the capture of both Sapporo and Sukade, the administrative capital city for the planet and Prefecture III, respectively. Other battle zones relayed by Bradley included an unexplained skirmish in the radioactive wastes of the Plain of Tears on the Sendai continent, and the blazing inferno of the Todaka Forest near Sukade, believed set by the Spirit Cat troops to smoke out the last of Bannson's forces.

Shortly after the blaze, witnesses on Ozawa who traveled with Bradley confirmed that DropShips bearing the logo of Bannson Universal lifted off Ozawa, surrendering the field and the planet to Spirit Cat control. Clan recovery vehicles also dragged a number of disabled vehicles and even a 'Mech or two from the forests near Sukade, but it remained unclear whether these machines were salvage taken from Bannson's troops or casualties sustained by Spirit Cat forces.

"One 'Mech looked like an IndustrialMech of some kind, but it was so blackened and mangled, it could have been just about anything," said Kei Loganov, a Sukade native who fled after Clan troops entered the city and declared Ozawa "isorla" of the Spirit Cats, a term that roughly translates to "spoils of war."

In contrast to the brutality shown during the fighting, however, Adept Bradley quickly pointed out that the Spirit Cats demonstrated concern for Ozawa's civilian population after their victory. In addition to permitting residents to depart if they so desired, Star Colonel Nova Cat announced that his warriors would not interfere in government affairs, and that he personally had no intention of subjugating the people of Ozawa to Clan rule.

"Despite claiming planetary militia bases, and assigning their own warriors to the infantry defenses at the planetary and Prefecture capitals, the Spirit Cat commander appeared disinclined to assert complete control over the planetary population," said Bradley. "The last we saw, all civilian and governmental agencies were maintaining the status quo under a Spirit Cat presence that has been most benign. In fact, a protest march against the invaders was staged just outside the Sukade Spaceport, where the bulk of the invasion fleet was located just days after the Bannson's Raiders withdrew. Despite the sizeable presence of Spirit Cat infantry, there were no reports of casualties or unnecessary brutality inflicted by the Clan troops."

Indeed, the Spirit Cats' light-handed approach toward Ozawa's civilians appears to have also left the majority of Ozawans indifferent, or even comforted, by the recent switch to the Spirit Cat banner.

"A lot of folks were rather unsettled when [Duchess Tormark] suddenly left to attack Addicks, taking her Dragon's Fury troops along with her," said Tara Sanders, another Ozawa native who arrived with Adept Bradley. "When Bannson's Raiders then showed up, apparently looking after his corporate interests, though, I don't think anyone felt any better. But now that the Cats have shown up, promising noninterference and the security of their protection, I really think a lot of the people consider it a good thing."

Editor's Note: The Towne ComStar INN Interactive Map previously showed that the Spirit Cats had already obtained this planet, as it was believed to hold the headquarters of Spirit Cat leader Galaxy Commander Kev Rosse. We apologize for this error. The information on the Interactive Map has been supplied by archive data and outside sources and may or may not be 100% correct.

### Towne Log

+ Holy crap! Does this mean the blasted Spirit Cats are running the whole Prefecture now?  
:- RepMan

+ Like anyone would listen? Seriously, it depends on how far Rosse's policy of 'noninterference' goes, RM, as well as how many worlds are left in this area who still think they're part of a Republic anymore. Personally, I'd say 'hell no.'  
:- SlikOne

+ Oh, please, Slik! The Cats likely behaved themselves only as long as it took that Adept and his traveling companions to board their DropShip and boost off-planet. Clan society treats all civvies as second-class citizens and servants to the warrior caste, and the folks on Ozawa won't be any different.  
:- FMLurder

+ You know, given who was holding that planet before Rosse's folks arrived, I'm not sure Ozawa isn't better off anyway, though I'll grant you it'll never be a paradise. I mean, Katana left, and almost instantly Bannson's people set up shop? Funny the article barely touches on their invasion of Ozawa.

:- Hippee

+ You just like the Cats because they're the 'anti-establishment' Clan, Hippee. But take away the incense and their hallucinogenic fantasies, and they're just another bunch of warrior bullies like any Great House or major corporate security force.

:- FMLurder

+ Speaking of Clan Weirdo, anyone want to hazard a guess, no pun intended, as to what the heck they were thinking wandering into a radioactive hot zone like the Sendai continent? Last I heard, there weren't two square centimeters on that land capable of supporting life.

:- Kurious

+ It was an homage to those lost in the fires of wars past! The Spirit Cats are guided by visions from Devlin Stone himself, come to demonstrate how we've all lost our way! Watch them, and know the fate that will soon befall us all!

:- Hop4Evr

+ Okaaay. Anybody else, please?

:- Kurious

## Oscar: Turan Province Crash Site Result of Space Battle over Towne

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02/24/3133

PORT HOWARD--In a press conference today, Planetary Legate Jonathan Jurik confirmed reports that space debris slammed into a cattle ranch in the Turna Province, just outside the small town of Camanche. He also confirmed that this debris was indeed the remains of a rare Excalibur-class DropShip that was mortally wounded by weapons fire from an apparent battle high above Towne. The vessel's affiliation and the reason for it coming under fire are currently unknown.

"At this time, we can confirm only that the wreckage was indeed a space vessel of the Excalibur-class, which crashed after failing to make an uncontrolled entry in Towne's atmosphere due to battle damage," said Jurik. "Who was firing on the vessel, or if this one was part of a larger fleet, remains unknown, but our techs are already working to locate the log box and flight recorders."

According to witnesses in Camanche, which is a small rural community 90 kilometers southeast of Shalizar, the provincial capital of Turna, the crash occurred five days ago. First appearing as a bright star, the superheated surface of the plummeting DropShip apparently lost control in the lower atmosphere, tumbling end-over-end as it fell. Several smaller fragments, seen breaking off from the ship during its descent, left smaller streaks in the sky that apparently burned up before hitting the ground. The impact was felt as far away as Jakobsburg, a rural community 30 kilometers west of Camanche.

"It looked like a shooting star, but far brighter than any other I ever saw," said Ronald Patten, of Jakobsburg. "When it hit, I saw a bright flash to the east--just for an instant--and then I felt a terrible rumble and heard a muffled thump."

"A bunch of us had gotten it in our heads to go and investigate whatever it was, since meteors don't usually survive the trip through the atmosphere," said Charles Bonner, of Camanche. "But by the time we drove up to where we figured the site was, the police and militia already had the highways blocked off. I think from where we got we could just make out a faint glow in the distance, like something there was on fire. But in the darkness, it was hard to make out any smoke or anything."

The crash of the unidentified DropShip scattered debris in a 30-kilometer stretch that was roughly three kilometers across at its widest. A large section barely identifiable as the nose cone, the mangled bridge, and half the forward port sections survived the fall, but were so blackened by the heat of reentry and impact fires that any markings were obliterated, according to INN helicopter footage.

Sources close to Legate Jurik told INN earlier today that the militia search team is still picking through the craft's remains, searching for bodies or equipment that might indicate its mission prior to being shot down over Towne. Data is also being scoured from orbiting news, weather, and communications satellites believed to have been within visual/sensor range of the plummeting vessel. An aerospace fighter pass near where the vessel was believed to have entered Towne's atmosphere discovered no further evidence of battle in orbit, though some ground-based sensors allegedly picked up several scrambled and burst-coded transmissions hours before the crash.

"We are investigating all the evidence we have," Jurik told reporters. "But at this time, our analysis remains inconclusive. At present, it is best that no one jumps to conclusions, and we're asking everyone to remain calm, as there seems to be no immediate danger to planetary security either on the ground or in orbit."

Despite such reassurances, however, this latest incident has many Towne residents worried.

"It's rather frightening when you think about it," said Patten. "I mean, we hear about fighting on other worlds, and there was even that scare at the Vanarium Reserve back in December, but to think there's still fighting going on over Towne is just plain scary."

### Towne Log

+ There goes the neighborhood!  
:- Gecko386

+ I heard that! So, anybody want to guess who's fighting over our quaint little planet now? My bet is Highlanders and Swordsworn. That would explain the presence of their 'delegates' here, if you ask me.  
:- FMLurder

+ T Ah. Hmmm. You know, I'd love to argue that one with you, Lurder, but you may have a point this time. Then again, it could also be Spirit Cats versus Steel Wolves, or even Dragon's Fury. I mean, Tara Campbell seems to be on the level when she says she wants to preserve The Republic, and the Feddies usually have been friendly to us, so they could have formed a coalition to defend us. Of course, Oscar and Jurik seem to think keeping us in the dark is more reassuring than revealing a possible nugget of truth.  
:- Jamjam

+ Quick question here, guys. What kind of DropShip is an Excalibur?  
:- Kurious

+ T 'Mech transport, K. That's why this is such a scare. For all anybody knows, that thing was transporting troops to hit us. IIRC, an Excalibur can actually haul a combined-arms battalion or some such--'Mechs, vehicles, and maybe even a few fighters.

:- Chungabunga

+ For all anybody knows"?! Would you listen to him? Chungabunga, you know as well as anybody here that Jurik and those militia analysts know way more than they're letting on about what's happening up there. The only reason to withhold info is to either avoid a panic or to find a way to put a positive spin on it.

:- FMLurder

+ T It's a sign of the apocalypse, I tell you! The Republic is falling apart, the HPGs are dark, and the sky is literally falling! Any fool can see it: The Word of Blake is coming back!

:- Rumormonger

+ See what I mean, Chungabunga? Case in point.

:- FMLurder

## Baker, Jokowski Claim Championship in Equatus 500 HoverBlitz

02/27/3133

MANTRAA, SOLARIS VII--In a stunning upset that had fans on the edges of their seats until the very end, Li Baker and Marlene Jokowski of Team Asbjørn claimed the Championship in the 3133 Equatus 500 HoverBlitz, deposing three-time winners Verne Dresden and Hoshi Calloway of Team Bannson. Reaching speeds up to 240 kph on the winding track, dodging automated laser fire through fields of smoke, and even surviving the dreaded Forest course in the final lap, Team Asbjørn (which means "God-Bear" in ancient Norse) pulled off an amazing win. They finished the course just a hair under 2.6 hours, barely a hoversled's length ahead of Team Bannson.

Competition in this year's HoverBlitz, sponsored jointly by Bannson Universal Unlimited and DefHes Industries, was particularly tight, with three new hoversled teams joining the Equatus League at the start of the fall season. The last month's semifinals, however, whittled the 34-team league down to a mere six teams for the 500-kilometer final, with Team Bannson favored by the odds-makers almost two-to-one. The closest contenders in this year's race, by all accounts, were Team Mjöltnir, Lyran favorites known for their aggressive driving, and the pro-Capellan Team Ji Nu, but no one expected the Rasalhaguan team Asbjørn to claim the starburst, least of all their champion racers, Baker and Jakowski.

"It was so incredible, especially in that last lap," Li Baker told reporters, her forehead still glistening with sweat from the hard-run race. "I just kept telling Marlene to pour on the thrust, till we could actually feel the engine mounts rattling behind us and every warning light on my panel was lit."

"The laser hit in the fourth lap had me concerned most," said Marlene Jokowski, Baker's engineer and copilot for the customized MKX-37 Avanti Starcharger they drove to victory. "We took a blast from the field turret that had us both fighting the controls to avoid going into a lateral spin. After that, I was just glad we survived to set down."

The laser cannons came online in the third lap, the infamous "crunch time" that gives the HoverBlitz its name, and accounted for the disabling of two of this year's competitors, including the champion sled of third-ranked Team Eagle of Marik fame, whose E-16 Macadam Bullet Glider slammed into the pit yards when a control-fin hit destroyed their maneuvering jets and sent them streaking off the track. Neither Hortense Timken, the Eagle pilot, nor his copilot, Ariel Ramos, was injured in the crash.

Meanwhile, the secondary sled of Team Ji Nu, piloted by Nickolas Akmed, managed a controlled slide to the sidelines when a laser bolt bit into its engine compartment, slicing open its distributor lines.

But by far the most difficult leg of the race began in lap five, when the eight surviving champion and secondary sleds swung through the infamous Forest course, darting amid the steel trees and holographic foliage of a simulated woodland that can confound even the most experienced hoverpilot. Only two competitors were eliminated by the maze of artificial trees and shrubbery, a far cry from the six-sled pile-up that all but ended the 3131 Equatus 500.

And in the end, Teams Bannson, Asbjørn, and Mjöltnir were in the lead, leaving Teams Eagle and Ji Nu and the Canopian-favored Team Stratos in the dust as each poured on every last bit of power for the finish. The final standings were as follows:

Team Asbjørn, in first place, claimed this year's gold starburst with a finish time of 2 hours, 34 minutes, 48.6 seconds. Team Bannson, in second place, earned the silver starburst with a finish time of 2 hours, 34 minutes, 51.3 seconds. Team Mjöltnir placed third, securing the bronze starburst with a finish time of 2 hours, 34 minutes, 55 seconds. And Teams Ji Nu and Thunder claimed the fourth and fifth places with times of 2 hours, 35 minutes, 6.4 seconds, and 2 hours, 35 minutes, 10.8 seconds, respectively.

"We were so close to the Bannson sled, I could smell the exhaust in my cockpit," said Jeanine Loffredo, pilot for Team Mjöltnir's Kreischener 4000 champion sled, which claimed the bronze sunburst. "But with every indicator warning of an imminent plant breach, I just knew we couldn't get the juice we'd need to pass."

Verne Dresden, three-time winner of the Equatus 500 and pilot for Team Bannson's champion V-20 Streak Missile Sled, demonstrated his legendary sportsmanship immediately following the race by personally congratulating Team Asbjørn's winning crew, and even posed for pictures with a friendly arm on the shoulders of both women.

"I'm a big enough man to acknowledge a great sledding crew when I see one," Dresden quipped to reporters, flashing another winning smile, "and I can definitely say I am seeing one here."

### Towne Log

+ Hellllllllllllll, yeah! About time someone knocked those Bannson punks off their high horses! That'll be 50 Stones, TVBluFist!  
:- BlazeFire

+ Dude! Team Asbjørn won? Over Bannson??? WTH? I didn't know the Rasalhagians even had a hoversled team!  
:- TVBluFist

+ Asbjørn and Stratos just came onto the scene last year, TV. Qualified for EL status after they passed the Pan-Solaris Open, if I recall it right.  
:- KevvyCone

+ The PSO? Dude, the PSO is crap! Simple run-around-the-continent stuff. Who has time to watch a 20-hour marathon of hoversleds when they got the Hoverblitz? If you ask me, that is what racing should be about--going ballistic, dodging laser fire, and trying not to slam your face into an iron tree!"

:- BlazeFire

+ And who'd have thought it, BF? Just five years ago, the PSO was "the" race to watch. Then Bannson took it to the next level with his Equatus League. Got to admit, that guy's a genius.

:- GropoM

+ Yeah, and no wonder his boys were the winners so many years running, huh? I still say these races are fixed.

:- Synnik

+ Cripes, man! Did you see that finish? Hell, Team Mjölfnir had its nose right up Bannson's tail-pipe, and you know it wouldn't have been pretty if they just lunged forward another five centimeters or so right then--not that Bannson couldn't afford some new glory boys after that. But tell me when you see one of those overpowered gliders split in two how it's all an act!

:- BlazeFire

+ Almost expected as much when Team Eagle's lead sled took that fin hit. Hell, to be able to survive a crash like that is some pretty fancy driving, the way I see it. Too bad they don't award starbursts for race-track heroics, eh?

:- OptMst

+ Winners get the medals, Opt, not survivors.

:- Synnik

## Blackstar's Kirkpatrick Claims 3132 S7 Championship

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03/06/3133

SOLARIS CITY, SOLARIS VII--With a spectacular finish to a charged fight season, Shayne "Shockwave" Kirkpatrick, star MechWarrior of Blackstar Stables, and her custom Zeus, "Thunderstorm," made history today by besting last year's fourth-ranked Omar "Demolition" Durand and his Vulture, "Gravewalker," at the Factory Arena in Montenegro. Delivering the killing blow on Durand's gyros and engines with one of her trademark "alpha strike" attacks, Kirkpatrick dropped the sophisticated Clan 'Mech from the Factory's infamous bridge and claimed the 3132 Solaris VII Grand Tournament Championship to thunderous applause from fans all across the Game World and beyond.

"I'd like to say, for all my fans, that I didn't win this Championship just for myself," said Kirkpatrick in the postbattle interview. "I won it for my team, the Blackstar Stables, for my stablemaster, Mr. Jeremiah Daelun, and for my brother, Domonic Hasseldorf--I love you, bud!

"But even more than all these guys," Kirkpatrick added with a glowing smile, "I have to dedicate this victory to the one and only Kai Allard-Liao, my hero and idol since I was about ten! The galaxy just ain't the same without him!"

Over 120 MechWarriors competed in the seven-day, Open class, single-elimination tournament that has been the heart of the Solaris Games for centuries. And like an annual changing of the guard, the top 20 ushers in a new generation of the Inner Sphere's finest competitors. Kirkpatrick's stellar performance was marred only by a near defeat in her first-round Boreal Reach match against the pro-Steiner Overlord Stable and their champion fighter, Kyle "Bonegrinder" DePaik. The shaky start had Kirkpatrick with only six to one odds at pulling off the Championship.

Omar Durand, ranked fourth in last year's Grand Tournament, made it to the final round this year, earning himself a number-two ranking that bodes well for his troubled employers at pro-Marik Galahad Stables.

"Going into the final, I really thought I was on borrowed time," said Durand about his victory over Ghost Bear, who held the Championship two years running using the brutal all-or-none approach favored by most Clan MechWarriors in the Solaris circuit. "I never expected to make it this far, so when they told me I was up against 'Roaring' Ronald, I just thought, 'Oh, damn! And I was having such a good run, too!'"

Kirkpatrick, who fought two vicious no-holds-barred grudge fights against vengeful opponents DePaik and her fourth-round victim, "Ravager" Raul Kalso of the Kuritan Silver Dragons Stable, remarked that Durand's professional--even polite--attitude before and after their final duel was a refreshing change from the bitterness that plagued past Championship games.

"He was nothing but cordial," Kirkpatrick told reporters, "congratulating me for every good shot even as we chased each other through the Factory. When my last shot knocked him off that bridge in the end, I truly felt sorry about it. So, when he landed and the game buzzer sounded, I had to make sure he was okay. I commed him and said, 'Hey, Durand, you need any help?' He just laughed and said, 'Whoops! I forgot to duck.'"

But where this year's best demonstrated legendary sporting play, out-of-arena conflicts--a common sight year round--often became as dramatic and violent as the 'Mech duels themselves. Well into the tournament, coverage actually centered on the ongoing feud between tenth-ranked Olivia "Queen Liv" Tyler of Zelazni Stables, a pro-Capellan team that has all but declared war on "Daring" David Strauss, last year's eighth-ranked star of the pro-Republic DiNappoli Stables. Known for a history of outlandish brawls during prematch and postmatch interviews, even when not scheduled to fight in the same arena, Tyler and Strauss outdid each other this year by inciting a miniature riot at the infamous Thor's Shieldhall nightclub in Solaris City's Silesia district. Both warriors were hospitalized for a day after the disturbance, which left an additional 57 fans, club staff, and bystanders injured; caused over 75,000 C-Bills in property damage; and resulted in hefty fines to both warriors in addition to their immediate suspension from the tournament.

"It's behavior like that that gives the sport a bad name," said Durand, when asked his opinion on the incident. "Thinking like that nearly destroyed this city decades ago. You'd think, by now, some people would know better."

### Towne Log

+ Un-freaking-believable! I saw that match, guys! Durand didn't just teeter off that bridge, he crashed down on his back, hard! The man's lucky to be alive, and all he says is, 'Whoops! I forgot to duck.'!?  
:- GropoM

+ Hell yeah, Gropo. It's his shtick after all. All these Solaris clowns got one. Actors and comedians, the whole lot, and people call this a legitimate sport!  
:- Synnik

+ Man, Syn, you're bringing everybody down in here. Bannson rigs the races; the mob rigs the 'Mech fights; the HPGs crashed because the 'Men in Black' are hiding the truth of an alien invasion from Strana Mechty. Give it all a freaking rest, won't you?  
:- KevvyCone

+ Any of you ever read about or watched footage from the Solaris Riots in the late 3060s? Hundreds of 'Mechs rampaging through downtown SC? Dudes, if you want to see intense realism in the Games, Synnik, that's where it happened! I'm amazed



they didn't simply turn entire blocks of the city into mega-arenas after that, I tell you. That would be some cool stuff!  
:- LevEOsa

+ Republican propaganda, Lev. You really expect me to believe that on a planet teeming with 'Mechs and ego-crazed 'Mech jocks, that the local cops and militia couldn't rein in two renegade fighters who took their 'Mechs to the streets?  
:- Synnik

+ Man, I still can't believe Kirkpatrick won! I had 100 Stones on Durand to claim the top spot this year!  
:- BlazeFire

+ Fools and their money, BF. I knew Shayne had what it took; she landed that gyro crit on DePaik in round one!  
:- BNCFanatic

+ How much did you win, then?  
:- BlazeFire

+ Um. Nothing. I didn't bet. :-(  
:- BNCFanatic

+ SNORT! What was that about fools and money?  
:- BlazeFire

+ "Not betting when your guys win isn't foolish, BF. Just unfortunate. Of course, I'm the guy who bet on Queen Liv taking out Strauss in the fifth round. Should've known they'd never even make it to the field! :-/"  
:- TVBluFist

+ Gasp! You mean you didn't put money on DePaik this year?  
:- BlazeFire

+ Huh? Freaking Blackstars. . . .  
:- TVBluFist

+ Hey! You watch what you say about my team, TV. Kirkpatrick whomped your boy not once, but twice this season!  
MWAHAHAHA!  
:- BNCFanatic

+ Enjoy it while it lasts, Fanatic. Come next year, your girl won't even be a distant memory when the Bonegrinder gets even.  
:- TVBluFist

+ In yer dreams, TV!  
:- BNCFanatic

+ Want to put money on that now, Fanatic? ;-)  
:- TVBluFist

## "Little Luthien" Killer Claims Fifth Victim

03/07/3133

KORDAVA – The port city of Kordava, located in the Zingara Province south of Port Howard, was stunned again yesterday by the discovery of a fifth mutilated corpse that baffled local police are already attributing to the so-called "Little Luthien" Killer. Officials have not yet released the name of this latest victim, but were able to confirm that she did in fact reside in Kordava's south side neighborhoods, an area that has been dubbed "Little Luthien" for the heavy cultural influence the Draconis Combine still has over its citizens.

Aside from her gender, and area of residence, the victim, a middle-aged female of Asian heritage, bears no apparent relation to four other women found in the Kordava harbor over the past two weeks. Inspector Frances Becca, of the Towne Bureau of Investigations, has confirmed for INN that, like the previous women, her nude body was found floating in the waters of Kordava Marina, apparently disfigured after her death.

"As in the case of the past four victims," said Becca in a press conference this morning, "we can confirm only that the deceased was a female who resided or worked in the 'Little Luthien' district of Kordava. She was found a little past midnight by dock workers at the local marina, where she had apparently been dumped only very recently. The coroner has identified the cause of death as suffocation, with the mutilation committed within the minutes afterward, but it remains unclear at this time whether or not the victim struggled with her attacker.

"Furthermore, we have been able to determine only that the killer has undertaken steps to remove what evidence may have been left on the victims before dumping their bodies in the Marina, though we suspect we are looking for someone with at least a basic knowledge of anatomy, and perhaps even surgical skills."

Asked if the killings were racially motivated, Becca told reporters that, while existing evidence supported such a theory, the TBI could not confirm it at this time.

"Although all of the victims lived or worked in the 'Little Luthien' district, the ethnic background of one of the women was Hispanic, so we tend to discount the race theory. Furthermore, the divergent occupations and known recreational hang-outs of the four previous victims show no common link as yet, though we're still waiting for more information on this latest killing to confirm that."

The slayings began twelve days ago, when the body of Alicia Lang, a 21 year-old waitress at Hiroshi's Bar and Grill was found by a Kordava harbor fisherman. The second victim, 27 year-old Takira Ikashi, employed as a computer lab technician for one of "Little Luthien's" north end offices, washed up on shore just three days later, missing her entire jaw. In the days that followed, two more bodies, belonging to 25 year-old Carmen Luego and 31 year-old Silva Agano, both residents of the western neighborhoods, but who worked over four blocks away from each other, also surfaced with various facial features removed sometime after death.

These brutal murders have created an atmosphere of mixed fear and anger through the neighborhoods of "Little Luthien" and other Combine-influenced communities all over Towne, with some citizens loudly blasting police and planetary officials for the slow pace of the investigation. At a rally held by many "Little Luthien" residents just last week, Yoshiro Kalawaska, one of the district's most prominent business leaders, challenged the planetary government to take action or risk an uprising.

"If these victims were descended from the Federated Suns, they would have their killer already," Kalawaska shouted to a throng gathered at the Kordava Marina. "Instead, we wait, while this monster slays us, one at a time! To Governor Jurik, I say, are we not your neighbors? Do we not deserve the same rights? We demand justice, now, or it will be time for the people of Towne to consider new leadership!"

Stymied by the lack of hard evidence, the TBI has contacted Terra for assistance in resolving this case, seeking the aid of one of the Republic's Knights in finding the killer who even now stalks the women of "Little Luthien". Unfortunately, the breakdown of HPG communications still affecting much of the Republic has so far frustrated such efforts, leaving local authorities to their own devices for the time being. Meanwhile, even though they still lack a suspect, police are urging citizens to remain calm in these uncertain times.

"I would like to stress that now is no time to panic, or to jump to obtuse conclusions," Becca reminded INN at the close of this morning's press conference. "Rest assured, that even if we must go it alone on this investigation, we will catch this killer, and we will bring him to justice."

### Towne Log

+ Sweet Jesus! How can they have five victims and no fragging DNA evidence to track this guy?

:- FMLurder

+ The cops aren't saying everything they've got, FMLurder. They never know if the killer's watching. They're just playing dumb, hoping to draw him in.

:- OptMist

+ Wish that were true, OM, but the fact is the guy hit again and they've done nothing about it. What I wonder about is why nobody's thought to investigate every doctor and butcher in Little Luthien, since they know they're looking for someone with

anatomical knowledge. There can't be that many.

:- Chungabunga

+ Guys, I live in Little Luthien! Trust me when I say the cops wouldn't want to do that. Things are bad enough here as it is that the second cops come in to interrogate every doctor and butcher, you'll be looking at a riot for sure!

:- Draco041

+ Even if it catches your killer, Draco?

:- FMLurder

+ I doubt it even would. There's no guarantee the guy even lives in the district, and all it would accomplish is making us look bad.

:- Draco041

+ That must be why they're bringing in a Knight. Only a Knight can handle this delicately enough to keep everyone's feathers from getting ruffled.

:- Michi

+ Heh. You didn't notice they added that the Knight may not be here for a loooooong time, did you, Michi? I have my own theory here, guys. Did you notice all the victims are women, who live and work in Little Luthien. My guess is we're looking at a trained black ops guy, probably from the Republic itself, here to root out Drac agents. You know Tormark's elite troops are all women, and some of them are pretty nasty. This guy could be doing us a favor!

:- WetWillie

+ I'm gonna pretend I didn't read that, WW.

:- Draco041

+ Truth hurts, doesn't it, Snake?

:- WetWillie

+ MALF OFF, WW! You don't know what the drek you're talking about!

:- Draco041

+ Knock it off, both of you! WetWillie, one more slur like that, and you're out of here! I've already warned you about the ethnic crap.

:- ModR8R039

+ Hang your rules if he can't take a joke! He's the one who's got a killer stalking his neighborhood, but won't let the cops in to do their job. The whole lot of them are a bunch of lousy ingrates!

:- WetWillie

\*\*\* WetWille has been kick-banned from server by ModR8R039: (Come back when you've finally grown up!)

## **War Fears, Communications Woes Still Plague Republic Stock Exchange**

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03/10/3133

PORT HOWARD – The ongoing communications crisis and rising fears of fighting across the Republic, continue to plague the Republic Stock Exchange, sending investors into a panic that analysts say could create a severe depression. Already facing a recession in the making before what many have called “the Great Crash”, investors from Towne to Terra continue to sell off their futures as uncertainly piles up with each passing day.

“More and more shareholders have been running scared since word of fighting first came in,” said John Farquest, a market analyst from Landerscholt & Sons, a Port Howard-based investment bank, who disclosed today their eighth straight week of losses since the collapse of the communications grid. “Many, believing it will protect their earnings, have opted to sell off their entire portfolios, though a few have been jumping back in with military tech stocks.”

Farquest says, however, that the worst may be yet to come. Once again citing the breakdown of interplanetary communications, he pointed out that the current value of stocks in off-world companies has become a “blind gamble”, with often-outdated information arriving only as fast as the next DropShip. Exacerbated by panic sell-offs, this situation could lead to a financial crisis felt by every corporation publicly traded throughout the Republic and beyond. To combat this, Farquest and the vast majority of stock brokers across Towne caution investors to think first before relinquishing their shares.

“Imagine,” said Farquest, “an investor on Tikonov holds stock in Cyclops, Incorporated, located on Skye, and each of his shares was worth 37.5 Devlins before the Crash. Without reliable data, who knows what those same shares are worth today? A mere tenth of that amount, or perhaps ten times more?”

Despite the advice, shareholders continue to dump their stocks in droves, driving the Republic-wide industrial averages down by as much as 1,000 shares a day on Towne alone, a decline unparalleled in history. Still, some analysts report that not all of the news is bad. Benjamin Fitch, vice president of Fitch Accounting, has advised many of his clients that now is the perfect time to look to the local markets for steady, reliable growth.

“Even as the Republic Exchange reels from the crisis abroad,” said Fitch, “local industries, particularly those geared toward defense and transportation, have begun to thrive in their place, opening the door for at least a regional recovery that could carry us through these dark times.”

## BCA Administrator Slain, "Little Luthien" Connection Suspected

03/14/3133

KORDAVA – Police at this hour are investigating a possible link to the so-called "Little Luthien" serial killer after the grisly discovery this morning of a partially mutilated body identified as that of Hikaru Roneskovich, head of the local Republican Bureau of Citizens' Affairs, at his Kordava home. The 67 year-old Roneskovich, popular among the residents of Kordava's largely Draconis Combine-influenced "Little Luthien" district for his compassion toward those of Combine descent, was discovered this morning by a house servant, who quickly phoned police.

Authorities in Kordava have declined to give details about Roneskovich's discovery, or the extent of his injuries at this time, but have indicated that some leads in this case suggest a possible tie in with the recent string of murders in the "Little Luthien" district. Towne Bureau of Investigations Inspector Frances Becca told INN reporters that every possible lead is being followed in the Republic administrator's slaying.

"Though there are similarities to the recent string of killings in Kordava's Combine-citizens district, we can't say with any certainties that this homicide is really connected," Becca said. "Among the few differences, however, is the fact that the deceased is male, and the body has not been disposed of in the local harbor area. Our forensics teams are still going over Mr. Roneskovich's apartment, which is actually located outside the so-called 'Little Luthien' district of Kordava, and we are questioning a number of potential witnesses at this time, many of whom are neighbors of the deceased."

Roneskovich, a thirty-year veteran of the Republic's bureaucracy, moved to Kordava only five years ago, but has served as head of the Bureau of Citizen's Affairs on Towne for well over two decades. Roughly two years ago, his otherwise commendable career hit a rough patch when Towne officials charged him with links to a yakuza smuggling operation in "Little Luthien". Though a special committee investigation, launched by then-Prefect Duchess Katana Tormark, eventually cleared Roneskovich, he was briefly demoted during that time, and only returned to the leadership of the BCA six months ago.

In light of his past, many have suggested Roneskovich's murder may be the work of organized crime, but in the face of such suggestions, Inspector Becca said only that the TBI will investigate "every credible lead".

While the investigation begins into the latest homicide to rock the port city of Kordava, the BCA has already vowed to forge ahead without his leadership. Lionel Gaherdt, a spokesperson for the BCA, announced today that until confirmation arrives from Terra, the bureau will appoint vice administrator Elisa Mataza as interim head of the department, and social services will remain open to the public.

"Mr. Roneskovich's passing was as tragic as it was unexpected," said Gaherdt in a telephone interview with INN, "but what's important is that his work continues. The BCA remains dedicated to helping all Republic citizens in times that have grown so uncertain of late. I'd like to think that, by doing all way can in his name, we can bring honor and dignity to he memory of a man who has faithfully served the people."

Tonight, the people of "Little Luthien" remember Mr. Roneskovich with a mixture of sorrow and fear – sorrow, for the loss of a man who so often championed the cause of Combine descendants all over Towne, and fear of the unknown killer who took his life.

"He was always there for our people," said one teary-eyed "Little Luthien" resident, upon hearing the news. "And now, there is no one. This was not just an attack on one man, but an attack on all of us."

### Towne Log

+ Does anybody else here get the strong feeling the TBI hasn't got a clue what they're up against this time?

:- FMLurder

+ I doubt it's the "Little Luthien" killer, personally. The other victims so far have been nobody special, and all of them were women who lived or worked in the area. That BCA guy was none of the above. Then again, the cops didn't say what evidence they had (or didn't have) to suggest what makes them want to go that way.

:- Gringo21

+ Alright, brainiacs. Since you obviously know more than trained police investigators, who do you think is behind this one?

:- Anonymous1530

+ This one? One word: Yaks.

:- WetWillie

+ There you go again, WW! Naturally, the killer has to be a Drac, since we're all a bunch of barbarians, right?

:- Draco041

+ I'm not going there this time, Draco. Look, you tell me: Mr. Ruchenkov – or however you spell his name – was in bed with the yaks a couple years back and he nearly got caught, till Tormark stepped in and saved his political posterior. Now out from under her protection, he's found dead in his apartment? That doesn't seem a tad convenient for you?

:- WetWillie

+ Oh, NATURALLY it has to be yakuza! How could I have been so BLIND? You know, a good man died today, but rather than recognize him, you have to put the blame on the Combine community, just because we stayed closer to our roots. Hey! Now that I think about it, you have one point at least: he lived while Tormark was still around, but look what happens when the honorable Dragons depart, eh? From where I sit, this IS the perfect time for some FedRats to make a move, and why not start with some upstanding Dracs, eh?

:- Draco041

+ I give up!

:- WetWillie

## "Little Luthien" Killer Strikes Again, Leaves Message for Authorities

03/17/3133

KORDAVA – In a chilling new development to a series of murders terrorizing the southern districts of the port city of Kordava, the so-called "Little Luthien" Killer left not only the remains of his latest victim in the harbor waters, but also a message to authorities, disavowing himself of any involvement in the recent murder of local BCA chief Hikaru Roneskovich, whose mutilated body was also found earlier this week at his Kordava residence. Officials close to the ongoing investigation into one of the most elusive serial killers in Towne history told INN this morning that the discovery of the latest victim and a data disc bearing the killer's message are still undergoing forensic analysis under the direction of the Towne Bureau of Investigations.

"At this time, it's hard to say exactly what the new evidence we've received will tell us," said the official, who spoke to reporters on the condition of anonymity. "However, strong clues do indicate that we are dealing with the same suspect as in at least five previous slayings."

Inspector Frances Becca, the TBI agent assigned to heading the investigation, said only that a sixth female victim, nude and mutilated was indeed recovered from the waters of Kordava's harbor, where five previous victims of the alleged "Little Luthien" Killer had been found. Roneskovich, whose body was discovered two days ago by a house servant at his west side Kordava apartment, similarly disrobed and mutilated, was tentatively identified by local police as a seventh victim of the same serial killer, but TBI officials have declined to confirm this speculation.

"While some of the events surrounding Mr. Roneskovich's murder fit into the established pattern of the so-called 'Little Luthien' Killer," Becca told INN in an interview yesterday afternoon, "additional evidence gathered at the scene has suggested that the Roneskovich case is unrelated, and that his killer or killers simply used the 'Little Luthien' scare as cover for their own actions."

Becca informed INN also that a composite profile on the 'Little Luthien' Killer has been finalized by TBI and Kordava police, bringing authorities one step closer to identifying and capturing the individual.

"Based on the available evidence," Becca said, "we're certain we are dealing with a single male individual, most likely of Anglic descent and upbringing. He possesses basic knowledge of human anatomy, and expert martial arts training. Moreover, given the time between the attacks, we believe the individual is a resident of the district, perhaps employed among the local fishing fleet or merchant marine."

Becca declined to elaborate further on the TBI profile, saying that additional information could compromise the investigation, but did caution Kordava residents not to panic or jump to hasty conclusions regarding the killer's identity.

"This investigation can only be brought to a successful conclusion with the cooperation of the local populace and police agencies," Becca said, appealing to all citizens of Kordava and the surrounding towns. "Racing to conclusions is not only counter-productive, but could allow a killer to go free, while innocents suffer."

Larisi Nakohama, mother of the last known victim of the "Little Luthien" Killer, 25-year old dental assistant Shari Nakohama, has accused the Kordava police and the TBI of not moving fast enough.

"My baby girl died because [Inspector Becca and the Kordava police] would rather wait for some high-and-mighty Knight of the Republic come here to do their jobs for them," Nakohama told INN. "And before her, so many others. Now they say they know something about who this murdering monster may be, but they're afraid to say because it will cause a panic? Have any of them any idea what it's like to be a mother, waiting at home anxiously waiting for her only living daughter to come home from school because her sister's killer is still on the loose?"

Becca told INN last week that a special Knight assigned from Terra is currently en route to Towne to assist in the case, but has also stressed that the local authorities and the TBI continue to pursue "every available lead" to bring a stop to these killings.

"Nothing would make me happier," said Becca, "than telling the Terran Knight his trip was wasted when he arrives."

### Towne Log

+ Two weeks later, and this is the best the TBI can come up with? A half-cocked physcho-theory? Seven people are dead – that they know of!

:- DefBones

+ Hey, don't knock those profilers, DB. Some of those guys can nail a person without waiting for forensics to get their hands on the DNA and fiber samples to prove it. Of course, with all the bodies washing up in Kordava harbor, you'd think they'd have that part too...

:- LewCass

+ You know what gets me? They mentioned that a data disc was found on the last victim, with a message from the killer. Now, maybe I'm asking too many questions here, but (a) I'd wonder what was on that disc, and (b) I'd wonder how the killer made sure it made it to the cops, if he dumped the body nude.

:- MM009

+ Um. (a) They probably won't tell us, MM, until they have a chance to analyze it for prints, DNA, electronic traces, etc. As to (b), I certainly DON'T want to know.

:- LewCass

+ I'm actually intrigued by the fact that it seems the Kordava police and the TBI don't seem to agree who killed the BCA guy, Hikaru what's-his-name there. If I read that right, the local cops say it's the serial killer, but the TBI doesn't agree.

:- FMLurder+ That's because Mr. BCA's murder doesn't fit their perfect little model, FM. Now, if I were the killer, I'd pull a few more hits like that, just to really throw folks off! If all the TBI has to go on is a profile, breaking with it now seems like a pretty sound tactic for a killer.

:- DefBones

+ Let's hope, then, he's not as smart as you are, Def.

:- Chungabunga

+ Say, has anyone seen Draco around lately?

:- FMLurder

+ Don't you get started now, FM!

:- ModR8R039



## Prayers, Pageantry Mark Freedom Day Celebrations

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03/18/3133

PORT HOWARD--Fireworks, parades, speeches, and prayers marked this year's tribute to Devlin Stone at the annual Freedom Day celebrations. The holiday, long endorsed by the Republican government--but made official only after Stone's retirement from his post as Exarch fewer than three years ago--has become one of the nation's most patriotic, heaping praise on the man credited with rescuing the Inner Sphere from the fires of the Word of Blake Jihad. But whereas prior Freedom Day celebrations have been upbeat, this year's celebrations, marred by the ongoing crises across The Republic, were tinged by an undercurrent of solemn reflection.

"He was a savior, a saint, and a soldier--all in one," said Legate Jonathan Jurik, who personally presided over the morning parades in Port Howard. "His wisdom brought us peace like we have never seen, and prosperity like we have never known."

Freedom Day marks the historic beginning of Devlin Stone's campaign to defeat the Word of Blake forces during their Jihad against the Inner Sphere. The Jihad, already in its third year at the time, plunged virtually all of humanity into the most brutal warfare seen since the Amaris crisis, with tens of millions killed annually in a brutal series of 'Mech clashes, nuclear strikes, biochemical attacks, and WarShip assaults. Though the Jihad was waged largely around Terra itself, the seat of the Blakists' power at the time, even the most far-flung states felt the wrath of the techno-zealots. Stone's 18 March 3071 escape from the Divine Light Reeducation Camp on Kittery, for which Freedom Day is celebrated, was the turning point of the war.

In 3086, Senator Leslie Brahe, an ardent supporter of Stone and The Republic, proposed the creation of a national holiday commemorating Stone's birth. But because the Exarch himself claimed he did not know the date, and would not condone a day of celebration in his honor, Brahe instead launched a grassroots campaign to establish Freedom Day in its place. The holiday won immediate acceptance on more than two-thirds of all Republic worlds, with local governments choosing their own traditions to honor their beloved leader. By 3100, there was not a world in The Republic that did not observe Freedom Day in one way or another, and even some of The Republic's neighbors adopted the holiday.

With the formal creation of Freedom Day as a Republic-wide holiday in 3131, Exarch Redburn approved an official set of holiday traditions that are now familiar on every world. Parades honoring those who helped fight for The Republic's creation and survival, as well as those who still serve it every day--such as doctors and fire and police officials--kick off the morning celebrations, while speeches and special tri-vid programming dominate the afternoon. At night, a special laser and fireworks show lights up the skies, and celebrity musicians express the joy of a people freed from tyranny.

This year's commemorations, however, were more low-key than usual, not just in Port Howard, but in cities all across The Republic. Darkened by the HPG crash and left uncertain by the military crises that seem to have affected every prefecture in The Republic, today's celebrations were tempered with quiet reflection. Jurik had the following to say during closing remarks this morning:

"We are all in this together, as we have been all along. Though we find ourselves now in an uncertain time, we must never forget that men like Devlin Stone can be found every day in the hearts and minds of those he touched. If we are to honor his memory and his dream, we must all remember that the price of freedom--and of peace--is eternal vigilance and the resolve to be the best we can be, both to ourselves and to one another. Let us therefore pray that the peace and prosperity we all knew under Devlin Stone's benevolent rule will soon return."

## Spy Scandal Rocks Kressly Technologies, The Republic

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03/24/3133

DORI, EPSILON ERIDANI (PREFECTURE X)--The discovery of an alleged Capellan spy ring centered on Kressly Technologies of Epsilon Eridani has created a stir not only at the company itself, but also in The Republic of the Sphere at large. Three more high-level employees of the Dori-based IndustrialMech- and aerospace-manufacturing company have been suspended in connection with the ongoing investigation; this announcement promises to complicate already tense relations between The Republic and its least-friendly neighbor during a time of great uncertainty.

Kressly Technologies spokesperson Harold Weasley said that pending a full investigation, his company could not release the names of the accused individuals, but again stated that all three were among the company's management staff.

"At this time, our own internal investigation continues with the aid of local Republic officials," Weasley explained during a press conference yesterday. "What we can say, however, is that two of the recent suspensions were members of the lower management staff at our Gousha aerospace complex, and a third was a member of the corporate office staff."

The alleged spy ring first came to light only four days ago, when a routine internal audit of the company's electronic records uncovered several unauthorized downloads of top-secret files. A Kressly Technologies representative, on the condition of anonymity, told INN that the accessed records included several military aerospace designs currently under development for sale to The Republic, and plans for retooling the IndustrialMech lines for military production. Weasley has neither confirmed nor denied this allegation.

"All we can say with certainty at this time is that electronic data pertaining to very sensitive programs underway at Kressly Tech has been compromised," said Weasley.

The spy scandal has already touched off a fierce debate in Geneva, Terra, as many Republic Senators are demanding immediate action against the Capellan Confederation. Citing a recent petition by the Confederation's representative, Mandarin William Chen, for a return of all historically Capellan worlds to House Liao, many Senators see the recent scandal as a call to arms.

"The discovery of spies in our midst cannot--must not--be tolerated!" said Senator Elam MacCain of Skye (Prefecture IX). "Engaging in such practices can be construed only as an act of war, and in light of recent threats made by Mandarin Chen, we must consider these actions a threat to our national sovereignty. Even if the suspects involved [at Kressly Technologies] are cleared, there is still reason to believe that House Liao is and has been engaged in acts of espionage and infiltration against The Republic. We must send a message!"

"Chancellor Daoshen Liao has stated, both publicly and through his minions, that he wishes to pick up where Sun-Tzu left off and reclaim the ancestral worlds of the Confederation," Senator Lina Derius of Fomalhaut (Prefecture X) told reporters. "And we have seen Liao incursions on Republic territory several times in the last decade alone. Now, with the HPG grid down, there's no question that the Capellans will strike. It's not a question of if, but when, they will do so."

Exarch Redburn, in an appeal for calm, appeared before the Senate to make an appeal for a diplomatic, rather than military, solution to the matter.

"It cannot be stressed enough," said Redburn, "that this Republic does not live for the sword, regardless of the opinions of its more reactionary elements. The solution to our problems--the only solution worth trying--involves diplomacy, compromise, and understanding: the values Devlin Stone himself taught us when this great nation was built. We must not let blind allegations, still unproven in a legitimate court of law, provoke us into panic. The Capellan Confederation is not our enemy. My fellow Republicans, do not allow the fear and uncertainty of these times lead you down the fool's path to war."

Despite the Exarch's appeal, however, many Republicans still feel that a war with the Confederation is almost certain, especially in light of the spy scandal at Kressly Technologies and the communications blackout still plaguing the galaxy at large. At the Capellan Embassy in Geneva, however, the spirit of Liao pride remains strong.

"These allegations of spying are foolish, at best," said Mandarin Chen in a rare holoivid interview with INN. "It is obvious that powers within Republican government intend to discredit our people and our government in order to distract attention away from their own issues at home. Such an outrage is tolerated only in the interest of fostering goodwill among our neighboring realms. If there is to be a conflict over this trifling matter, however, know that the spirit and the will of House Liao can never be broken. We shall prevail."

### Towne Log

+ Oh, goodie! House Liaoser wants to pick a fight with us! This ought to be a short contest.  
:- RepMan

+ None too bright, are you, RepMan? Don't you see that a fight with a Great House, in the Republic's current state, is the last thing we need right now? We still have a half dozen renegade factions running around on their own agendas, you know.  
:- Graussler

+ You never heard the old adage about the enemy of my enemy, Grauss? If House Liao invades, those various factions will realize there's bigger fish in the sea than themselves. They'll have to join forces again to keep the Capellan hordes at bay, and

when it's all over, Redburn can pick up the pieces and declare a victory. Two birds with one stone!

:- RepMan

+ That's the most naïve load of horse-hockey I ever heard!

:- Graussler

+ Hey, fellas! Can you hear yourselves? They find a few spies in some AgroMech company, and you're all suddenly banging war drums. Hell, nobody even knows who these people were, or who they were really spying for, but you guys are jumping in with the first thing some feeble-minded Senators say about the CapCon. Why not wait till the courts decide what the hell happened before you go dictating policy, eh?

:- Chungabunga

+ Spoken like a liberal tree-hugger. Hippee? Is that you?

:- FMLurder

+ All I'm trying to say is that this isn't Kentares IV or Outreach! It's a spy op, and for all we know the guilty party could turn out to be Bannson and his corporate raider types! We just DON'T KNOW yet.

:- Chungabunga

+ I just like how everyone's getting all worked up over this. I mean, come on! Do you REALLY believe that this spy thing's just a one-way street, really?

:- FMLurder

## **Mike Nurdenburg's Corner: Who Says Sci-Fi Is Dead?**

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03/27/3133

A new year has come, and with it the inevitable flood of new holovid and novel releases that this reporter, for one, always looks forward to. This year, however, has seen a surprise departure from the Immortal Warrior series and other action films, as the biggest box office and bookshelf draws have actually emerged from the often-scoffed genre of science fiction.

Still in theaters, with an astonishingly refreshing storyline, believable characters, and some of the most realistic acting this reporter has seen in many a year, the smash hit *Divergence* brings us our first glimpse of a trilogy set in A. H. Baker's *Altered Spheres* sci-fi novel series. In this film, Adrian Delaurel plays Kirk Damons, a mercenary commander whose unit is loosely attached to the SLDF just after the defeat of the Clan Crusades. In this alternative time line, however, the Word of Blake Jihad is shattered before it can begin when hordes of aliens appear right in the middle of the Chaos March to launch a war of conquest and annihilation. Damons, starting out as little more than an errand boy for the League, spends much of the movie in fierce competition with a Steel Viper Clan Commander, Paul Andrews, played by Damian Remora, whose unit is also assigned to serve as part of the SLDF's reserve action force. The film ends with a cliffhanger, of course, as the alien invasion first begins by smashing several worlds. Among the most striking scenes is the brutal overrun of Blakist defenders at Dotara on Kawich, in a battle that almost makes one feel sorry for the fanatics. This drama is sure to win awards at the next Irian Film Festival!

Also in bookstores this month, echoing the success of *Divergence*, is the latest sci-fi thriller by Bryn Charlotte. *The Unnamed* is a speculative-fiction tale that begins with a monumental discovery, as researchers discover the real truth behind the disappearance of the fabled Clan Wolverine, and explodes with action as the team of mercenary explorers travels beyond the reaches of the Inner Sphere to discover a vast, malignant empire poised to strike at all humanity, beginning with the Clans.

With hits like these dominating the box office and bookstores now, all I can say to you 'Mech-jaded types who think sci-fi is dead is, well, "Neener, neener!"

## Archaeologists: Brythunia Find Predates Pons

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03/29/3133

BORAMIS--Archaeologists confirmed today that artifacts and ruins discovered more than five kilometers off the eastern shores of the Brythunia province on Hyboria are in fact the remains of a man-made settlement established some 40 or 50 years before plankton magnate C. Augustus Pons led the first settlers to Towne in the late 22nd century. The analysis ends speculation about the nature of the ruins, which extend to the base of the Brythunia highlands some 15 kilometers inland, including a few rumors that the site was in fact the remains of a lost alien civilization.

"It's a very exciting find," said Dr. Vanessa Markoja, head of the University of Towne's field archaeology team supervising the underwater dig site, where most of the larger ruins and artifacts have been found. "Though certainly of human origin, this find--at the very least--may completely rewrite the history of our world, and possibly give us insight into the early events surrounding the first Terran exodus and colonial expansion."

Until today, Towne history texts unanimously declared that the world's first settlements were established by an expedition led by billionaire C. Augustus Pons, the eccentric plankton magnate. His noteworthy affection for the works of 20th-century writer, Robert Erwin Howard, led to many of the names for the cities and features of Towne, particularly on the Hyborian continent, where the initial waves of North American settlers landed and set up colonies. The discovery that settlers arrived on Towne half a decade earlier may now call into question details of this early colonial period, as archaeologists work to discover whether Pons or his expedition knew of the Brythunian site.

Dr. Markoja told INN in a press conference that the ruins were first discovered a month ago when workers started breaking ground for a new militia base. A summary analysis, including sonar and spectrographic sensor scans of the region, found evidence of structures and refined metals along a 20-kilometer stretch that ends in a grand complex located almost 300 meters below the waves of the Eastern Ocean.

"It appears, by the arrangement of structures, that the Brythunian colonists established themselves along the banks of a river," explained Markoja, illustrating her point with a computer-generated map of the region. "We believe the majority, however, were located on the coastline, which at the time must have existed approximately five or six kilometers from where it is today. At the underwater site, our teams have located and identified the remains of large structures and small homes and, buried under centuries of silt, loose rock, and coral, samples of heavy machinery such as vehicles and ocean-going vessels."

But what caused the Brythunian colonists' extinction, and whether they ever encountered Pons' settlers or their descendants, remains a mystery.

"This area shows a great deal of tectonic instability," remarked Dr. James Taggart, a resident seismologist. "Such a thing is only natural, however, for a world as geologically young as our own. If I had to guess, my theory would be that a major seismic event literally swept these settlements off the map and diverted the flow of this river. The main settlement likely fell or slid into the sea as a result of this event, which could very likely have been triggered by an asteroid collision that largely went unnoticed by the [Pons] settlers on the west coast, who had not yet moved into the area."

### Towne Log

+ Wow! I wonder what those first folk would have said if they found out a guy with an obsession with Conan the Barbarian was going around naming everything after stuff from some cornball comics, eh?  
:- Teknofile

Hard to say. How can an expedition be mounted to explore and settle a planet, and never find a colony that big on the same ruddy continent? Did Pons' guys just park on the first untamed coast they saw and set up camp?  
:- BobaQ

+ Maybe they DID run across them, BBQ, and maybe there was a disagreement, if you know what I mean. They say winners write the history books, after all.  
:- FMLurder

Lurder, do you HAVE to come up with a conspiracy theory for everything? How would you explain the fact that their entire colony establishment was buried under layers of soil and rock so deep and so smooth it looked like natural earth?  
:- BobaQ

+ All right, then. How do YOU explain that a colony can get that large and not be detected? Or that the early settlers never happened across them while scoping out all the metal deposits on this rock, huh? Oh, I know! Maybe the serpent sirens got to them!  
:- FMLurder

## Pierson's Round Table: War Drums?

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03/31/3133

**PIERSON:** Good morning, viewers! Ian Pierson here, and the topic of the morning's Round Table is: War. Certainty, or just a lot of hype? With me this morning is INN political analyst, Doctor Stefan Marshall . . .

**MARSHALL:** Thank you, Ian.

**PIERSON:** former Senator of Zamora Province, Philip Genakis . . .

**GENAKIS:** Hello, Ian.

**PIERSON:** and Captain Annabelle Kemiko of the Towne Militia.

**KEMIKO:** Good to be here, Ian.

**PIERSON:** Thank you all for coming, people. Now, to the topic at hand: Doctor Marshall, anybody with half a brain can see that things have gone crazy since the interstellar communications net went down in August. Before then, we saw Capellan threats and calls to expand Republican military. Now, it seems that new armies are growing up all around us and many are openly engaged in hostilities--not with any foreign invader--but against each other. Is the future one of war, or is this "just a phase"; and how should the people of Towne react?

**MARSHALL:** Well, Ian, what I think it is we're seeing is the initial panic that goes with a person's first real experience with blindness, expanded to the social level. It's akin to seeing dark and menacing creatures all around you in a crowded room, right before somebody turns off the lights. These armies now forming are the result of certain leaders, many with the best interest of society at heart, lashing out in panic lest they be caught flat footed by one of those mysterious attackers. As to how Towne should react, well, it's not really my place, but if it were me, I'd get ready just in case one of these "panic attacks" hits home.

**PIERSON:** Interesting theory, Doctor. Mr. Genakis?

**GENAKIS:** In my opinion, arming ourselves for solo action when The Republic at large is in danger is a very dangerous path to choose. Contrary to Doctor Marshall's assessment, the truth is that some of the forming factions--such as the Dragon's Fury and the Steel Wolves--are outright aggressors, targeting worlds in a larger campaign aimed at claiming territory for ancestral reasons, or to carve their own fiefdoms in the name of glory. The moment we become a threat or our military industry rises to the point where it's worthy of a pitched battle, Towne is doomed to become another statistic in The Republic's gradual decline. Instead, I think we should be giving The Republic more political and financial support, and maybe requesting support from the Knights, rather than just arming ourselves like vigilantes.

**PIERSON:** Another excellent point. Captain Kemiko?

**KEMIKO:** As much as I hate to disagree with Mr. Genakis, the fact of the matter is that The Republic, and more specifically Exarch Redburn, has granted emergency authority to local commanders and planetary leaders to take those actions needed to maintain order. Now, because Towne has no major base of operations for any Republic militia units or major defense forces, we are forced to secure our own defenses and the means to maintain order from within our own ranks. We are aware that there are agencies, even those formerly among The Republic's own most outstanding citizens and leaders, who've turned on the ideals of Devlin Stone and who seek their own conquests. Without any form of militia, Towne doesn't stand a chance against them. Meanwhile, we see friendly forces out there, like the Highlanders, who are dedicated to maintaining the central authority and have the limited means to hold multiple worlds in The Republic's name, but not all of them. Those forces will require allies interested in the same goal to help other worlds--allies such as Towne itself.

**PIERSON:** So, what you're saying is that the Towne militia believes the question isn't if, but when, Captain?

**KEMIKO:** Unfortunately, yes, Ian.

**GENAKIS:** Now, see here, Captain. It's one thing when a man keeps a club under his bed to ward off intruders, but another thing entirely when the same man posts land mines on his front step and packs a semi-automatic on his way to work in the morning.

**PIERSON:** On that note, it's time for our first commercial break. Stay tuned, Towne, as we continue to discuss the sounding of the war drums.

### Towne Log

+ This show kills me! I mean, Pierson almost never speaks for himself; he just gets his guests to do all the talking, then shuts them up for a commercial break! Where can I get a job like that?

:- Synnik

+ Glad someone's amused by all this. Has anybody here noticed that today's discussion is seriously slanted in favor of war footing? I mean, look at these guests? The militia recruitment chief, an INN war analyst, and a deposed Senator for the

Nationalist party. Really, who gives Genakis any credibility at all these days, anyway?

:- Hippee

+ Oh, hell, Hippee! If Stone himself crawled out from wherever it is he's gone to hide and showed up here, we'd all be bowing and hanging on his every word! And why? Because he held the respected position for so long. Genakis is clearly the voice of reason here, if Kemiko and Marshall would only shut up and listen up.

:- Kurious

+ Sad fact, folks, is that the militia chief and the war correspondent are right. I mean, six small armies formed in our little corner of The Republic as it is, and Knights are few and far between. Even if Genakis were right, we'd not have much chance of surviving the next Dragon's Fury attack if we had no army of our own, and before you know it, those of us who don't swear to the Dracs' Dictum Honorum would find our heads in the gutters--very far from our bodies, if you catch my drift.

:- Chungabunga

+ I for one detest warmongers, but 'Bunga's right. If we don't gear up for war, we're facing oblivion, no matter how much or how little we have to offer. Warm bodies make for a good labor force, no matter the banner.

:- EISi

+ Hey guys, stow it! The show's back on . . .

:- Kurious

## Senate Debates Communications, Digital Overwatch

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04/02/3133

GENEVA, TERRA (PREFECTURE X)--The recent discovery of a Capellan spy ring, centered on the Kressly Technologies facility on Epsilon Eridani, has renewed the Republican Senate debate over establishing a nationwide communications and digital traffic overwatch, which would be aimed at locating political insurgents and hostile agents infiltrating The Republic before they become a threat to national security. As expected by champions on both sides of the issue, emotions ran hot during the latest discussions over the proposed bill, which would grant The Republic the authority to eavesdrop on all forms of domestic and interplanetary communications within its borders.

Speaking on behalf of the senators opposed to the bill, known as the Vasquez Bill for its original author, Senator Jennifer Vasquez of New Kyoto (Prefecture VIII), Senator Elan MacCain (Skye, Prefecture IX) took to the floor with an impassioned speech.

"Passing this bill puts another nail in the coffin for basic human liberties and civil rights in The Republic," said MacCain. "Not only does it deprive the common citizens of their rights under a free and peace-loving state, but it also jeopardizes the basic trust of the people in their government, and turns our leaders into watchdogs, no better than the dictators of ages past."

Proponents of the bill, however, have disagreed, saying that the need to protect The Republic against both internal and external threats overrides the right of individual secrecy. Senator Lina Derius (Fomalhaut, Prefecture X), championed the bill from the floor of the Republican Senate.

"The security of The Republic and its people must be protected at whatever the cost," said Derius. "With a great deal of The Republic's authority now vested in its various local military leaders and planetary governors, and with many of those same citizens suddenly perverting said authority to raise armies of questionable loyalty at best, and overt treachery at worst, it has become of paramount importance that our intelligence community obtains as much information as possible about potential internal threats. What use is protecting our citizens' right to privacy if we sacrifice their lives in so doing? What hope does this body have of restoring order and peace if it cannot maintain any semblance of central authority for the sake of personal vanities?"

With opinion on the Vasquez Bill divided almost evenly among the reduced Senate, and an unprecedented third of the Legislature on the fence, the debate still rages on, and may continue to do so for weeks according to some government analysts. Even on the streets of The Republic itself, public opinion is sharply--and evenly--divided.

"It's appalling, to say the least," said Belinda Blair, an e-bank teller from Des Moines, Terra. "I can't believe the situation has come to this. Is the government now trying to say it's so scared that it has to watch all of us? That it suspects us all of being potential terrorists or Liao spies? Today, they want to listen in on everything we say, and read everything we write, but what about tomorrow? Will they want to install holocameras in every home, so they can watch us in case we start using sign language? Where will it all end?"

"I guess if one has nothing to hide, then one has nothing to fear," said Shatori Nasaki, a plant manager in New Tokyo, Terra. "The Republic is surrounded by enemies who would see it fail, and are now seizing upon their chance to make it happen. If it takes letting the government look through my spam to track them down, I don't mind the disruption."

### Towne Log

+ It's amazing how far just a little paranoia goes, huh guys?  
:- Hippee

+ Come on, man. This is some serious stuff they're talking about. Have you read what's in that bill? The Republic gets the right to monitor all your communications--electronic, voice, video, even hardcopy--analyzing it for style and content. There's provisions for 'just cause' to be sure, but the provisions are flimsy, indeed. Hell, if the powers-that-be want to lock you up for having too many zits on your face, they can find an excuse in that legalese monstrosity!  
:- Chungabunga

+ I don't know what's scarier, Chungabunga. The implications of what you just said, or the fact that you actually read legalese!  
:- RepMan

+ Another comedian! Sheesh!  
:- Chungabunga

+ Okay, look. I KNOW this is a serious thing, CB, but it seems to me the government's going to do what it's probably been doing all along; they just want to make it legal-like, now that there's a credible threat.  
:- Kurious

+ House freaking LIAO is a credible threat!? What are you on, Kurious?  
:- WetWillie

+ Hey now! Liao has always been tough in the intelligence category. Sure, they're the smallest state nowadays, but that doesn't mean they aren't shifty. Nobody that small could have come through the Succession Wars without some brains and cunning, you



know.  
:- XSOkay

+ What it all comes down to is this: Big Brother will be watching all of us if the Senate passes that Kerensky-forsaken bill of theirs. At that point, the government wins the right to read every little love note you type, and record every network site you visit. I don't know about any of you, but I find that kind of thing embarrassing and dehumanizing. My life shouldn't become a government nerd's peep show!  
:- Chungabunga

+ Agreed, Chungabunga. Besides, who watches the watchers?  
:- Hippee

Exactly, Hippee.  
:- Chungabunga

## Addicks Refugees to Return Home

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04/05/3133

PORT HOWARD--With the fighting for their homeworld finally over--replaced by a stable peace that has held for months now--many of the Addicks refugees, huddled in their DropShips on the tarmac of the Prince John Spaceport since mid-November of last year, say they are ready to return home. The announcement, made this morning on behalf of over one thousand of the refugees on-board the DropShip Tarawa, has met with mixed opinions among the local population, and indeed among the refugees themselves.

"A lot of us were growing used to DropShip rations and the hospitality of our Towne hosts, to be sure," said Millicent Lao-shu, one of the refugees on the Tarawa, who claims she is eager to return to her office job in Neo Carthagia. "It's almost been like an extended vacation, but none of this can ever be just like home."

"I'm not so sure about going back," said Lucius DeMarko, who claimed that he would stay a bit longer with the refugees aboard the other two DropShips, Terrestria and New Hope. "I saw the [Dragon's Fury] invasion force when they came in, armed to the teeth and ready to put up the fight of their lives. Sure, the Highlanders may have won, but as long as there's oil on Addicks and The Republic's still out of control, anywhere has to be safer than that place."

"It's just not fair," exclaimed Veronica Hastings, originally of Hesperus, a suburb of the Addicks city of Neo Carthagia. "I mean, it's hard enough when you change schools as a kid, but I met a very nice guy here on Towne, and we were even talking about marriage. Now my folks want to go home!"

Local business owners say they will definitely feel the pinch when the Addicks refugees finally depart. Since their arrival, Port Howard retailers, restaurant operators, and hotel managers have seen a boom in sales, mostly from refugees eager for a change from DropShip provisions and amenities. The economic impact of the looming departure of a third of Towne's guests from Addicks, however, will be felt in more than just the loss of a new customer base, according to some local merchants.

"I have three Addicks natives on my payroll now, one hired as far back as December," said Michael Green, owner/manager of Green Hovermotive, a Port Howard hovercraft repair and sales dealership. "Today, two of them handed in their resignations. It's such a shame, too; they were here only a short time, but I'd come to think of them as two of my best employees."

Not all opinions about the imminent departure, however, have been so sad. Nicholas Aikashi, a Port Howard resident and self-proclaimed member of the Dragon's Hope Youth Club, told INN he was glad to see the refugees leave.

"Towne is not some dumping ground for the unfortunate, ungrateful masses who run at the first hint of trouble," Aikashi said of the Addicks refugees. "I, for one, say, 'good riddance!'"

The Addicks refugees, and others who soon followed as war gripped the oil-rich planet shortly after the breakdown of interstellar communications, have been a source of tension between Towne residents both for and against the factions fighting on Addicks. These tensions escalated sharply soon after the first arrivals landed, culminating in a riot at the spaceport when pro - Dragon's Fury activists demonstrated near the refugee DropShips. Sympathy riots and smaller incidents of violence have since dogged both pro-Dragon activists and Addicks refugees since then.

Only one third of the original refugees have so far decided to return to their homeworld at this time, with the rest opting to wait a bit longer after holding a referendum among their membership. The DropShip Tarawa, designated to carry these people home, is expected to launch later this week, once those refugees electing to stay and those choosing to depart finish transferring between the remaining vessels. Sources close to Port Howard Mayor Antonio Joshua have indicated that the city will hold farewell ceremonies to be held in honor of the departing refugees is tentatively set for Wednesday.

### Towne Log

+ About damn time! I thought these people would never go!  
:- FMLurder

+ You know, Lurder, you really should be a bit more patient with those less fortunate than you. You'll never know when the tables will be turned.  
:- Hippee

+ Damn, if I had a Stone for every one of you liberal types I hear whine that we should open our wallets for every bleeding-heart case that lands on our soil, I'd be Jacob Bannson by now! I mean, Addicks wasn't nuked or anything, and the Highlanders won the day, but still these refugees sat on the launch pad, soaking up our charity and barely even contributing at all to our own needs.  
:- FMLurder

+ Needs? Buddy, did you READ the article? Some of those guys were employed here. Hell, it was a tourism boon for the PH industries, what with all the hotels, restaurants, and shopping centers these guys stopped at. We're not talking about a bunch of deadbeats here.  
:- Kurious

+ Besides, FML. Hippee is right. All it takes is for somebody like Tormark or Radick to stop by here, and it may be YOU who has to board the next DropShip out, pal.  
:- Chungabunga

## **Fetryl Floods Kill 15, Leave 4,000 Homeless**

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04/07/3133

JOHNSTON FALLS--Flooding in the Sydney province on the Fetryl continent, brought on by several days of torrential downpours and the failure of two major dams in the region, has claimed the lives of at least 15 Johnston Falls residents and left more than four thousand homeless at this hour. Emergency services from five nearby towns have been called, along with the 32nd Towne Militia Engineering Division, in an effort to contain the flooding and support humanitarian efforts in the small mining town that at its peak boasted a population of just around 15,000.

The people of Johnston Falls, having been plagued by drought conditions since early last year, were caught completely by surprise when tropical storm Ichi abruptly swerved northward and slammed into the region. The storm, the largest to hit these parts in over a century, dumped over 20 centimeters in as many hours, swelling both the South Sydney and Johnston Valley reservoirs well beyond their intended limits. Safety releases failed to keep up with the overflowing dams in both reservoirs, resulting in a series of breaks that sent water raging throughout a valley region already drowning in the heavy rains.

The neighboring towns of Barnaby and Luego Vista have also been hit by rising floodwaters that have already forced the evacuation of over 30,000 residents to higher ground. At the Lower Johnston Valley Mining Station, which employs over a thousand area residents, the sudden flood has been devastating, but thankfully, company executives say, casualties were minimal.

"We got news of the dam break about 30 minutes before the waters got here," said Priscilla Landers, spokesperson for Lower Johnston Valley. "At the time, only a handful of workers were at the site--all aboveground, since the mining shift ended a few hours before. We managed to evacuate before the flood hit, but weren't able to seal all the mine entrances first, which has cost LJV a lot of valuable equipment and seriously upset our timetables."

Bruce Hogan, governor of Sydney province, has requested and received assistance from the planetary government, with Planetary Governor Renee Oscar already declaring Johnston Falls a global disaster area and freeing up emergency funds and additional rescue crews to respond to the crisis. The first of these crews is expected to arrive as early as tomorrow morning, though many Johnston Falls residents are already looking toward the long and difficult process of rebuilding. Meanwhile, local utilities providers have acknowledged that over 95 percent of the tri-town area remains without power or fresh water at this hour.

"My wife and I spent years of sweat and tears to finally find ourselves a place to call our own," said Mikael Anderson, a MiningMech driver who has lived in Johnston Falls his entire life. "It's hard to grasp the fact that, in just a few short hours, it can all be just swept away on the currents, and we're back to square one again."

Governor Hogan, upon surveying the damage via VTOL, reported that he was "appalled" to see the devastation in downtown Johnston Falls, where water levels remain nearly two meters high at this hour.

"The sheer scope of the devastation in Johnston Falls is staggering," Hogan told INN. "What once was a thriving community, buzzing with activity, is now a ravaged landscape of sunken buildings and broken lives. This disaster is a tragic loss to the people of Sydney, and I vow on behalf of those affected by this tragedy to do whatever it takes to restore what we have lost."

## Branch, Towne-First Praise Myers Solar Energy Complex

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04/10/3133

PORT HOWARD--Koth province Senator Westley Branch and his Towne-First party today heaped praise on the plans unveiled by Myers Universal Solutions, Incorporated (MUSInc) to establish a solar energy complex in the Tahitian province on the Gherst continent. MUSInc, a Kale Bay - based utilities and power technology development firm, applied for a grant earlier this year under a recently enacted provision of the Towne-wide Energy Development Bill, intended to encourage the development of cheaper energy resources to support the planet's increasing industrial activities.

"With luck, the investment our government makes today in MUSInc and its visionary leader will pay dividends for centuries," Branch told INN in a press conference. "Today, some of our world's best and brightest have stepped forward to carry us into a future better prepared than ever. We can only hope that others will soon join them and, in so doing, make Towne strong again."

Augustus Myers, founder and CEO of MUSInc and an outspoken proponent of Senator Branch's Energy Conservation Bill, declared that his proposed complex, set to begin construction in three months, would provide power to tens of thousands of residents along Gherst's eastern seaboard. The complex, which will occupy nearly six square kilometers of the Shahiri Desert west of Kale Bay, will gather solar radiation--particularly ultraviolet light--and convert it into clean, cheap, and usable electrical power suitable for commercial and residential use. Initial costs to consumers switching to solar power from conventional nuclear and fossil fuel sources, however, are expected to run higher than the global average in order to offset the projected expense of building and maintaining the gigantic array. Though reluctant to give hard numbers, Myers says that rough projections indicate that enough reliable, clean energy will be made available to over 70,000 commercial and residential customers.

"Over the long term," Myers assured INN reporters, "our customers will see a drop in energy prices as the Shahiri plant comes into its own and initial start-up costs are covered. Even these costs can be offset, however, if the [Branch Energy Conservation] bill passes."

With a 300 percent boom to mining, processing, and manufacturing anticipated over the next two years, the issue of global power needs has come to the fore. In the planetary Senate, suggested approaches to handling the looming energy crisis have ranged from a controversial tax-raising energy conservation bill, put forward by Senator Branch, to a competing alternative offered by the Nationalist party that would reduce the levies on off-world energy sources, such as petrochemicals and deuterium fuels.

"At its heart, the debate boils down to isolationism versus alliance-building," said Wilhelm Gaytes, political science professor for the University of Towne in Port Howard. "On the one hand, leaders like Branch advocate making Towne more self-sufficient, seeing to its own energy needs in case The Republic fails to restore order and the region plunges into further violence. On the other hand, those with faith that The Republic will recover feel that resources are better spent keeping trade and communication lines open with neighboring worlds."

Myers maintains that the motivations of MUSInc are professional and ecological, not political. "Though we certainly appreciate both sides of the current energy-control debate, the truth is that there is an opportunity here that neither MUSInc or Towne as a whole can ignore. Solar energy arrays run cleaner, and cheaper, than comparable hydroelectric, geothermal, or even nuclear-based power plants. Whether ComStar manages to turn all the lights back on and the Exarch once more manages to pull the disparate elements of The Republic back under control, Towne must ensure that its energy needs are met--and that is the very reason I founded this company."

"Towne could use a few more forward-thinkers like Mr. Myers and his company," Senator Branch told reporters on the steps of Towne's Senate building in Port Howard. "It is men like him, and his vision for a brighter, more self-reliant tomorrow, that will carry us through this new dark age."

### Towne Log

+ Funny. Nobody bothers to mention what happens to all those MUSInc customers if the area gets hit with a particularly nasty series of big storms, eh? I'm sure they've thought about capacitor-storage in case there's a rainy day or two, but I'd hate to see how a solar power grid will hold up after a week under storm clouds.

:- Synnik

+ I was wondering the same thing myself, especially with such a centralized facility--though it sounds like it'll be HUGE. I would think it would be smarter to spread out a bunch of smaller solar panel posts throughout the continent; that way, a single week-long rainstorm won't black out the whole coastline.

:- RepMan

+ Inefficient, RepMan. Have to lay too many lines and send employees all over creation to keep them running.

:- Teknofile

+ Wouldn't it be simpler to just build a fusion plant or two? I mean, sure, the eco-freaks will be all over the supposed long-term mutating effects of nuclear power, but at least a few of those babies can power a whole continent and run through a heavy blizzard.

:- RepMan

+ Those kinds of reactors wouldn't just worry the eco-terrorists, RM. You're also facing the fact that such reactors can be used to produce weapon-grade material for stuff like nukes and neutron bombs. After the Jihad, regulations clamped down tightly on such tech, and since then it hasn't really been economically feasible to build--much less maintain--one of those reactors. (Oh, and of course there's the ultraslim chance of a catastrophic meltdown that wipes out all life and civilization in a 50-kilometer radius, but hey, you can't make an omelet without breaking a few eggs for the next five million years, right?)  
:- Teknofile

+ Spoken like a man worthy of that nickname, Tek.  
:- ROSmith

+ Thanks! I try!  
:- Teknofile

## Protests Disrupt Gunderland Power Groundbreaking Ceremony

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04/13/3133

CAMP MARIPOSA--Local protestors opposed to the use of nuclear fission and fusion power disrupted the groundbreaking ceremony for PlasmaTech Enterprises' (PTE) new fusion-plant factory in the Gunderland province. Decrying the use of nuclear technology, which is more commonly used in the construction of BattleMechs, aerospace craft, and armored vehicles rather than commercial or civilian equipment, many of the protestors from nearby Camp Mariposa declared that the PTE factory will encourage runaway military development and make Towne a bigger target for renegade military factions.

Police officials at Camp Mariposa, former home of the Copper Queen Mining Corporation and decommissioned militia base, arrested five of the protestors during the disturbance, including Patrick Dell, 19, son of former Gunderland province Senator Richard Dell. Dell and his fellow antiwar activists allegedly assaulted PTE and government officials at the ceremony by flinging animal carcasses and spent bullet-shell casings at them. Police say that those arrested have also been charged with breach of peace and cruelty to animals.

"Mr. Dell himself apparently led the disruption," Sergeant Illyana Mustaffa told INN reporters after the incident. "Approaching as if members of the audience, they managed to get close enough to throw the remains of two wild animals at [PTE CEO Charles] Romanovski, and [Camp Mariposa Governor Lorraine] Sun-Li, while several others tossed spent shell casings that appear to have come from a variety of smaller-caliber slug throwers. It's not totally clear if the suspects killed the animals themselves, and no weapons were found in their possession at the time of the arrests."

"The warmongers of Towne must be stopped, or we are all doomed," shouted Dell as police led him away from the scene. "PlasmaTech will have the blood of millions on its hands!"

The arrest of the protestors delayed the rest of the groundbreaking ceremony for close to half an hour, but Gunderland province's Lieutenant Governor, Valerie Minnasota, who was also on hand for the dedication, remarked that the incident demonstrates a disturbing trend in Towne society.

"It's hard to believe that otherwise fine and upstanding young men and women can behave so crudely," said Minnasota after finishing the groundbreaking ceremony. "I only hope that such short-sightedness isn't indicative of the rest of Towne's youth."

Plans to build the Camp Mariposa factory proposed by PTE were a thorn in the side of former Senator Dell, whose vocal opposition to the expansion of military-related industry on Towne further estranged him from his constituency before last November's elections. Dell, who lives in Bella Dona, a small town 50 kilometers north of Camp Mariposa, could not be reached for comment about either the groundbreaking or his son's role in the protest.

"The production of portable, affordable nuclear generators and fusion power plants is not an inherently evil or even an inherently military matter," said Charles Romonovski, CEO of PTE and occasional advisor to Senator Westley Branch. "We must not forget that as industry--both commercial and military--continues to grow on Towne, our world will face an energy crisis of unprecedented proportions. What PTE offers will help to address this crisis with convenient, long-lasting, safe, and reliable nuclear power."

But not everyone is convinced of Romonovski's claims. Opponents of nuclear-based power say that potential risks, particularly radiation hazards and thermal pollution, make the use of fission- and fusion-based power unacceptably dangerous.

"Even the best safeguards can fail," admitted Dr. Cameron Killen of the University of Towne in Port Arthur. "This is particularly true when the technology is used in military applications, such as BattleMech reactors and aerospace craft, which often sustain a lot more punishment than do civilian applications. In many of the epic clashes of the mid- to late - 31st century, for example, we saw entire formations of 'Mechs destroyed when one 'Mech's reactor lost containment from a lucky hit. Another drawback of thermonuclear energy is that it can be used to produce weapons of mass destruction, a distinct threat in an age in which central authority appears to be failing and a number of terrorist and renegade military leaders are on the rise."

"Even though fusion reactors of today are much more advanced and safe compared to the nuclear reactors of, say, the 21st century, the fact remains that radiation leakage can happen even with the best systems," said Theresa McClaine, a member of the political action group, Towne Against Nuclear Power. "Instances of cancer, for example, remain higher among starship engineers, as well as MechWarriors, aerospace craft pilots, and others who work closely with such systems."

Despite these criticisms and protests, however, Romonovski remains determined to press forward with PTE.

"Doom-sayers have been condemning nuclear power for centuries," Romonovski said. "But without it, mankind would never have reached the stars, and there would be no Towne to speak of."

### Towne Log

+ Well, now, people! Anyone want to say what's really on their minds about this one? I, for one, know what those fusion plants will be built for, and it ain't gonna be your daddy's AgroMech!  
:- Synnik

Oh, I don't know, Synnik. Let me guess. Um, they could be used for emergency power generation for hospitals. They could go into surface-to-orbit shuttles. They could be used at the corner recharge station to fill up your electric sedan. They could power

communications satellites. They could even be used to keep the lights and life support working on those offshore and underwater mining platforms we have all over. Gee, I don't know what kind of applications can be found for portable fusion plants . . . .

:- ROSmith

+ You know, sarcasm doesn't become you, ROSmith. You and I both know damned well that they're going to be made for use in BattleMechs. Not to upgrade MiningMechs. Not to power hospitals and mining platforms. BattleMechs. Our illustrious Legate just can't wait to throw away the rules Devlin Stone handed down and build her own army of 'Mechs. I just wonder who's coming to lay the smack down on us before our grand army reaches a battalion.

:- Synnik

Hey, I'm not saying it won't come to that, but to assume that all nuclear tech heralds the rise of the 'Mech is just plain stupid talk.

:- ROSmith

+ So, anybody want to hazard a guess as to what old man Dell's going to do about his kid? I saw the vids of that little 'incident' they're talking about. Man, Dell junior looked about as personable as a rabid animal, even as the cops put him in the squad car.

:- RepMan

Well, seems to me that Pat Dell is just carrying on his father's work. Senator Dell used to bitch about PTE's plans every chance he had till he was voted out. Hell, he's even the chairman for the local chapter of TANP! His son's just the 'radical element' he can use when the corporate and government powers-that-be don't heed his words.

:- FMLurder

+ You're saying Pat Dell is just a fall guy for his dad? Dude, that's harsh!

:- RepMan

It fits, though. Doesn't it?

:- FMLurder

+ Ah, what fools these mortals be! When Devlin Stone returns, he will sort out those who passed his tests from those who failed. For those so quick to lose faith, judgment will be swift and terrible!

:- Hop4Evr



## Tsukude Governor, Aide Charged in Sex Scandal

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04/19/3133

OGAWA CITY, TSUKUDE (PREFECTURE I)--Tsukude Planetary Governor, Count Daniel Jaranto, and his Minister of Justice, Raul Tate, were formally charged today in relation to an ongoing investigation into allegations by three capitol building aides that the Governor sexually assaulted them following a holiday party last month. An official close to the case said that the names of the accusers are presently being withheld to protect their right to privacy, but added that the charges may only be the first in what appears to be a long history of sexual misconduct allegedly committed by the planetary ruler and his most trusted advisor.

"There is sufficient evidence to warrant a deeper investigation, possibly going back as far as 3129," said the official, who spoke to INN on the condition of anonymity. "The allegations being made are credible and very serious, as are the individuals making them. From their statements, we think there is a pattern of misconduct that has somehow been kept out of sight for four years before someone finally found the courage to come forward."

Governor Jaranto--who has been married to Countess Leslie Jaranto of the East Domashini province for 12 years--stands accused of using his authority to blackmail three female members of his palace staff into granting him sexual favors. Tate, his close friend and minister of justice, faces similar charges from one of the same women, as well as additional charges stemming from his alleged efforts to cover up the scandal. Jaranto himself, however, insists that he is innocent, and in a written statement issued to INN shortly after the charges were filed, claims that he is being set up by political rivals.

"These groundless allegations are as far from the truth as one can possibly get short of science fiction," Jaranto wrote. "Those who have accused me are merely pawns of the unscrupulous few who are opposed to the politics of my administration. This entire matter is a sham--a complete waste of taxpayer money--and should be summarily thrown out if there is to be any real justice."

From his home in Ogawa City, Minister of Justice Tate declined to answer any questions regarding the accusations, except to declare his own innocence.

In what's already shaping up to be a historic case pitting the upper echelon of Tsukude nobility against the ranks of the common people, the planetary Parliament is racing to find suitable legal representation for each side. Should the matter go to trial, it remains unclear whether Jaranto and Tate plan to retain attorneys or mount their own defense--which both men could do, given their legal backgrounds. The prosecution, meanwhile, is already being considered by the planetary Legislature, with Baron Daryl Scott-Haipei, one of Count Jaranto's most outspoken critics, emerging as the favored candidate for the job. Scott-Haipei, himself an expert in the local justice system, could not be reached for comment, but a source close to him told INN that he is willing to assume the responsibility.

"Baron Scott-Haipei will be only too glad to perform his civic duty," said Martin Laskler, a personal aide to the Baron of Tsukude's Southern Kyuna province. "Although he holds the position of Governor in the highest esteem, he realizes that the man and the office are not always of equivalent character."

The scandal threatens to further disrupt a political system already brimming with tension. The local nobility and political leadership remain sharply divided over issues like interplanetary trade, self-sufficiency, planetary defense, and industrial expansion. Tsukude, a world forced to import most of its food because humans are biological incompatible with the world's native flora and fauna, has felt the isolation of the shattered communications network more keenly than most over the past few months. Combined with increasingly unreliable and irregular space traffic, shortages of even the most basic necessities have begun to mount, and leading economic indicators have begun to drop. The planet's location, close to the Draconis Combine border, and its history as a long-time part of House Kurita, has many locals fearing an imminent strike by either the Dragon's Fury or the Combine itself. The resident Knight, Katya Chimiso, however, feels that domestic matters now plaguing the world's current administration will not impact efforts to defend the planet itself.

"There is politics, and then there is practicality," said Chimiso. "That is why worlds like [Tsukude] possess an apolitical standing militia, rather than an amalgamation of house security forces that bow to their individual masters. Whatever the outcome of the current political crisis, we should be able to maintain planetary security should any force invade."

If convicted of the charges, both Jaranto and Tate could face prison time as well as expulsion from the nobility.

### Towne Log

+ Sex and the Not-So-Single Count: a new reality series coming soon to INN! What do you think, eh?  
:- RepMan

+ Oh, this oughta be good! Jaranto and his buddy really stepped in it now!  
:- WetWillie

+ You can't believe anything will come of this, can you, Willie? You've got the people in the highest office on the planet being accused by their secretaries of misconduct. It's the word of a noble against the word of some commoners. Who do you REALLY think is going to win?  
:- Synnik

+ Oh, brother! I can just see this coming: primetime tri-vid coverage, live via HPG, of this lousy stinking travesty of justice. I hate when celebrities get in trouble, because we all have to listen to it like it was some kind of reality series.

:- GM01379

+ Even worse like this, GM. Because not only do we have to listen to it all, but also by the time the public makes up its mind that the two are guilty--and right now, even with as little as we've got, I'm guessing they are--the judge or magistrate or whatever will find them innocent. A total waste of time and energy, if you ask me.

:- Synnik

+ It's official: We just got a glimpse of a planet in worse shape than our own. At least our nobility can get along, more or less. I won't be surprised at all if this time next year Tsukude is either a Combine holding or just a totally anarchy.

:- FMLurder

+ I wonder what would happen if they DO find Jaranto guilty, though. Do you think he'll just quietly step down and go to jail?

:- Kurious

+ Hell, no, but I'm more interested in hearing what the Countess will have to say about all this! Amazing nobody bothered to get her take on the whole thing, huh?

:- WetWillie

## Gherstwood Mall Explosion Kills 30, White Hand Claims Responsibility

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04/21/3133

GHERSTWOOD--White Hand terrorists claimed responsibility for the midmorning explosion at Gherstwood Mall in Gherstwood, Haitiana province, that has killed at least 30 and wounded over 80 more. Officials at the scene say that the blast, apparently centered somewhere inside the mall's food court, went off precisely at 1030 hours local time, and caused extensive damage to all three floors of the mall, including a blaze that swept several adjoining shops and which firefighters continue to battle at this hour.

"It was loud--so loud the entire floor shook and one of our windows cracked," said Marta Onalia, a clerk at Brodi Comics, a bookshop located on the eastern wing of the mall. "Then there was all the screaming outside. By the time I got into the hallway, so many people were running, I didn't even see the flames at first."

"A friend of mine was supposed to be working at Happy Dan's [a food court diner] this morning," said Michi Abalon, whose friend, Frank McCastle, is among those missing at this hour. "I tried to get in there, maybe help out or something, but when I saw all those bodies, I just froze. Then security ushered me out . . ."

Gherstwood's Constable, Octavius Browne, briefed reporters from an emergency field-command center in the mall parking area, shortly after the attack.

"At this time, rescue personnel on the scene have confirmed 30 dead, many of whom were dining in the food court at the time of the attack," said Browne. "Another 80 or so have been wounded, with the worst cases already en route to hospitals or receiving emergency care at this hour. There are also an estimated 30 more individuals unaccounted for."

Police say the terrorists' bomb was likely of military origin, possibly composed of one or two blocks of pentaglycerine, and was set off by remote detonator or timer switch. In an effort to determine the source of the blast and the potential identity of the terrorist or terrorists responsible for planting it, Browne told INN that efforts were already underway to recover information from the building security cameras.

Fewer than three minutes after the attack, an individual--claiming to be a member of the White Hand--made a voice-only call to the Gherstwood Police Department. Browne said that the Towne Bureau of Investigations has already been brought in on the case.

"The call was recorded and a copy is undergoing analysis at the local TBI headquarters," said Browne. "At this time, we can say only that we believe--but cannot confirm--that the caller was male, and that the call originated from an emergency public-access communications booth. We are pursuing all leads to track down the caller and determine the legitimacy of his claim."

The White Hand, opposed to Towne's government, is a fairly new terrorist organization, formed only within the past few months. Officials say that the White Hand espouses many of the same fanatical, techno-elitist views of the vanished Word of Blake, but are not believed to be a remnant of the actual splinter faction of ComStar that ravaged the Inner Sphere in a self-proclaimed Jihad from 3067 to 3081. By contrast, the White Hand claims a following only on Towne itself.

"[The White Hand] are really the result of a growing fear in the sudden mass-industrialization of our world," said Doctor Lindsey Xantares, a criminal psychologist with the Gherstwood PD. "Its membership is composed of radicals from every fringe group on the planet who have a cause--be it ecological, political, social, and so forth--they feel is worth fighting or killing for. Unified only because these causes align in the face of widespread development, mostly for the sake of boosting Towne's defense, they see the government and the military as the threat, but not one they're able to face directly."

The White Hand first appeared shortly after the mid-November seizure of the Port Howard HPG station by the Voice of the Dragon, a pro - Dragon's Fury terrorist group. The deployment of Towne military security troops inside the capital--for the first time in more than 50 years--to end the two-week standoff led to a sympathy call by the White Hand against the use of such forces as a sign of government oppression. Since that time, bomb threats and minor acts of sabotage on commercial and civil authority facilities and equipment have been attributed to the Hand.

"Reliable knowledge about [the White Hand] remains scant," Xantares admitted. "Some may even be members of the shattered Voice of the Dragon, but that hasn't been confirmed. Are they fanatics in the truest sense of the word? We can't be certain because none of the organization's operatives have yet been captured. Their willingness to target civilians to attract attention is obvious, however, and hints that they are, thankfully, a small force, and one probably lacking in military training."

Governor Renee Oscar, who was attending a fundraiser for the Towne Historical Society in Uthan Hel at the time of the attack, was immediately whisked back to Port Howard once word of the terrorist strike reached her. En route, she broadcast a statement to the people of Towne, vowing to bring the White Hand to justice:

"The only people who would do such a thing are cowards, plain and simple," said Oscar. "No agenda, no matter how benign, no matter how noble, is worth the massacre of innocent lives. No cause is so just that it can be addressed over the blood of civilians. Rest assured, good people of Towne--justice will be done after this latest tragedy."

At ground zero tonight, the site of the bloodiest terrorist attack on Towne in recent memory, however, assurances even from the planetary leader are small comfort indeed, as rescue teams continue to find more victims than survivors.

## Towne Log

+ Holy crap!  
:- Hippee

+ Took the words right out of my mouth, Hippee. What kind of monsters can do something like that!?  
:- RepMan

+ I have no idea. What's worse, it sure as hell seems the government has no idea, either. How does some wannabe terrorist group like the WH, who can't even freaking smuggle a pipe bomb into a bulk mail box without somebody's dog sniffing it out, pull off a stunt like this?  
:- PhazeOne

+ Maybe it's not them, after all. Maybe it's VoD, trying to play off like they're a new group?  
:- FMLurder

+ Lurder, for once stow the conspiracy theories, okay? This is serious!  
:- PhazeOne

+ You think I'm joking? My point is that the enemy--whomever they might be--doesn't always have to come out and say who they are in order to instill terror. If I were heading the VoD, after getting spanked at that HPG standoff, I'd start lurking in the shadows, making things real unpleasant for my enemies, but trying to distract them from my real goals. Now, while the govt. goes after some neo-Blakist terrorists called the White Hand, the VoD can do whatever they need to for another shot at putting the Dragon's banner up over Parliament.  
:- FMLurder

+ I don't know, but what I'm more worried about is what the government's counterattack will look like. This article reminded me of the standoff at the HPG a few months back. Anyone remember that one? First time a BattleMech marched in Port Howard since just after The Republic's founding day, and armored infantry fought inside the building. Before that, folks around here practically forgot we had--or needed--an army. Suddenly, we've got new terrorists springing up, and maybe what's left of the Voice did go and join them. Maybe that's even why these Hand attacks have gotten stronger.  
:- RepMan

+ Meanwhile, it all gives Oscar and Jurik more reason to start cracking down on the people! I mean, come on, this article suggests all the really radical folks out there--ecology fanatics, ousted political-action groups, and the local street gangs--are probably in league with the White Hand. It makes for a nice way to set up a blanket 'shoot-on-sight' system of justice.  
:- Synnik

+ Bingo! So, watch what you type now, guys. One never knows when one might be labeled a subversive (and thus a potential White Hand terrorist) and then 'disappear' one day.  
:- FMLurder

## Unemployment Rate Hits Ten-Year Low

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04/24/3133

KALE BAY--With the industrial explosion well underway and new companies cropping up almost every week, global unemployment figures have dropped to 11 percent worldwide, their lowest point in a decade. Analysts further predict that this trend will continue as more and more defense, power generation, and manufacturing businesses, spurred by government incentives and the daily threat of war, continue to open up all over Towne.

Compiled by the Towne-Wide Stock Exchange in Kale Bay, today's figures include many residents who have received promises of employment by companies that have not yet opened their doors, such as the new Kohlat Industries support weapons plant in New Brisbane, which is still under construction. The news is music to the ears of many local stock watchers, who have turned to the planetary stock exchange since the collapse of the HPG network left the interstellar market dangerously unreliable.

"What we're seeing here is an unprecedented period of industrial and commercial growth for the people of Towne," says Tyler Stevinson, a leading economic analyst. "Industry is taking off on mere speculation, drawing in construction revenues to hasten development, and companies are offering incentive packages to their prospective employees, even going so far as pretraining their new hires for jobs that are not yet available. This widespread trend has not only brightened the outlook of the planetary exchange, but it's also widening the job market at a phenomenal rate."

Industry and defense, however, are not the only employers looking to find a few good men and women. Jobs in the commercial and financial industries, including retail, food service, banking, and accounting, are all showing signs of recovering from the economic recession that preceded the HPG network crash. Buoyed now by a booming wartime economy, companies are gathering all the skilled and unskilled labor they can find.

Some, however, still find little to celebrate between the sudden hiring boom and the forecasts of more defense-related jobs on the horizon. Belinda Warthington, an economic analyst for the Hope Foundation, cautions that Towne's economic windfall today will almost certainly translate into a catastrophic depression tomorrow.

"By their very definition, wartime economies don't last," said Warthington. "Attempting to buy and sell warfare is like dealing with the devil. While it may be true that the dividends are now great, what will happen when the HPGs are restored and the fighting dies down? What will happen when the government realizes it's overextended itself to build military bases and buy expensive BattleMechs for a threat that no longer exists, then has to close it all down again and decommission the troops? That's what nobody seems to have an answer for, and that's why this great industrial revitalization everyone keeps glowing about is nothing more than a house of cards."

## Mountain Tantari Herds Return to Eiglophian Range

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04/26/3133

ATHALAU--The annual return of the tantari, a smaller, hardier cousin species to the six-legged eiglotherium of the western plains on Hyboria, began today as forestry rangers in the Central Eiglophian Mountain Reserve sighted a dozen of the creatures foraging for food along the mountain base. The return of the lithe hexapods to the area marks the completion of an annual migratory cycle from the northern ranges: Tantari follow several resident bird species and the growth cycles of mountain berry trees that are their only sources of food.

Tantari, likened in many ways to Terran mountain lions, are known for their amazing agility and extremely limited food preference. Though distantly related to the herbivorous, elephantine eiglophians, which roam the western plains and live off much of the local vegetation, tantari hunt, sleep, and migrate with their prey in a massive herd. Shaggy, like the eiglophians, but with thinner, clawed legs and a semiprehensile tail, tantari prefer rugged, mountainous terrain, but are not as territorial or as resourceful as most predators.

"There's nothing in nature quite like [the tantari]," said Ranger Joshua Eisenholt of the Central Eiglophian Reserve. "Wholly devoted to hunting a select few creatures, as if deathly allergic to anything else, they would rather starve than seek alternative food sources. This has effectively made them symbiotically dependent on their environment, and in the worst possible way."

According to Eisenholt and area zoologists, this peculiar behavioral trait of tantari has its good and bad points. On the one hand, humans can safely enter the midst of a tantari herd without fear of being attacked, because humans never register to the animals as potential prey. On the other hand, however, unexpected shifts in the weather, which can throw off the migratory cycle of the birds or the growth cycle of the berry plants, can easily spell doom for the tantari.

Despite tantari's peculiar habits, however, Eisenholt says that the actual numbers of the tantari do not seem to dwindle to any appreciable degree with each passing year--a fact that has kept them from being added to the list of endangered species on Towne, though the Central Eiglophian Reserve is considered an official haven for the animals.

## History for Sale: FedCom Aficionado Selling Legendary Collection

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05/03/3133

AGRAPUR--A limited-edition replica of the wedding dish held aloft by Prince Hanse Davion upon his marriage to Archon-Designate Melissa Steiner; an original 3028 copy of blueprints for the 65-ton Axeman; a framed, flat image of Yen Lo Wang, autographed not by Kai Allard-Liao, but his father, Justin Xiang Allard. These are just some of the more remarkable items found in Agrapur millionaire D. Anastasius Rogers' collection, which he has recently decided to part with in a truly historical sale to the newly renovated Towne Museum of History.

"It's almost heartbreaking to part with all this stuff," Rogers told INN in a rare personal interview from his hilltop estate overlooking the Sea of Turan. "This collection actually began with my great-great-grandfather, who served when the two Houses formally united. He lived in those times, as did his son, and his son's son, watching as the alliance soured and fell. Everything in this collection covers some part in that history."

Why then, is Rogers selling this priceless memorabilia, with its combined value assessed at well over two and a half million stones? Rogers himself says the act is his gift to the rest of Towne--indeed, to the galaxy.

"Keeping it all in the family, especially when I have no heirs, would almost be a crime. Entrusting it to the Towne Museum of History will still allow me to visit my ancestor's legacy, as well as share the grandeur of those times with the rest of humanity."

Rogers said the deal between the museum and him is still in the works, and so he could not disclose any figures or legal conditions, but did indicate that he has also volunteered to fund any construction required to accommodate any of the items he plans to sell. In a quick tour of his own private museum of FedCom mementos, Rogers showed INN a collection that staggers the mind.

Holovid footage of the most politically charged Solaris VII duels of the era and wartime films of the Fourth Succession War, the War of 3039, and even the final blows of the FedCom Civil War review the key events in the Commonwealth's 39-year life.

Among the most disturbing pieces are gun-camera scenes of the brutal fighting on Alyina during the Clan Invasion, and the outbreak of rioting on Solaris VII after the infamous Searcy-Vandergriff match of 3062. Field and dress uniforms of the Federated Suns and Commonwealth--before, during, and after the alliance--and campaign ribbons commemorating battles on more than thirty worlds give a glimpse of military life. Dominating this are three nine-square-meter dioramas, handmade by Roger's father decades ago, which depict major battles in the Commonwealth's history--from the capture of Tikonov in the Fourth Succession War to the battle for New Avalon that ended the Civil War. Rogers says, however, that the real crown jewel in his collection was lost even before he was born.

"My grandfather had a vintage 3046 Enforcer, handed down from his own dad back in the day," Rogers told INN. "Of course, the family surrendered it to The Republic almost 70 years back."

Marcus Zillermann, manager of the Towne Museum of History, says he is grateful to Rogers for his willingness to donate such a legendary collection.

"It's the kind of collection that the people of Towne, and indeed the entire Inner Sphere, can come to appreciate and enjoy," said Zillermann. "There just aren't enough words to express our gratitude for this gesture."

### Towne Log

+ I bet there's not enough stones, either, huh? I wonder where the museum will come up with the two to three mil that collection's going for?

:- RepMan

Shoot, RM. For all we know, Rogers threw in a few extra clauses, like visitation rights, or maybe he's throwing in that new wing to sweeten the deal so the museum takes it off his hands.

:- Funkit

+ I don't know; this sounds fishy to me. The guy's family's been collecting for a hundred years, and he decides on his own that he wants to sell it all? Can you say tax write-off?

:- RepMan

+ Have you never heard of a philanthropist before, RepMan? I mean, come on! Rogers would still be worth millions with that fishing fleet he maintains out of Agrapur. He doesn't need another few million badly enough to go through all this!

:- ROSmith

+ A philanthropist? One of those guys who goes to college to sit around all day and ponder life, the universe, and everything?

:- RepMan

+ Unless he's in trouble, ROSmith, maybe. Who knows? Maybe he lost a big bet on the latest Solaris Championship, and now has to fork over more than he's really worth to get by?

:- Synnik





## **"Little Luthien" Killer Returns, Claims Seventh Victim**

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05/03/3133

KORDAVA – After a brief, unexplained lull, in which life almost began to return to normal for the terrorized people of Kordava's "Little Luthien" district, the grisly discovery of the nude, mutilated body of a local woman brought home the harsh reality that Towne's worst serial killer in over 50 years remains at large. At this time, authorities in Kordava are withholding the identity of the victim, but have confirmed she was a resident of the city's southern waterfront district, an area known as Little Luthien for its concentration of residents descended from House Kurita's Draconis Combine.

As with previous victims, the body was discovered in the waters of the Kordava harbor, but that is not where officials believe the murder took place. Both local authorities and those of the Towne Bureau of Investigations, particularly Inspector Frances Becca, who is presently heading the investigation, told INN reporters that certain evidence collected from the bodies indicates they were killed elsewhere, and only recently dropped in the harbor waters.

"Forensic analysis from the previous victims has shown their exposure to seawater to be postmortem, and relatively brief in time," Becca told reporters this morning. "In fact, at least one of the previous victims, we know, was likely deceased for a period of three hours prior to being deposited in the Kordava harbor waters. As in the previous cases, the victim was suffocated prior to mutilation."

Hiro Jijamaro, a fisherman based out of Kordava harbor, discovered the body just before dawn while preparing to set sail on a fishing trip. Though officials close to the case neither confirm nor deny his account, Jijamaro told INN that the victim's body was mutilated, like past Little Luthien victims; her legs were amputated just above the knees, in an apparently surgical fashion. The victim also appeared to be of Asian heritage, and in her mid-20s to early 30s.

Unlike the last killing, which followed soon after the apparent murder of Hikaru Roneskovich, an administrator for the local Republican Bureau of Citizens' Affairs, no message was found on the victim, according to Kordava police, who were first on the scene after Jijamaro's call. Officials close to the investigation have indicated, however, that there have been more messages – allegedly from the killer – received by local authorities.

These messages, apparently little more than electronic letters, were sent to the police through public terminals, such as library and public communications boxes that any number of individuals may access. Our source, who spoke to INN only on the condition of anonymity, said that the content of these messages remains under investigation. The presence of these messages has, however, given hope to investigators who have been frustrated in their search for the Little Luthien killer.

In related news, Inspector Becca told INN reporters at this morning's press conference that Terra has indeed dispatched a knight-errant to assist in the investigation. Kristoff Erb reportedly left Terra shortly after the request was received, and is expected to arrive on Towne within two weeks. Erb, a citizen of Towne, was born and raised in Theopolis, a small town just north of Kordava in the Zingara province, and made local headlines when he was accepted into the ranks of the Republic Knights-Errant this past April.

"We expect that Sir Kristoff's assistance will be invaluable to our investigation," Becca said. "Until his arrival, however, the TBI and the local authorities of Kordava and the Zingara province remain committed to finding and capturing the killer, before Erb's arrival, if at all possible. As I said before, nothing would make us all happier than to turn Sir Kristoff's trip into a mere homecoming affair."

Typically, Knights-Errant of The Republic of the Sphere are assigned directly after undergoing rigorous training on Terra. But Erb, like many recruits who commenced training in the past year, was caught up in the events surrounding the collapse of the HPG network in August. INN has learned that many of these later-generation Knights-Errant thus received accelerated training as part of the Exarch's emergency measures aimed at boosting the ranks of the most loyal defenders of The Republic. For this reason, many on the streets of Kordava feel that Erb's assistance to the case will be marginal, at best, and disastrous, at worst.

"This man isn't even a cop!" exclaimed Rosanna Li-Sann, a Kordava shop owner. "I know those Knights-Errant are supposed to be smart, but let's face it; they're trained as MechWarriors, not detectives. What's he going to do, charge his 'Mech down the streets and demand that [the killer] come out and surrender?"

"It's a scam, plain and simple," said Ortega Matsuida, a Kordava taxi driver. "And worse, it's a recipe for disaster. I haven't heard a thing about this Knight-Errant that convinces me he even knows how due process works, and everything that suggests he's a jarhead military type. If he's even lucky enough to find the killer, my money's on him either malfing up the arrest so bad, [the killer] will get off, or he'll blow holes through the entire neighborhood doing it. Either way, we're no better off." On the streets of Kordava, dissatisfaction goes further than mere accusation about a Knight-Errant's lack of ability, however. Many Kordava residents, particularly those of the Little Luthien district, have grown steadily more apathetic toward the TBI and the Kordava police as the investigation appears to bog down more with each passing day.

"They would have caught this murderer by now if the victims had Davion bloodlines in them!" declared Mirachi Lobense, a Little Luthien furniture salesman. "Instead, they call in some farm-boy Knight because they can't be bothered, while a killer stalks innocents in the night."

Many have accused the government of Kordava – and, indeed all of Towne – of dragging their feet because the victims are mostly Combine descendants, citing the predominantly FedSun backgrounds of a majority of city and planetary governments.

Demonstrations against this apparent attitude of "Davion-supremacy" have thus become an increasingly common sight on the streets of Kordava, but so far all have been relatively peaceful.

"These streets are a powder-keg now," says Matsuida. "I wouldn't want to wait for even a full Knight to arrive to catch this guy, if I were the TBI. Mark my words, these streets are going to explode before much longer."

### Towne Log

+ Hey, OptMst? How much longer do you think the cops are going to be "playing dumb" here? The body count's up to seven now – not counting Mr. BCA there.

:- FMLurder

+ It's all well and good to make jokes when you're not in harm's way, isn't it, Lurder? Around here, it's gotten so bad that nobody's letting their women out of their sight. I've seen guys walk their girlfriends to the bathroom at a restaurant – and actually go in, just to be sure. Meanwhile, the cops have done nothing but ask a lot of questions, and give precious few answers.

:- Draco041

+ "Their" women? What, is slavery legal in Little Luthien now?

:- WetWillie

+ First and last warning, WW.

:- ModR8R026

+ Jeez! It's actually a serious question here! He said "their" women. I mean, is *every* member of the female persuasion escorted now? Do they all have masters, or somebody to report to?

:- WetWillie

+ Christ! I know you can't be that dense, Will. Draco clearly didn't mean to even imply that. The killer's targeting women, so a lot of the locals have taken to escorting their female associates – be they sisters, mothers, coworkers, or SOs. I hear it's even common on the streets of Kordava proper nowadays.

:- RUShore

+ True enough, Rus.

:- Draco041

+ So, what about this Knight-Errant? Anybody hear of him – aside from the big headlines when he got accepted, that is?

:- Elektra771

+ I think my cousin met him. Contrary to the article, he wasn't a farm boy, though. His dad's a lawyer, I think, and his mother was in the Thermopolis PD. He was also supposed to be some kind of egg-head. I think he'd know the law, but acting as a detective? Hell, we have a better chance with the incompetent TBI.

:- Eminay09

+ Incompetent is right! If they know they're dealing with a psycho who knows anatomy, why aren't they rounding up the doctors and butchers yet? What has this guy taken, anyway? I've heard of facial features, a jaw, hands, and now legs? They sure they're after the same guy and not a copycat?

:- FMLurder

+ My friend came up with a gruesome theory once, but it's really creepy, like a warped take on Frankenstein's monster or something.

:- MordenEvR

+ What? You mean he's, like, BUILDING a woman? That IS sick. But it also makes no sense. Why not keep the first victim's whole body, then?

:- FMLurder

+ This is why they call him a homicidal maniac, Lurder.

:- Chungabunga

## Citizens for Tomorrow Gathers on Towne

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05/06/3133

AGRAPUR--Police in the Turan province city of Agrapur remained at alert yesterday at a public rally for the Citizens for Tomorrow (CFT), a self-proclaimed activist group that advocates the return of several worlds throughout Prefectures III and IV to the Federated Suns, including Towne itself. Though vocal and challenging, the Citizens did not clash immediately with the city's security force or with antisecessionist protesters and pro-Combine agitators.

"They were organized and restrained," said Agrapur Mayor Liam Guom. "Though I personally do not share their views or condone the idea of secession, the security forces had no cause to detain anyone when [the Citizens for Tomorrow] staged their demonstration."

The CFT rally, the first one organized on Towne since the interplanetary group first appeared on Mirach in December, even found support among locals; many of whom are House Davion Federated Suns descendants. Many others who witnessed the gathering of more than two hundred separatists in the city square, however, found the rally disturbing.

"I was revolted!" declared Alisyn Farber. "Three generations ago, House Davion willingly transferred this world and so many others to The Republic to repay Stone for his help in the war against Blake's minions. The grandparents and parents of these people lived in harmony ever since, never complaining about being a part of The Republic. These people are all just a bunch of ingrates, pure and simple."

"Well, in the end, who can really blame them?" asked Rashata Jaime. "The Republic has only been around for about 65 years. Before that, Towne and just about every planet a jump or two away belonged to the FedSuns for centuries. If it weren't for the Jihad, we'd all still be Davions."

Marcus Paige, head of the newly christened Towne chapter of CFT, proclaimed that his organization's intentions are peaceful, but their mission is clear and their determination to see it through is strong.

"Our fathers and grandfathers lived in The Republic in honor of Devlin Stone, a hero who saved all Houses from the fires of Armageddon," Paige told INN. "In return, they were scattered among worlds they had never heard nor wanted any part of, and told they no longer belonged to the House that bore them. Stone is gone now, and with him apparently will go his precious Republic. Before any other House of minor faction sweeps in to claim our heritage, we of the Citizens are sworn to restore and protect the heritage that has been denied us. We want to go home, and we'll stop at nothing, short of harming the people we have come to save, to return home."

Paige's words were small comfort for Agrapur's second-largest population, descendants of House Kurita, some of whom are planning their own counter-rally for tomorrow afternoon.

"They call themselves 'Citizens for Tomorrow,' hah!" said Li-Quan Domishate, a local merchant who watched the rally with apprehension. "Perhaps 'Citizens for Yesterday' would be more like it! People like these would be the first crushed under the heels of someone like the Dragon's Fury, or even the mighty House Kurita itself."

Paige told INN that the CFT will continue to campaign nonviolently for the secession of Towne, taking their case to every major city--ultimately including the capital of Port Howard itself--until Towne joins with many other worlds allegedly agitating for a return to Davion rule.

"Our cause is righteous, and our resolve is iron," Paige said. "We will not rest until Towne is free and safe once more."

### Towne Log

+ Woohoo! That's telling them!  
:- WetWillie

I like how they worded that, 'We'll stop at nothing, short of harming those we have come to save.' Can anyone say 'Word of Blake?'  
:- Draco041

+ Ah, Christ! The CFT are NOT the Word, Willie! Even a stupid Snake like you can see that!  
:- WetWillie

They might not be the demons themselves, WW, but they sure have their rhetoric. 'Those they have come to save' are those of Davion bloodlines and loyalties only. All else can go to hell--or haven't you heard about the race riot they instigated on Schedar? You know, after that one, I don't see why the cops didn't arrest these guys the second they all got together.  
:- XSOkay

+ Freedom of speech, XSOK. The government hasn't suspended it . . . yet.  
:- ROSmith

To hell with freedom of speech! These guys are holding a freaking hate-fest in Agrapur! Sure, they don't come out and say, 'Kill the Snakes,' but that's only because they're also after the Clans, the ElSies, the Cappies, and the Eagles!  
:- Synnik

+ Amen, Synnik. These guys have got to go. There's just no room on this Towne for a bunch of ungrateful hate-mongers.  
:- Gringo21

'Room on this Towne'! Haha! What a slogan!  
:- ROSmith

## Touring the Stars with Bertram Habeas

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05/07/3133

*We began on Terra, millions of years ago. Today, mankind stretches throughout the stars, touching worlds as far from our home as Clan space, more than two thousand light-years distant. Yet who are we, really? What have we become in our relentless push outward and onward? I'm Bertram Habeas, and tonight, we'll find the answers to these and many other fascinating questions together, as we tour the stars!*

### Volume I: Rise of the Dragon – the Beginnings of the Draconis Combine

The Draconis Combine was officially “born” in 2319 after a long, brutal military campaign by its founder, Lord Shiro Kurita, First Citizen of New Samarkand and Director of the Galedon Alliance. The founder of the Kurita dynasty, however, did more than single-handedly establish an empire. He also imparted his will and his beliefs onto this new realm, a spirit that lives on even now, eight centuries later. More than any other nation, the Draconis Combine reflects the culture and personality of its Coordinator and ruling family, House Kurita; but where did it all begin? How did a man born to a fractured world of city-states rise to create a nation today known at once for boundless beauty and harsh determination?

The rise of House Kurita and the creation of the Draconis Combine can actually be traced all the way back to the 2236 Outer Reaches Rebellion against the Terran Alliance, long before Shiro Kurita's birth in 2270. The two-year Rebellion ended with the collapse of the Alliance government and the near-total isolation of its former colonies. All cohesion between the far-flung worlds of the Inner Sphere shattered, as every world suddenly found itself unsupported and left to its own devices. Filling the void and maintaining a semblance of trade were numerous mercantile alliances. The most powerful of these in the Galedon region was the Ozawa Mercantile Association, a loose – but pervasive – trading coalition united under the Ozawa family of Terra's Japan. The OMA enjoyed unrivaled dominion in the “northeast” quadrant of human-occupied space, controlling all trade among the struggling colonies.

Motivated purely by profit, though certainly unafraid to use their influence to extract favors from local governments, the Association focused less on consolidating control and more on expanding their influence and stifling competition. The excessive arrogance of the Association's merchants, however, and the flouting of their wealth in the faces of those who barely managed to eke out an existence, led to widespread bitterness among the peoples and governments of the region. Into this age of simmering resentment came Shiro Kurita.

*Shiro Kurita may well have been an extraordinary individual, but like every such person, he was also a product of his environment. His father, Yamaro Kurita, was a prominent statesman in Yamashiro, one of New Samarkand's biggest city-states. He was also a strict disciplinarian, a follower of 17th century samurai traditions, which were en vogue on New Samarkand at the time.*

*Now, factoring in the post-Rebellion state of the Inner Sphere at the time, which was pretty much like Terra's Soviet Union, Shiro and his brother Urizen are growing up in an age of chaos. Their world is divided, and the Ozawas, who had built up a trading empire, are everywhere, rubbing the natives' noses in their affluence. It was even more personal for the Kuritas, however, who crossed paths with the Ozawas as far back as the second Terran World War. The Kuritas believed their family honor was stained by the Ozawas in that conflict, when Admiral Jisaburo Ozawa's fleet was destroyed at the battle of Leyte Gulf, leaving Admiral Takeo Kurita unsupported and forced to retreat in the face of an American task force.*

*Shiro Kurita, raised – and dare I say indoctrinated – by his father to revere his family's martial history, took all this to heart. He actually felt it, and that's what gave him the drive to do what followed.*

--Dr. Lorenzo Torres, Professor of History, University of Thorin

Shiro Kurita took an active interest in politics as he grew, following in his father's footsteps and far exceeding the elder Kurita with his relentless drive to unify the planet under his rule. He and his brother Urizen embarked on a campaign of diplomacy, blackmail, and even assassination. By 2296, at only 26 years of age, Shiro realized his goal, crowning himself first citizen of New Samarkand. This conquest would not, however, be enough. The Ozawas, after all, were a power to be reckoned with throughout the quadrant. Tackling the Association, however, was beyond the means of a single planet. Shiro Kurita wanted – needed – more.

*Galedon V was a logical next step for Shiro Kurita in many ways. First, the planet offered a heavy industrial base, a definite plus given the relatively resource-poor world of New Samarkand. It was also nearby, and its population also chafed under the perceived domination of the Ozawa clan. Wealth, productivity, and resentment were all tools Shiro needed to expand his influence and ultimately oppose the OMA directly. Playing to the collective ego of the Galedonians, he named his proposed coventure the Alliance of Galedon, and “humbly” offered to assume the “duty” of administering the technological and military resources of both worlds to oppose the Ozawas. Ever the eloquent speaker, it wasn't long before Shiro had the Galedonians eating out of his hands, and they signed onto his new alliance, allowing him to use their resources and gather manpower. Already eyeing his next conquests, Shiro went right to work raising an army – on New Samarkand.*

--Doctor Lorenzo Torres

In 2302, the Alliance of Galedon became a reality. Soon thereafter, other worlds began to join at almost breakneck pace, swayed by Kurita's oratory gift and their own bias against the Ozawa clan. When the alarmed Ozawas raised their rates to Alliance worlds, the tide turned firmly in Kurita's favor. Though the Ozawas attempted to rally, Shiro Kurita's agents dealt the

Association a death blow in late 2303, firebombing every known office within the Alliance – a violent reaction that has become a hallmark of Kurita leadership. Less than a month later, Shiro Kurita launched his next step in building an empire with history's first interplanetary assault. His target: the neutral world of Sverdlovsk.

*If anything, Shiro Kurita was a man of action, not words. The OMA's metaphorical body was barely cold when he took the army raised under the blessings of the Galedon Alliance and began invading his neighbors. Like many worlds of that era, Sverlovsk was fragmented, and could not muster an organized response to Shiro's well-trained army. The action also served as a warning to the rest of the Alliance to stay in line – a message that came through loud and clear that he could do the same to others what he had to Sverdlovsk.*

--Dr. Lanie Dresdenova, Professor of Military History, University of New Earth

Over the following decades, Shiro Kurita would combine his golden oratory, iron will, and the threat of military force and its occasional use to absorbing those worlds around him or binding them to his Alliance. Though some protested, they quickly felt his military might, and were brought to heel. By 2319, the collection of worlds sworn to Kurita's rule spanned almost from Terra to the Draconis Rift, and up to New Samarkand. Declaring this new empire the Draconis Combine, and assuming as its standard the symbol of the dragon, Shiro proclaimed himself Coordinator, establishing at once the title, the state, and its ruling dynasty. The following decades would see the expansion of the Combine until it met the borders of House Davion's Federated Suns, the Terran Hegemony, the Lyran Commonwealth, and the Principality of Rasalhague. The Dragon had truly risen.

When Shiro died in 2348, he left behind a legacy that endures even today, an empire of more than 60 star systems, tens of millions of citizens strong. More than that, he forged a society, and through his daughter, Omi Kurita, even established the code of conduct – the Dictum Honorarium – which still pervades Combine society. Though successive generations might be credited for the Combine's wholehearted adoption of the ways of the samurai, Shiro Kurita, the first shogun of the modern era, cannot be overlooked. Above all this, he established the Way of the Dragon, the immortal spirit of strength and power that cannot be separated from the nation. In his own words to his son, Tenno:

*I have chosen the dragon as our standard and our symbol, reflecting many facets of our existence. We must never forget the ancient Terran heritage of our line, with its samurai greatness. I remind you, too, that in many mythologies, the dragon is feared and respected for its strength, cunning, and willingness to destroy for the sake of its own power. Always keep the virtues of the dragon in mind, and use them to defeat your opponents.*

*Always preserve the dragon, and its magic will keep you strong.*

-- Shiro Kurita to his son, Tenno, 2319

Join us next week, friends, as the saga of the Dragon continues into the glory days of the Star League. I'm Bertram Habeas.

## **"Little Luthien" Killer: "I Am the Kappa"**

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05/10/3133

KORDAVA – In a remarkable new twist in the weeks-old hunt for a serial killer stalking the streets of Kordava's so-called "Little Luthien" district, the Towne Bureau of Investigations today released what they believe to be electronic messages from the murderer himself. The TBI has not revealed exactly when the messages – all apparently sent from public-access terminals throughout the city – were issued, but have suggested to INN that all of them postdate an earlier electronic message in which the killer denied any involvement in the death of BCA Administrator, Hikaru Roneskovich. In this latest batch of transmissions, many sent in both Japanese and English languages, the killer apparently attempts to warn off his pursuers, and has even gone so far as to name himself the "Kappa," after a mystical creature of Terran Asian origins.

In one of the earliest and most distinctive messages, the killer seemed to suggest that the rise in military and political tensions may have prompted his killing spree, which has so far claimed seven lives:

*I am the Kappa, the spirit of the waters and the land. I have watched the folly of men, and I have grown enraged. In the name of justice, I strike out. In the name of vengeance, I leave you the signs of warning. I am not the cause of your pain, but an echo of it. Fear me for what I am, but do not blame your mundane troubles upon me, for I can claim that which you hold most dear, most cherished, with but an instant's work, and with far greater tragedy than any of your foolish wars.*

Inspector Frances Becca told INN that criminal psychiatrists and linguistics experts at the TBI are continuing to analyze these messages for clues as to the identity of the killer, and have drawn a number of possible conclusions. First and foremost among them is the developing belief that the killer is likely of Draconis Combine origin, and may in fact be a resident of the Kordava area, which includes some of the most concentrated communities on Towne populated by descendants of that state.

"At this time, our best analysis holds a greater than 80 percent chance that the alleged suspect hails from the Japanese-influenced culture of the Draconis Combine, or is a descendant thereof," Becca told INN in this morning's press conference, held at the TBI field headquarters in downtown Kordava. "In either event, it is clear we are dealing with a suspect who retains strong ties to such heritage. The kappa myth is largely unknown in the modern world, being arcane among the Japanese even before the first spacecraft left the Sol system."

"We are also secure in the belief that the killer possesses an intimate knowledge of human anatomy," Becca added, citing as evidence the precision of the mutilations on all seven known victims. "It is possible that the pieces he is claiming from each victim bear some significance, given that he prefers strangulation and suffocation as his chosen murder methods, both of which avoid any gross physical damage to the body prior to mutilation."

In ancient Japanese folklore, the kappa was an amphibious creature with the back of a tortoise, a scaled hide, webbed feet, and the face of a monkey. It possessed supernatural abilities derived from rivers, lakes, and ponds, and usually carried some of its native water in a saucer on its head, which when dry left the kappa powerless. Likened in some tales to vampires, and renowned for mutilating their victims and consuming either their blood or internal organs, kappas supposedly possessed superhuman strength and intelligence, as well as a peculiar sense of honor and courtesy. They were also said to be able to reattach their own severed limbs. Many of these characteristics, police believe, fit with some aspects of the killer's pattern, including the dumping of victims in the Kordava marina, as well as the mutilations, thus explaining the killer's assumption of such an alter ego.

The killer also allegedly sent a more recent message in which he warns the TBI not to allow incoming Knight-Errant Kristoff Erbe to join the investigation:

*There is no savior who can rescue you from my justice. All that can be accomplished by bringing in outsiders – even those born of my soil – is to draw more of my wrath upon you. Hunt for me if you like, but I will not honor he who does not belong.*

Despite the cultural identification of the kappa myth, Becca warned INN that nothing in the messages confirms the suspect's origins, and the TBI is not singling any one group out as harboring the killer. She further stressed that – contrary to rumors by local demonstrators – the TBI has not initiated background checks against possible pro-Combine dissidents under the cover of this case, an action viewed by many as an excuse for a police crackdown on the community.

"We are not in the business of persecution," Becca said, when asked if the TBI was looking into local family backgrounds. "The Bureau is simply pursuing every possible lead in this case, while simultaneously bearing in mind the citizens' right to privacy."

A new wave of demonstrations began yesterday after Kordava police reportedly raided the home of Dr. Shiro Kawanaka, a prominent physician in the Little Luthien district. Kawanaka was released in the evening after a reportedly intense questioning that had many area residents proclaiming his rights were violated.

"The TBI's treatment of Combine residents and citizens is appalling!" declared Agito Checherenkoff, one of several area youths who spoke out at a demonstration in downtown Kordava, just outside the TBI field headquarters. "We are made to feel as if we are all under suspicion, when we are all clearly the victims here! When will the government confess that they're too incompetent to solve this? When will they look beyond our neighborhoods, to the Davion Supremacists, who gain ground and credibility at our expense?"

## Towne Log

- + WTF? As far as I ever knew, a "kappa" was just a letter of the Greek alphabet, and something Clanners named their Galaxies after. Since when did it ever become a mythological beast?  
:- FMLurder
- + I dunno, since long before a hyperopinionated mongrel like you were born? Lurd, the legend predates the nuclear age! Heck, the article says it was archaic before spaceflight!  
:- Vesuvius
- + And this guy just pulls that out of his butt? Figures the cops are buying it, but now it's got to be obvious they're dealing with somebody who has WAY too much time on his hands.  
:- FMLurder
- + Which brings us the other question of how we all know it's a male killer? The cops, even the reporter writing this article figures it's a male, without even offering a shred of evidence.  
:- LewCass
- + Whoever it is has killed only women; generally speaking, that's not often done by serial-killing women. We're dealing with a misogynist, a brilliant one, mind you, and likely a nut case, too – or this is all just what he wants us to think.  
:- Chungabunga
- + All right, so he thinks he's a prehistoric mythological beast, which sounds like it walked out of one of those crappy flat-screen animations the Dracs seem to love so much. What does that tell us? Hmmm. Oh, I know! Let's get him to bow or something – him being all honorable and courteous – and then he'll dump all that water in his head out and be powerless.  
:- MM009
- + I know you're trying to be ridiculous, MM, but actually that was part of the kappa mythos, too.  
:- RaiRai
- + Huh!?  
:- MM009
- + According to the legend, one way to defeat a kappa was to bow. Its sense of honor demanded a return bow, which of course spilled the water it used for its power. (Hey, don't look at me; I didn't write the freaking myth!) Another way to save yourself was to write your name on a cucumber and toss it into the lake or whatever it lived in.  
:- RaiRai
- + What the hell does THAT do!?  
:- FMLurder
- + Heh. The kappa likes cucumber, apparently. (Where do you think we got kappa maki from?) Feeding a kappa what he likes makes him grateful, and since you signed it, he knows not to attack you.  
:- RaiRai
- + That is the dumbest thing I ever heard in my life. Who came up with this myth? Some poor, starving cucumber farmers, to open a new market?  
:- FMLurder
- + (shrug) Where did the Europeans come up with those silly myths about fairies, elves, and dwarves? Did they have some kind of "thing" for short people?  
:- RaiRai
- + Huh! That explains why I saw all those vegetables in the bay this morning! Never heard of that . . .  
:- Draco041
- + What's kappa maki?  
:- Synnik
- + Sushi, stuffed with cucumber. Rather disgusting, really.  
:- RaiRai
- + Quick, Draco! Go carve your name on a cucumber! Maybe your killer won't find you!  
:- WetWillie
- + Get a life already, WW!  
:- FMLurder



## **Del Laurel: "The Galaxy Could Use More Guys Like Damons"**

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05/13/3133

PORT HOWARD--In another of his trademark on-the-spot interviews, Adrian Del Laurel, star of Tharkad-Donnegal's sci-fi thriller *Divergence*, told INN that the Inner Sphere could use more heroes like the one he plays on the *Tr@^GSW!I---*

### **WE CAN TURN IT BACK!**

"My fellow Republicans:

"I trust that you will forgive the interruption of your regular programming, but the hour is fast approaching when so few of us will be left who can influence the dark age that is now upon us--a dark age born of treachery, deceit, and, most sadly, the loss of faith.

"I come to tell you that it is not too late. Not yet. We can turn it back!

"The Republic we have all grown up in is under siege, its leaders confused and frightened as forces both known and unknown--both from within and without--converge to attack. I have watched, dismayed to find that many of us seem to feel, standing on the brink of chaos and war, that there is nothing that can be done. This defeatist attitude spreads more every day; it is a cancer eating away at The Republic.

"Is this what we truly want? Is it going to take another Succession War, another Clan invasion, another Jihad, to awaken the people? Or will we not stand by what we believe in, what Devlin Stone himself believed in. Have we forgotten that The Republic and the man were not one in the same? Have we assumed that Stone's departure was but a death knell for his dream, for our dream?

"My friends, the trying times we now face are but a test of our resiliency and faith. The Republic is in danger, and our belief that it cannot stand will transform this danger into a mortal peril. We have come so far since the days of the long-vanished Star League, when our people lived under states ruled by a single liege lord. Even before the Jihad, our lives were determined exclusively by those of noble birth, the fate of our nation and all our worlds bound to the whims of dictators--no matter how benevolent they were. If the people had a voice, it came through a sympathetic lord, not by their own vote. Even at its most enlightened, it was not freedom.

"Now, under The Republic, we have something our ancestors could only dream of. We have voice. We have power. We have strength. And we have pride. Are we now to throw all that away just because someone turned off the lights? Are we to surrender the greatness that is The Republic to those who wish to revive the old hatreds and ways? Will we allow the freedom and equality of each world, each Prefecture, to be surrendered to the general with the biggest 'Mechs, someone who believes that the biggest army speaks the final--and only--word?

"If we do, then The Republic that I know and dearly love truly is dead. And yet, I know it cannot be so. I know that there must be others like me who are willing to fight for what's right. It's time to the end of the tyranny of doubt and fear. It's time for every one of us to fight for our Republic. We do not have to take up arms to do this. We do not have to make war on our fellow citizens. We can fight the way every democracy and republic has always fought. We can vote. We can get involved. We can contribute anything we have to support our government, our freedom, our dignity.

"In the final analysis, it comes back to faith. Above all else, we have to believe in The Republic and its destiny. Let go of the hatreds of the past. Let go of the dreams of creating the next Star League. Live for your freedom, for your voice--for if you do not, someone out there will surely take it all away."

--Cicero

### **Towne Log**

+ Uh . . . .

:- RepMan

+ What the hell was that!?

:- Skitzoid

+ Somebody hacked into INN!?!

:- Paranoid

+ Looks that way. Any idea who?

:- Graussler

+ Stone! It must be Devlin Stone! Hahahaha! I told you all he would return! He has not forsaken us after all! He will return, and all you nay-sayers will finally have to swallow your foolish pride and admit you were wrong!

:- Hop4Evr

+ Uh, hate to burst your bubble, Hop, but wouldn't Stone have said he was Stone? Why use the 'Cicero' handle?

:- Synnik

+ Synnik, you know who Cicero was--in real life, I mean?

:- ROSmith

+ Aside from the guy who just interrupted the spiel of some self-important actor? No. You?

:- Synnik

+ He lived in the days of the old Roman Republic--way pre-spaceflight. Hell, they didn't even have electricity. Anyway, he was one of their biggest scholars, and a major fan of the Republic. I think this guy's just using the Cicero handle to draw a parallel.

:- ROSmith

+ I take it he forgot about the general IQ of most Republicans, eh?

:- XSOkay

+ Dude, I don't care so much about the political lines; I just wanna know how he/she/it just pulled that off!

:- Graussler

+ Hehe! He's a L33t hax0r d00d!"

:- Teknofile

## Touring the Stars with Bertram Habeas

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05/14/3133

*We began on Terra, millions of years ago. Today, mankind stretches throughout the stars, touching worlds as far from our home as Clan space, more than two thousand light-years distant. Yet who are we, really? What have we become in our relentless push outward and onward? I'm Bertram Habeas, and tonight, we'll find the answers to these and many other fascinating questions together, as we tour the stars!*

### Volume II: Unstoppable Force – The Combine and the Star League

Imperial City, capital city of the Draconis Combine, sits under a hazy blue sky that shimmers even at night with an almost pearlescent glow. The skies over planet Luthien, tainted by centuries of rampant industrialization – even before the fires of the Jihad – earned this once-sleepy world its nickname “Black Pearl.” But while the air and water may seem poisonous to those taking in the world as a whole, Imperial City itself is a city of unmatched beauty, an almost fairy-tale image surrounded by verdant gardens. It is the crown jewel not only of Luthien, but also of the Draconis Combine as a whole.

*The eel rarely seeks the same prey as the goldfish. The eagle flies not with the pigeon. The tiger needs no friendship with the goat. Such are the paths of the Draconis Combine and the Terran Hegemony.*

--Shiro Kurita, in response to Director-General James McKenna's offer of alliance, 2325

Upon its founder's death in 2348, the Draconis Combine, barely 30 years old and composed of over 60 worlds, was already a force to be reckoned with. Shiro Kurita, its founder and first Coordinator, infused the realm with his determination and martial ruthlessness. Bred to embrace the severe, honor-driven mindset of the ancient samurai, his legacy set the tone for the Kuritas who followed. It comes as no surprise then that the Combine, driven by the Kuritas' dream of one day ruling all humankind, refused to ever ally itself with any of its neighbors, preferring instead its own path, the way of the sword. For over two centuries, as its dominion slowly absorbed the entire quadrant, including near-total control of the neighboring Principality of Rasalhague, the Dragon walked alone.

But despite Shiro's reluctance to ally with McKenna's Hegemony, the Dragon would eventually become part of the Star League the Hegemony would one day forge. Signing the Treaty of Vega, Coordinator Hehiro Kurita, son of the diplomatic and visionary Coordinator Siriwan McAllister-Kurita, opened the Dragon to the League.

Under the Star League, the Combine prospered as never before. Trade with other nations combined with an explosion of technological advancements to produce a more powerful nation, though it was one that would eventually be weakened by cultural contamination and softened by a lack of warfare and struggle. At least this was the view taken by Coordinators Sanethia and Urizen II.

*Sanethia initiated the move of the Combine capital from New Samarkand to Luthien for one reason and one reason only, really. Far from simply relocating the command center for her troops to a more logistically effective region in the event of war on any front, the relocation was actually a test of – and reminder to – the people of the Combine itself. Her hope was that, by presenting the people with a common focus, a difficult task on behalf of the state, she could unify them behind a spirit of national unity, reminding them that they were citizens of the Combine first, and the Star League second.*

*Urizen II took this effort one step further, however, when he ascended to the throne after her. His own sweeping reforms, intent on imposing the widespread adaptation of the feudal Japanese culture at all levels of Combine society, included the so-called Kokugaku (“national learning”) Policy, which taught the Shinto religion, the cultural mores of the Dictum Honorium, and the Japanese language. All other cultures were effectively forbidden as the state turned inward. Using his authority, and the power of the ISF that was always a Kurita family prerogative, Urizen probably did more than any other Coordinator since Shiro himself to shape the Draconis Combine we all know and love today . . .*

--Dr. Lanz Rettig, PhD., Professor of Inner Sphere History, University of Academia, Kessel

The rise of a new sense of cultural identity, in the form of a stratified and structured way of life reminiscent of feudal Japan, was brutally enforced by the dreaded internal security force, though their role in enforcing culture would one day fall to the less severe, but no less dedicated Order of the Five Pillars. By the end of Urizen II's reign in 2691 – when he was 101 years old – the diverse cultural mix that existed under the rule of the bushido-obsessed Kuritas was virtually erased, aside from the tenacious Azami and some Rasalhaguian holdouts. A rigid new hierarchy established roles for citizens in every walk of life, assuring a clear chain of command from the Coordinator himself down to the lowliest Unproductives.

Additional efforts to attain technological self-sufficiency and sharpen their trading skills helped assure the Dragon would indeed bow to no other power, and schools taught that the Kuritas joined the Star League only through a sense of pity and personal honor. Though brutally imposed in some cases, this new sense of identity and self-sufficiency would leave the Combine well-equipped in the years ahead, when the actions of Stefan the Usurper would bring about the death of the Star League and the end of humanity's Golden Age.

*At the time of the Amaris Crisis, I think many who have vilified the Combine for its inaction would be shocked to realize just how ideal a position they were in to destroy the League. [Coordinator] Takiro Kurita did not have to stop at simply denying the SLDF passage through his realm to keep his captive cousins alive under Amaris' "protection." Indeed, he could have seized the moment and assaulted the League troops himself, hastening their demise while allowing Amaris' Rim Worlds*

*troops to bear the blame. He was trapped, pure and simple, but willing to help any way he could. The fact that he did little more than deny the SLDF use of Combine space – rather than seizing the chance for personal conquests – should attest to that.*

*The SLDF's victories on Combine worlds near the Hegemony borders would prove that fact just as easily. Here, the SLDF faced Combine troops that retreated with only token resistance. Surely anyone familiar with the high value attached to personal honor by the precepts of bushido would know that Combine warriors simply did not retreat from a fight.*

*As it happened, though, doing nothing helped save the Kuritans' strength for the wars to come, when the League collapsed after the Liberation. Their highly polished, well-trained, and well-equipped military, suddenly free to act when the SLDF survivors launched their Exodus, served them well enough that they nearly overwhelmed House Davion in the First Succession War. Only the fallout from the Kentares Massacre, in fact, prevented the Dragon from delivering a crushing blow that would have claimed half of the populated galaxy in just over ten years of warfare.*

--Cedric St. Marcus, *The Dragon We Never Knew*, Republic Press, Terra, 3106

As fate would have it – or, rather, karma, by the Kuritan way of approaching things – the Draconis Combine would remain locked in almost continuous conflict with its neighbors for another three centuries before its next great upheaval. Amazingly, throughout these so-called Succession Wars, little would shake the sturdy foundations of the Kurita dynasty, or the faith and fanaticism of those who served it. None could overcome the truly unstoppable force that was the Draconis Combine.

Join us next week for part three of our four-part exploration into the Draconis Combine, our fascinating coreward neighbor, as we continue our tour of the galaxy! I'm Bertram Habeas.

## Woman Disappears as "Kappa" Demands Knight Return Home, Threatens More Killings

05/17/3133

KORDAVA – The arrival of native-born Knight-Errant Kristoff Erbe prompted another chilling message from the alleged serial killer stalking women in the southern waterfront district of the seaport city of Kordava. Threatening the community rocked by the murders of seven women ranging from 20 to 31 years of age, the self-styled Kappa demanded Erbe's immediate departure, and Kordava police believe it may be possible that the first of a new wave of victims has already been taken to underscore this demand. Inspector Frances Becca of the Towne Bureau of Investigations, whose office is working closely with Sir Kristoff Erbe, said the latest message arrived even as authorities announced their search for Mari Ingersoll, a 23-year-old lifeguard at Kordava's South Side Middle School, whose family became concerned when she failed to return from work last night.

"At this time, there is no evidence to suggest that [Ingersoll] has been taken by the so-called 'Little Luthien' killer, but we are taking no chances in this investigation," Becca told INN at a press briefing this morning. "All Kordava police have been put on alert, and we are asking all citizens to keep an eye on the Kordava harbor for any suspicious activity."

Knight-Errant Kristoff Erbe, who arrived directly from Terra on a special Republic Courier-class DropShip two days ago, was unavailable for comment on this latest series of events. Becca explained to INN, however, that he was well aware of the situation, and that together the TBI and the Kordava authorities were coordinating their efforts to help track down the killer.

"I personally briefed [Sir Kristoff Erbe] as soon as the Kordava forensics department relayed the suspect's transmission to my office," said Becca. "The determination at this time was to proceed as before, with the TBI and Kordava police coordinating their efforts through [Erbe's] office."

Locals say the slayings began on February 23, when a Kordava fisherman found the nude body of Alicia Lang, 21, a waitress at Hiroshi's Bar and Grill. All the victims were residents of Kordava's southern district, known as Little Luthien to the locals for its strong ties to the history and culture of the Draconis Combine. The fifth killing was followed by a ten-day lull, during which time life almost returned to normal in Kordava.

This lull was broken when a sixth victim, carrying a data disc message intended for the authorities, was discovered. This discovery exposed the fact that the killer had in fact been communicating with detectives for some time, prompting a wave of protests against the police handling of the crisis.

"[The killer] was making demands all along, taunting the police and the people of Little Luthien, and all the while the TBI told us they had no leads," said Yoshiro Kalawaska, a prominent Kordava business leader who resides in Little Luthien. "Now, of course, the question is 'Why?' Why didn't they tell us? Was it to avoid panic or to cover up their own gross incompetence in tracking a killer who uses public terminals to send his messages of doom?"

The tension felt on the streets of Kordava has grown only worse since the killings resumed, with demonstrations against police mishandling occurring almost daily. The arrival of Sir Kirstoff Erbe, however, much anticipated since the planetary government requested his assistance in late February, has added a sense of optimism to a community grown disillusioned by the failures of its protectors.

"I sincerely hope this Knight can get to the bottom of these terrible crimes, because the people of Kordava are crying out for salvation," Kalawaska said. "I fear that we have lost all faith in the police today, and a people without faith are capable of a great many terrible deeds."

### Towne Log

+ A people without faith . . . ? What was that? Was he trying to be profound, or was that last bit supposed to be some kind of threat?

:- WetWillie

+ Yes.

:- FMLurder

+ I'm confused . . . .

:- Corpus02

+ You're always confused, Corp.

:- Lkool

+ No, I mean, about this case, wiseass! What does the killer hope to gain by telling the cops to get rid of the Knight now? I mean, hell! They're hunting him down, and they'd do it with or without the high and mighty guardians of The Republic showing up.

:- Corpus02

+ Well, especially not a guy like Erbe. Notice how – apart from saying "Here I am!" when he arrived at Prince John – we've seen neither hide nor hair of this guy? I thought he was helping out here!

:- CalTrops

+ My POINT is why is he scared of this Knight? And does he really expect the cops to listen by threatening to do what he's already doing?

:- Corpus02

+ How should any of us know, Corpus? The guy's a nut case! Slag all those pet theories that he's actually hunting down sympathizers to the Dragon's Fury! The man's crazy, and to him, it probably makes perfect sense to expect the cops to lose in a battle of wills.

:- FMLurder

+ Nah, this guy ain't no nut case – well, not THAT nutty, anyway. He's kept the local and planetary police from doing more than put together a loose profile on him and gotten away with murder eight – maybe even nine – times! He's not looking to get the cops to back off; he's looking to broaden the rift between Kordavans and the police. Anyone can see they're ready to riot in Little Luthien.

:- Lkool

+ Dude, the man thinks he's a human-turtle hybrid with a bowl on his head and supernatural powers. The man's a psycho!

:- FMLurder

+ All this time, and we don't even know for sure it IS a man, fellas. Fact is, even that's just an element out of some police profile, based on the fact that he kills only women and the belief that he's a classic misogynist. For all we know, this is one of the most hell-bent girls you can imagine, driven insane by some kind of jealous rage over losing her boy/girlfriend to another woman.

:- Chungabunga

+ Every victim is strangled, cut up after death, and dumped into the harbor. I just don't see a woman doing that, no matter how psycho.

:- WetWillie

+ Then you have a narrow view of the world, my friend. Hell, how are they sure it's only one guy? Just because syntax, spelling, and "tone" may all look right in the e-messages, they are presuming it's the same guy, but hell! The guy who wrote the letter may not even be the same guy crushing these girls' windpipes.

:- MNDrake

+ Damn, I just can't believe he's already snatched another one. Don't you think by now they'd have some kind of hard evidence on this guy? Something admissible as evidence in court and strong enough to get this guy out in the open, where they can take him down?

:- RaiRai

+ Man, I'm telling you, he's not dumb. I'd bet ex-military . . .

:- Lkool

## Touring the Stars with Bertram Habeas

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05/21/3133

*We began on Terra, millions of years ago. Today, mankind stretches throughout the Milky Way, touching worlds as far from our home as Clan space, more than two thousand light-years distant. Yet who are we, really? What have we become in our relentless push outward and onward? I'm Bertram Habeas, and tonight, we'll find the answers to these and many other fascinating questions together, as we tour the stars!*

### Volume III: The Dragon's Crucible

As any historian in the galaxy will tell you, the 31st century was a time of tremendous change and growth across the Inner Sphere. Besides watershed events such as the Clan Invasion, the rise and fall of the Federated Commonwealth, and the Word of Blake Jihad, this era was important to the Draconis Combine for other reasons. Among them, the formation of the Free Rasalhague Republic, the War of 3039, the integration of the abjured Nova Cat Clan, and even the rise and fiery fall of the infamous Black Dragon Society. In its centuries-old, rigidly stratified state, few would have expected the Draconis Combine to survive these tremendous and rapid upheavals. Indeed, but for one man, it very likely might have shattered.

*Even before he became the Coordinator of the Draconis Combine, Theodore Kurita was perhaps the most visionary leader of his time. Even the ambitious, forward-thinking Katrina Steiner, Archon of the Lyran Commonwealth, with her monumental Peace Proposal of 3020, could not compete with the man who challenged the core of his nation's culture and beliefs for the better.*

*But for all his vision, one must wonder how much of his success had to do with the basic, and personal, differences between father and son. Theodore's father, Takashi Kurita, was a brutally rigid traditionalist, much like Shiro Kurita or Urizen II, with unbending rules about honor and a penchant for swearing blood oaths against enemies both real and imagined. Theodore strove to be everything but another Takashi. His more progressive views and actions included elevating the yakuza and other so-called undesirables to fight for the Dragon, supporting the release of Rasalhaguans from centuries of oppression, and generally lifting a lot of the harsher standards that held down the Combine people for so long. These steps flew in the face of everything his father held dear.*

*Of course, it was a miracle that, given the deadly methods of past Kuritan rulers, Theodore wasn't put to the sword by his own father. In that, one may suggest that the equally strong, and completely basic, feelings a father has for his son – even one so rebellious – spared the young Kurita's life.*

--Armando Sanchez, PhD., History and Psychology Professor at Greiger Institute of Modern History, Terra

Whether Theodore Kurita's penchant for reform was the result of childhood rebellion against his father, or the implementation of strategic necessity, the changes he wrought in the Combine were profound. Yet in enacting his bold new plans, Theodore walked a treacherous tightrope, balancing the survival of his realm against the passions of its peoples. Success often vindicated him during this time under his father's reign, even when he personally orchestrated the creation of the Free Rasalhague Republic. This action formed an instant buffer zone between the Combine and the Lyran half of the now-united Federated Commonwealth, while a side deal negotiated with ComStar gave the Combine access to Star League technology, including new BattleMechs for its war-ravaged army. Together with his new Ghost Regiments – staffed by yakuza and other "undesirables" formally recognized to serve the Combine's interests – Theodore saw to it that his realm survived the Steiner-Davion's efforts to destroy it in the War of 3039. No one, not even Takashi Kurita himself, could deny Theodore's success, and very few in the Combine did more than verbally criticize his departure from tradition.

The Clan Invasion spurred another wave of reform, especially after Theodore claimed the throne. Many Combine citizens relaxed cultural restrictions within the Combine, while others helped open the realm to its neighbors. Historical enemies became valued allies – and, in some personal cases, even friends of a sort. Though the Japanese cultural identity and national pride remained strong – as it does today – it became possible once more for long-suppressed cultures, such as the Muslim Azami, to celebrate their own strength of character. Unfortunately, in the years that followed the Battle of Tukayyid, in which ComStar won a 15-year respite from the invaders on behalf of all Inner Sphere powers, the reforms that allowed the Dragon to survive its most devastating wars in recent memory nearly tore the realm apart from within.

*The Black Dragons, the Kokuryu-kai, were a curious mix, to say the least. Allegedly an ancient group that always acted in the Dragon's best interests, they made their presence felt only from the mid-3050s through the 3070s. Ironically, what made it possible for them to exist and function as well as they did were the very liberal reforms they wanted to stop. In that respect, they were a group dedicated to cutting off their own nose to spite their face.*

*In practice, the Black Dragons were an Asian version of the fabled Illuminati Society, a loose alliance of like-minded criminal, business, military, and political leaders who met in dark rooms and plotted the downfall of their government with the pretense of saving it. The question, however, was who were they saving it for? Was it for them? Doubtful, as the reforms they acted against actually helped most of them accumulate wealth and power. Was it for the people, then? Absolutely not! Indeed, historians of the last century have argued that the Society actually worked – perhaps unwittingly – for only one man or a handful of men, who merely wanted their own shot at the throne.*

*Alas, who the Dragons actually worked for, and what their ultimate goals really were, may never be known, as the Society was all but annihilated during the Jihad. Their activities and goals, however, fit in nicely with those of the Word of Blake fanatics, so perhaps there is some credence to theories that the Dragons were never interested in the Combine's well being*

*at all. Rather than a misguided group of traditionalists, what if the Black Dragons were actually a carefully grown dissident group that actually – and unknowingly – served the Word of Blake itself?*

--John Kerrigan, author of *Who's Really in Charge?* Avalon Press, 3129

For the Draconis Combine, the triple threat of the Federated Commonwealth, the Clans, and the Black Dragons reached its apex in the mid-3060s, when all three groups dragged the nation into a war on every front. Coordinator Theodore, hoping to isolate his realm from the fighting, was thwarted when the Black Dragons successfully instigated a war with the neighboring Ghost Bear Clan. Renegade troops on the borders of the FedCom realms then attacked. Forced to assume a posture of aggressive defense, Theodore launched heavy counterassaults on every front, eventually securing each one, though at a severe cost to the Combine military. When the Dragon emerged whole from these crucibles, it became clear that House Kurita would persevere no matter the odds.

So it was believed, until the Word of Blake Jihad.

Their military already broken from the fighting on both former FedCom fronts, and by the slugfest on the Ghost Bear border, the Combine was only beginning to recover from the ravages of war in the months leading up to the Blakist holy war. Predations by the newly arrived Snow Raven Clan in the nearby periphery forced the Coordinator to deploy troops all around his nation, thinning them out to cover every possible avenue of invasion. In that weakened state, the realm was almost overwhelmed in the first days of the fighting that erupted almost everywhere at once.

Compared to the recent conflicts, the Jihad presented the most hellish years of warfare known since the Second Succession War. Nuclear weapons were thrown about faster than a 'Mech army could be assembled, and the Combine command structure was all but smashed when Luthien and other key worlds were bombarded by a blitzkrieg of WarShips and 'Mech regiments. At the height of all this, the tragic loss of Theodore Kurita, perhaps the best Coordinator since Shiro himself, left a demoralized realm to battle an enemy that would stop at nothing to bring ruin to all those it touched.

It is a testament, once more, to the iron will of the Kurita clan, that the Combine managed to survive at all, but it is a monument to Theodore and his progeny that the realm actually managed to turn the tide alongside Devlin Stone and his liberating armies.

In our final installment on the Draconis Combine, we'll take a look at how it exists today. Please join us as we continue our tour of the stars! I'm Bertram Habeas.



## Interesting Times, Dangerous Places: #362 "The Clash of Swords"

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05/25/3133

I thought that after Ankaa I would have an opportunity to catch my breath, but after only the briefest of respites – in the medical center on Tikonov where I recovered from my injuries after being evacuated – I learned of yet more troop movements, this time on Ronel. Against the doctor's advice, I managed to wrangle a ride on one of Duke Sandoval's supply DropShips – the Alacrity – heading from his capital world to the beleaguered garrison. It was a long trip, but it gave me more time to recover and to assemble my notes on the border world.

From what I gathered, Dragon's Fury forces had struck from Prosperina against the Prefecture IV world as part of the pro-Combine faction's endeavors to strengthen their position in their home province. On its own, Ronel would seem an unlikely target; though rich in mineral resources, it remains shrouded in a poisonous atmosphere after the use of chemical weapons in the First Succession War. But when taken in a larger context, as a stepping stone into Prefecture IV or, more likely, as a base of operations against the Highlander base on Addicks, the significance of the world becomes more apparent.

It appears that Dragon's Fury troops, part of the Brotherhood regiment and under the command of Abeado Measho, had arrived in system via a pirate point and staged an assault directly on the planetary capital, Lenor. The son of disgraced Combine warrior Akito Measho, who chose exile and dishonor in The Republic rather than commit seppuku in the Combine, the younger Measho is, I gather, intent on winning back his family honor, and used the assault as a means of proving his worth. The Ghost Legion defenders under Captain Santiago Padilla sought to keep the world under Duke Sandoval's authority, and largely – but not wholly – supported the Swordsworn.

The blitzkrieg against Lenor wasn't the decisive blow Measho had hoped. Many of the Swordsworn escaped his initial assault, but his troops did successfully seize the city. In truth, Padilla's forces withdrew once their situation became untenable, deliberately moving away from the city to avoid damaging its vital atmospheric scrubbers. Of course, this was all presented from a pro-Swordsworn angle – I was on one of Duke Sandoval's DropShips – and the tales of the brave and glorious defenders against the vicious and inscrutable invaders had to be taken with a pinch of salt. Jumping into the Ronel system, however, I was able to tap into the local news feeds and get fresher, if no more accurate, updates on the situation.

The broad strokes of what Sandoval's people had told me was true, including a surprising honesty on their "less than optimal" performance in the defense of Lenor. But I was surprised to learn that the Fury forces had immediately pursued the Swordsworn, journeying into Xox's highlands and the upper reaches of the Lenor Valley. The pro-Fury broadcasts – they controlled the news facilities in Lenor, of course – implied that the Swordsworn would soon be hunted down and eliminated, something I initially took as the typical hyperbole of a group seeking to legitimize itself and dispel tales of a strong opposition. The glum faces of the command crew on the Alacrity seemed to lend credence to the reports. While a little loathe to give out information to an unaffiliated journalist, the Captain eventually filled me in on the situation, which continued to be bad news for Sandoval.

The Swordsworn had successfully drawn the Dragon's Fury out of Lenor, but found themselves under constant harassment from Measho's forces. From what I gathered, Padilla and his troops very nearly walked into a Fury ambush, but thanks to a mix of luck and determination were able to slip free – but not without cost.

That was the situation as we came into land. The Alacrity had been scheduled to land at Lenor to resupply the garrison, so instead we are to rendezvous with Padilla's troops before moving against the Fury's LZ at Crater Bluff. Whether that will be the last hussar of the Swordsworn or the start of their counterattack remains to be seen.

--Cameron Shaw

### Towne Log

+ Whoa. Was it me or did we miss some Cameron Shaw stuff? The last one was #348, right? It sounds like he got roughed up on Ankaa.

:- Lu

+ It was #350, but beyond that, it looks like it. Problems with the HPG, I presume. I remember from some of his early stories that when he was in Marik space he got shot a couple of times.

:- Johnson

+ Actually, he got shot only once (on Sadurni IIRC), but he got hit by shrapnel, too. There was also a vid-journalist there, and I recall seeing the pics in Our Times. Went under his vest and hospitalized him for a couple of weeks. Didn't seem quite so cocky then. Another journo there wasn't so lucky and lost a leg. Perils of being a war correspondent, I guess.

:- Kaywood

+ So what did happen on Ankaa?

:- Lu

+ I heard it's in Steel Wolves hands, so I presume Sadia Wolf kicked Jameson's butt. Black Border published omnibus editions of his work in the past, so you might be able to get the articles that way eventually, though given the way things seem to be going to hell in a hand basket, I wouldn't hold your breath.

:- Hound

+ Thanx.  
:- Lu

## **CAPTURED! "Little Luthien" Killer Nabbed in Kordava Shootout!**

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05/27/3133

KORDAVA – The hunt for the "Kappa," the elusive serial killer who terrorized the dominantly Combine-influenced Little Luthien neighborhood of Kordava since late February, ended today in a shootout that killed one local police officer and left both the alleged killer and Republican Knight-Errant Kristoff Erbe seriously wounded. The dramatic battle erupted in the midday hours after the Kordava police located the Enfield runabout registered to Shu Imashinigi, the subject of a provincial manhunt that has taken to the seas as well as the streets.

"At 1245 hours, a harbor patrol boat sighted the suspect's boat, an E-31 runabout designated KB-156A, five kilometers southeast of the city marina," Kordava police chief Geoffrey Flecher told INN in a late-night press conference regarding the event. "After hailing the suspect's vessel, and failing to get any reply, harbor patrol moved to intercept, at which point the suspect fled the area at flank speed."

According to Flecher's report, Imashinigi led the harbor patrol on a 10-minute chase across the waters near Kordava before entering the Ethryn River just east of the city. The shallow river prevented the police boat from entering, and apparently forced Imashinigi himself to ground his boat after less than a kilometer upstream. Police units rushed to the scene found the boat abandoned, its motor still running, and signs that Imashinigi had fled on foot, but it was unclear where the 53-year old suspect had gone until, just an hour later, he was spotted in the Little Luthien marketplace. Flecher also added that a search of Imashinigi's boat quickly revealed evidence implicating him in the rash of recent killings.

"Inside the suspect's vessel, officers on these scene reported finding human remains, preserved in on-board freezer units," Flecher said. "These freezer units are typically used by fishers operating far from port, to retain the freshness of a day's catch. Though it is still too early to tell, because a detained forensic analysis has yet to be performed, the remains are believed at this time to be the missing body parts from the eight known victims."

Flecher further told INN that a ninth body was also discovered in a separate freezer unit on Imashinigi's boat, but that that body remains unidentified as was "in a state of severe damage and decay."

Upon being spotted and identified in the Little Luthien market by locals, police say that Imashinigi fled, forcing police responding to an emergency call to fan out over the sector's east and south neighborhoods. Knight-Errant Kristoff Erbe and Towne Bureau of Investigations Detective Frances Becca were among the searching parties, though it appears that neither one crossed paths during the hunt.

Erbe and two Kordava city officers assigned as his partners came upon Imashinigi just outside the Kordava marina around 1500 hours, over two hours after the harbor patrol first discovered Imashinigi's boat. At that time, a gun battle ensued between the alleged suspect and the police.

"The suspect was apparently armed with an old-model Nambu autopistol," said Becca. "When confronted by police, he immediately ran for cover, firing several shots at the officers. It was at this point that Officer William Mousa was struck twice in the chest, both hits defeating his vest, suggesting that the suspect was using armor-piercing rounds. After leaving Officer Sami Keppler to tend to Mousa, who later died from his wounds, Sir Kristoff then resumed the pursuit without backup."

"It was like some holodrama was being played out right in our back yard!" said Kimi Umeko, a Kordava resident whose house borders the marina. Like many of her neighbors, Umeko, 25, was at home this afternoon, when Erbe's foot chase with Imashinigi crossed over her fence and came to its dramatic conclusion in the street beyond. "[Imashinigi] came running through my yard – right by my window, even! He was so close I could see his sweat. I didn't see his gun at first, but heard him shoot just a few seconds later. I was so scared, I just got down on the floor."

"When I heard the shots, I went to the nearest window to see what was going on," said Kazuo Keitaro, another neighborhood resident. "I saw [Imashinigi] slumped on the sidewalk, about two houses down. He looked like he was bleeding. Then I saw [Erbe] kind of limp over to him from behind Mr. Umeko's car, and he was bleeding, too."

Becca said that both Erbe and Imashinigi suffered serious injuries in the shootout, but that Erbe was still conscious when police and ambulances arrived at the scene. Both the Knight-Errant and the suspect are currently listed in "guarded" condition at Piotr Svaarstad Memorial Hospital in downtown Kordava, where Becca says that Erbe is expected to make a full recovery.

Tonight, the mood in Kordava is lighter than it has been in a long time, as a terrorized community breathes a collective sigh of relief. But it is a relief that comes mixed with sorrow, as the city remembers the victims of Towne's worst serial killer in more than 50 years.

"Even killing that monster won't bring my Alicia back," said 47-year-old Okapi Lang, father of Alicia Lang, the first victim now believed to have been slain by the infamous Kappa. "And I know in my heart that the families of the others this man killed would feel the same way. But it is good, at least, to know he will not harm another person ever again."

Lang's body was discovered in Kordava harbor on February 23 by local fishermen, signaling the start of more than four months of fear and anguish that has pit the Combine-influenced community of Little Luthien against local and planetary authorities, whom many have accused of moving too slowly on this case. Yashiro Kalawaska, a prominent member of the Little Luthien community, offered only small praise for today's climactic end to the ongoing crisis.

"I'm sure the community at large can now rest easy knowing that the guilty party has finally been found," said Kalawaska. "However, I'm sure this arrest, and the length of time it has taken to make it, will bear further scrutiny for some time to come."

### Towne Log

+ WOOOHOOO! They finally got the bastard!!!!!!

:- RaiRai

+ I heard THAT, RR! Though, personally, I don't see why Erbe didn't just punch a few more slugs into his brain when he had the guy on the ground there!

:- Draco041

+ Christ! Drac justice, huh? Don't you guys know anything about due process?

:- WetWillie

+ Cut him some slack, Willie. You'd be screaming the same thing if it were happening in Port Howard. Hell, I'm not from that area and even \*I\* want to know why Erbe didn't simply finish the job. Hell, from what I hear, he practically protected the man from the locals when they all came out to see what happened.

:- FMLurder

+ He's a Knight, FM. That's what they do; keepers of the peace, and all that. Not like he could have stopped them all, mind you, if his wounds were as bad as they say. I think people stayed back out of respect for the title.

:- MNDrake

+ Yes! Respect to the Knight! Only the righteous servants of Devlin Stone prevail where the efforts of those who have lost faith fail! Remember that it was a Knight who saved you, not some slack-jawed yokel towing the party line of a separatist government! Can there be any doubt where our gratitude applies?

:- Hop4Evr

+ Malf that respect bit! The cops dropped the ball on this guy ever since the whole mess began. Now we have eight dead girls – not counting whoever it was aboard his boat – and business here is shot because everyone assumes the people of Little Luthien are a bunch of hooligans! Killing this bastard's the least we could do to regain our collective honor.

:- WetWillie

+ Methinks Hop is getting more delusional with each passing day. Let me guess, you're Cicero, right?

:- Synnik

+ Still nothing more about who this guy was, though. I mean, how do you keep the police running on land \*and\* sea like he did? At 50+ years old, no less? He's \*got\* to be military trained, or some kind of covert op!

:- Lkool

+ Who cares!? You writing a biography on him, or want dibs on the tri-vid rights here? The guy's a whacko. He killed a bunch of helpless women. He got caught. End of story! Bury the dead! Move on! It just galls me to think someone wants to make a hero out of guys like this, or make us all relive a killing spree with a long, drawn out – and probably overexposed – trial process AND a made-for-trivid movie!!

:- Corpus02

+ +So, Corp, tell us how you REALLY feel. Don't hold it all inside....

:- FMLurder

+ I'm with him, FM. This bloodbath's been sensationalized enough as it happened. I just want this guy fried and forgotten. We should all remember the victims, not the killer.

:- Draco041

## Erbe Declares Manhunt after Ninth "Kappa" Victim Escapes Killer

05/27/3133

KORDAVA--The search for the elusive serial killer calling himself the "Kappa" took a dramatic turn this evening when Kaori Atariya, a 19-year-old retail employee from Kordava's southern waterfront community, burst into a city police station, bruised and disheveled--but lucky to be alive after an alleged attack by the "Little Luthien" killer himself. Just hours after this shocking event, Knight-Errant Kristoff Erbe declared a province-wide manhunt for Shu Imashinigi; he declared the man, described as a 53-year-old local fisherman, "armed and extremely dangerous."

"Whether or not Mr. Imashinigi is or is not the so-called Kappa killer will be up to the courts to decide," Erbe told INN in an emergency press conference after making the announcement. "What is known is that an individual fitting his description has been linked by several witnesses to the recent assaults, including tonight's attack on Miss Atariya."

"Anyone seeing or harboring this individual is advised to contact authorities immediately," Erbe added. "People should not attempt to confront, question, or apprehend this individual themselves. He is to be considered armed and extremely dangerous."

Inspector Frances Becca of the Towne Bureau of Investigations (TBI), speaking alongside Erbe, further added that Imashinigi's private fishing boat, a blue-and-white Enfield Runabout E-31 named Luka and bearing the call number KB-156A, is not presently in the waters of Kordava harbor, having set sail apparently in the late evening. Despite this fact, Becca said, police and TBI officials are focusing their search for Imashinigi in the Kordava city's southern districts at this hour.

"We are leaving no stone unturned," Becca told INN. "Mr. Imashinigi may be at sea, or he may be at large on the streets at this hour. At the present time, the Zingara Province Coast Guard has reported no sighting of his vessel, so his whereabouts remain a mystery."

An unidentified source close to the case told INN earlier today that police had begun focusing their search on the transient fishing community, and that Imashinigi, a widower and resident of Kordava's Little Luthien district, was one of only a handful who was still being sought for questioning. Imashinigi, whose wife died five years ago from lung cancer, was described as a "recluse" by some fellow Kordava fishermen since the loss of his 18-year-old daughter, Luka, this past December. Our source declined to say for sure whether or not the object of the police investigation, now under the direction of Sir Kristoff Erbe, was believed to be the Kappa himself, but did say that his capture was considered "critical" to the case.

The breakthrough, apparently, was the late-night arrival of Kaori Atariya at Kordava's Little Luthien police precinct 671, in the company of city police. Atariya, according to a police source, claimed that she was assaulted just outside Sato's department store, where she is employed as a clothing sales clerk. According to the report, Atariya was waiting for a ride home, in the company of her store manager, and was approached by "a plain-looking gentleman" when her manager stepped back into the store to answer a phone call. She said the individual, whose description matched that given by police for Shu Imashinigi, first engaged her in conversation, but then quickly attempted to strangle her with a length of some kind of rope or wire. Atariya then claimed that her alleged attacker ran off when her manager returned, having heard her alarmed cry for help.

Though police refuse to speculate on Imashinigi's character, his friends and neighbors expressed a mix of shock and outrage over Erbe's declaration and its implications.

"Are the police trying to pin these killing on [Imashinigi] now?" asked Giovanni Laputin, a Kordava school teacher who counts himself one of Imashinigi's neighbors. "How could he? He's an old, kind man who doesn't bother anyone. How could anyone think he's a killer?"

"I can't believe it," said Nihongi Estelle, a Kordava fisherman who said he often spoke with Imashinigi via radio during expeditions in the tropical ocean off the southern shores of Hyboria. "[Imashinigi] was always polite and friendly whenever I spoke with him. I can't imagine he'd ever harm another soul."

"After poor Luka died, [Imashinigi] was just never the same," said Priscilla Narabu, a Little Luthien grocer who claims Imashinigi often frequented her store in the marketplace near the marina. "He almost never talked or smiled . . . and just seemed to stare off into space. It's such a shame."

Other members of the Little Luthien community, so named because its residents continue to uphold the traditions and culture of their shared heritage in the Draconis Combine, have complained that Erbe's manhunt further stains the image of their community in a time of social strife.

"This manhunt is yet another example of the Davionist elements of the government--and The Republic at large--to strip away the dignity of those citizens and residents of Draconis descent," declared Yoshiro Kalawaska.

Kalawaska, a prominent Little Luthien community leader, has been at the heart of many civil disturbances over the past week, all directed at the seemingly ineffectual efforts by the local authorities and the TBI to find and catch the Kappa. The latest demonstration, in fact, prompted Sir Kristoff Erbe to personally intercede before the situation could degenerate into violence.

"What we have here is a blatant move by the local government to find a kindly, upstanding member of the community guilty of a crime, just to appease the masses," Kalawaska added. "The people of this community deserve far better!"

Regardless of the opinions, however, a community continues to live in fear tonight, stalked perhaps by one of their own, and the search now begins for a man who may--at the very least--know who is responsible for terrorizing his people. At last, according to Sir Erbe, the end of this ordeal may be in sight.

### Towne Log

+ All this time, and it was a freaking fisherman!? Oh, gawd! I bet those malfing cops got egg all over their faces now!  
:- WetWillie

+ I'm still betting on ex-military. They didn't say if that Imashagi guy--damn, Dracs have some tough names to spell!--ever served, but you gotta wonder. Killing eight women and avoiding capture like that, he just \*can't\* be an ordinary fisherman!  
:- Lkool

+ Any of you consider he may not be the guy? I mean, the killer's taken out people ranging from 20 to almost 40 years old, people who should know a lot better than some 19-year-old girl, anyway. And getting away with it, too. Anyone consider that this sloppy guy who went after what's-her-name there is just a copycat?  
:- Chungabunga

+ I think it's just ridiculous! I know Mr. Imashinigi. His boat is parked just three piers from my uncle's! The man's no killer! He's just an old guy who's had a rough life--and no, Lkool, he's not ex-military, so he's not your guy!  
:- RaiRai

+ Well, RR, maybe you should be watching your back, then, eh? Or better yet, go to the cops and tell 'em what you know, because your boating neighbor there is a wanted man. Or do you think it's just a coincidence he happens to be nowhere about when Erbe says they want him?  
:- FMLurder

+ It's gotta be a mistake is all I'm saying! The girl's gotta be confused or something!  
:- RaiRai

+ Which brings us to the next question: This girl gets attacked, and may have given a description of the fisherman, and suddenly it's a manhunt? Can we say "grasping at straws," folks?  
:- Draco041

+ Right, Drac. That's what you say now. You know, I've listened to you fume about how the cops can't find any leads and make any arrests, and now you're bitching because they locked onto somebody.  
:- Synnik

+ Okay, so assuming just for a second that this Imashinigi guy IS the killer, what's the deal? Why's a fisherman doing in a bunch of women? Is it just because his wife and daughter died? Now he's bitter about other women or something?  
:- XSOkay

+ Heh. Ask RaiRai. They're buds. ;-)  
:- FMLurder

+ Ah, shove it, Lurder! The man lost his wife to cancer, like the article says, and his daughter fell into the ocean and got caught by a Seraphim Swimmer! You know what those things can do?  
:- RaiRai

+ Frag! You know, I don't have any idea why they ever named those things after angels! More like a giant piranha! That's a grisly way to go!  
:- Chungabunga

+ You aren't kidding! My uncle told me about how his friend was fishing off the Styx coast there, and a school of Seraphim Swimmers came by. Apparently, they'd snagged a five-meter-long blackback and were just starting to reel it aboard. The school picked up the scent and, wow! They say the whole thing was gone in 20 seconds flat!  
:- RaiRai

+ Okay, I dunno what to believe, now. That the cops really may have a lead on this Kappa killer, or that there IS such a thing as a five-meter-long blackback!  
:- Synnik

## Interesting Times, Dangerous Places #363: "Deep Down"

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05/31/3133

"You are not welcome here."

The harshness of the words was a stark contrast to the beauty that spoke them. Of course, I'd heard of Lisabet Wolf, Captain Padilla's XO and a descendent of those who followed Katya Kerensky into The Republic. Wolf believed in the Clan lifestyle but didn't support Kal Raddick, and instead had chosen to fight alongside her friends under Sandoval command.

"Not to you, perhaps, but Lord Sandoval approved of my presence." I handed her the laissez-passer that approved my presence on the world. Okay, saying that the Duke had approved my presence was perhaps stretching it a little – it was a one of his staff that I'd browbeaten into allowing me to ride on the Alacrity and to report from Ronel.

Wolf glanced at it, noting the Duke's veri-signed signature, and grunted before handing it back. "Against my better judgment." She turned on her heels and strode down the DropShip's gangplank, taking a dozen steps before turning back to me with a scowl. "What are you waiting for?" She motioned for me to follow. I grabbed my kitbag and dashed after her. Wolf climbed into the driver's seat of a skimmer, and I threw my bag into the back before hauling myself into the passenger seat. "Hold on." She grinned maliciously and gunned the engine.

She wasn't kidding. I've been on some wild rides in my time but that run across the LZ to Padilla's command post was one of the most nerve-wracking. We dodged in and out of traffic, skidded around piles of newly unloaded supplies, even leaped between legs of a Black Hawk . . . as it was walking down the rough-hewn roadway. Needless to say, I wasn't in top form by the time we reached the CP, which I'm sure was Wolf's intention. She leapt from the skimmer and ushered me into the canvas tent that served as Captain Padilla's HQ. I struggled to pull my bag free then walked – a little unsteadily – into the Swordsworn's command post.

I'd seen pictures of Santiago Padilla on the run-in to Ronel but the real deal seemed to be less impressive; his stooped pose and the bags under his eyes showed the strain the campaign had placed on him. Nonetheless, the captain was jovial and greeted me much more warmly than his XO. "Lizzie gave you the tour, I presume?" Wolf scowled at her CO but he grinned. "Word to the wise – never accept a ride from a hovertank driver. They think the entire world is a race track."

"Duly noted." I offered him my pass but he waved my hand away, instead gesturing to a canvas chair. I sat and he did likewise. Wolf remained standing, unwilling to relax her guard. "Your reputation precedes you, Mr. Shaw, and I'll offer you all the assistance I can. The Duke's compliments. And mine. Just let Lizzie or me know."

"Santi . . ." Wolf's scowl deepened.

"We've been over this, Liz. Ankaa wasn't his fault." Then I realized why she'd been so aggressive.

"If you'll excuse me." Wolf saluted and then turned on her heel.

"A case of shooting the messenger?" I asked.

"Indeed. One of her sibs was with the Steel Wolves on Ankaa, and Liz learned of his death through your articles." I nodded. It wasn't the first time I'd been blamed for simply reporting the facts. "At least you won't have to wait long. We're in final prep for an assault on the Dragon's Fury at the Omar-Hyrog mine. Once the equipment you rode down with is ready, we'll go. Shouldn't be long." He handed me some images of the encampment around the mine-head and then drew us off some juice. I sipped it slowly and studied the images.

"That looks like it could be an interesting fight." Of course, I meant a bloody fight. A close-quarters battle against a dug-in enemy would never be pleasant. I'd seen enough of those in my time, both back in the League and in the more recent conflict within The Republic. Fortunately, I was saved from having to elaborate by Wolf sticking her head back through the tent flap.

She scowled at me again, then turned her attention to Padilla. "We're about done, Santi."

Santiago gestured toward the exit and we joined the tanker outside. "You know what to do, Lizzie." She saluted and loped off toward her waiting chariot. Santiago watched her go, and then strode purposefully toward the Swordsworn's waiting 'Mechs, unzipping his jumpsuit as he did. He gestured to a soldier, who approached.

"Find Mr. Shaw somewhere to stow his gear." He turned back to me. "Want to take a ride?"

### Towne Log

+ Anyone got a picture of Lisabet Wolf? She sounds like a real cutie.  
:- Beetle

+ She'd eat you for breakfast, little boy. Give it up.  
:- Lu

- + I'm with Lu. Forget the kiddy fantasy. You saw what she did to Shaw, and that was just because she didn't like something he wrote.  
:- Kaywood
- + Hey, I was only asking!  
:- Beetle
- + So what do you think the Swordsworn's chances are? Shaw doesn't seem too optimistic.  
:- Johnson
- + Well, they're 0 for 2 so far, and this looks to be a tougher nut to crack. My money is on the Snakes, probably 2:1 in their favor. I just don't think "Santi" has what it takes.  
:- Kaywood
- + Yay for us! Go Furies!  
:- Shinjo
- + I hardly think that's appropriate, do you? Not after what the Furies tried to do to the HPG here.  
:- Lu
- + He's allowed free speech – and delusions of adequacy.  
:- Storm
- + Storm, play nice.  
:- Kaywood
- + That is nice. You know what I'm like when I'm not being nice!  
:- Storm
- + Hang on a sec, I just realized something . . . is Shaw going to ride into battle with Santiago? He's never done that before, has he?  
:- Johnson
- + He's ridden in one before – back in the League, I think – but never during a battle. This could be interesting.  
:- Kaywood



## Touring the Stars with Bertram Habeas

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06/03/3133

*We began on Terra, millions of years ago. Today, mankind stretches throughout the Milky Way, touching worlds as far from our home as Clan space, more than two thousand light-years distant. Yet who are we, really? What have we become in our relentless push outward and onward? I'm Bertram Habeas, and tonight, we'll find the answers to these and many other fascinating questions together, as we tour the stars!*

### Volume IV: The Draconis Combine Today

**Fact Sheet:** Draconis Combine

**Founding Year:** 2319

**Capital (City, World):** Imperial City, Luthien

**National Symbol:** A green, Asian-style dragon head coiled in a red field

**Location (Terra relative):** Coreward-Spinward Quadrant

**Total (Inhabited) Systems:** 243

**Estimated Population (3130):** 729,000,000,000

**Government:** Autocracy (Japanese feudal stylings)

**Ruler:** Coordinator Vincent Kurita

**Dominant Language(s):** Japanese (official), Arabic, English

**Dominant Religion(s):** Shinto (official), Buddhism, Muslim

**Unit of Currency:** Ryu (1 ryu = 0.94 C-Bills)

New Samarkand, the world where it all began an amazing nine centuries ago, lies beneath the glow of a yellow-white subgiant. On a clear day, the skies overhead are almost turquoise, gradually recovering the azure blue seen by the planet's first colonists, before centuries of rampant industrialization pumped billions of tons of harmful fluorocarbons into the upper atmosphere. Hillside outside the capital city of Yamashiro, birthplace of the first Coordinator of the Draconis Combine, and once the seat of imperial power, are green once more, reclaiming land long marred by the empty shells of forgotten buildings. In the centuries following the relocation of the Combine capital from this place to distant Luthien, this world had become a proverbial "ghost planet," though one with a population just over one billion strong.

In the years after the Jihad, the Combine pieced together many of the worlds shattered by the Word of Blake fanatics, including the capital planet of Luthien. In the interim, Combine rulers returned to their roots on New Samarkand, revitalizing this tired and forgotten world. Even though the seat of power is once more the "Black Pearl" of Luthien, the all-too-brief return to prominence can still be felt and seen on this ancient, almost hallowed world.

The pride it takes to rebuild obliterated cities, on worlds nearly rendered uninhabitable by nuclear bombs and natural disasters, is part and parcel of the hard-working, proud spirit of the Draconis Combine. It is a pride that once had its roots in oppression--a government-sponsored effort to force people into conformity--but what exists today is far more than that.

What makes the people of the Combine so proud is the deep sense of honor and duty that pervades all levels of its society. More than almost any other society in the Inner Sphere, life in the Combine is structured and stratified by a caste system that provides a place even for the most nonconformist citizens. From the highest levels of government, even including the noble House Kurita itself, to the lowest menial laborer, beggar, or thief, all are regarded as an important facet of the greater whole.

At the top of this rigid social order sit the kuge, the nobility, who command and guide the realm in politics and in war. Just below them, the buke (warriors) serve as the Dragon's muscle, both in a military and paramilitary capacity, defending the realm against threats of every kind. The middle classes, including professionals such as merchants, corporate CEOs, manufacturers, and doctors, form an important third tier that in other cultures might be classified as "white collar." Though highly educated and esteemed for their contributions, even these talented individuals are nothing without the henin, or worker caste, whose sweat and skills make life possible.

The fifth caste, the so-called Unproductives, is an equally important part of Combine life, despite its dubious title. This is a caste not only of criminals, but also refugees and immigrants, or higher caste members demoted for some dishonor or subversion. If for no other reason than to elevate themselves to a better caste, Unproductives--such as the infamous Ghost Regiments who blur the distinction between the Unproductive and warrior castes--strive harder for recognition, and their efforts on behalf of the Draconis Combines simply cannot be discounted.

As foreign a concept as having an officially recognized caste that everyone wants to get out of might be to some, one must understand the core values of the Draconis Combine and its people. Duty, honor, patriotism: These common values, ingrained in the neosamurai culture of the Combine, have penetrated every strata of Dragon society so completely that its citizens cannot help but absorb these tenets to some degree. Even today, and even among those cultural groups that resisted efforts to "Japanize" the entire Combine, this sense of duty to the whole forms the basis of the average citizen's self-worth. So that he or she may one day be elevated, an Unproductive may work longer hours, enlist in some form of military or paramilitary service, or possibly even risk life and limb for the benefit of other citizens.

On the streets of New Samarkand, once overrun by yakuza and roving bandits, homes built in the classical Japanese architecture, pristine in bold colors of white and red and almost all uniform in appearance, line streets that are immaculately swept, matching beautifully kept lawns with evenly cut hedges. Every day, just one hour before sunset, a man can be seen hard at work in his stone garden out front of one such house. He is just over 90 years old, and his once-raven hair has long since

grayed and all but disappeared. Age has stooped him low, but he toils every evening nonetheless, a sense of pride filling every stroke of his rake. He is Taro Nusaka, and he helped build this community. Once, he was a member of the Unproductives.

In his native Japanese, Taro smiles as he tells of the day the local Friendly Persuaders--the Combine's colorfully dressed, yet well-armed and trained civilian police force--conscripted him and others in his street gang to the revitalization project. The Dragon was finally calling upon its forgotten sons and daughters. Their chance to serve had come at last. Their reward? A life off the streets, the promise of more work in the future--a return to a civilization they themselves helped to build.

To Taro, those decades of reconstruction spared him a life as some yakuza foot soldier, and spared his fellow citizens on New Samarkand from a life in squalor. Pride, Taro says, was his greatest reward, though he did rise above the ranks of the Unproductives. He found a job in city administration, met a fine woman named Kiria, and settled down in a house his own hands helped build. They had children who have long since grown to contribute in their own way to the common good. Karma was realigned. Where else, Taro asks, can one get such a second chance?

Contrary to popular belief, the Draconis Combine is not an exclusively Japanese warrior society, though the existence of the caste system might lead one to think so. The past efforts to enforce Japanese mores and impose the Dictum Honorium merely established a "state" culture that others coexist alongside. For instance, the Azami, a Muslim society descended from the Middle East and North Africa regions on prespaceflight Terra, have clung to their customs and traditions despite centuries of repression, and have earned their right to identity and a degree of self-governance. Near the Combine's periphery borders, a large Russian populace exists, lending their own unique flavor to the local customs and attitudes. And along the border with the Rasalhague Dominion, the customs of Clan Nova Cat are still observed. This balance of uniformity and diversity is a hallmark of Combine society, bringing together different beliefs and values under a single, guiding influence.

At its heart, the Draconis Combine, like any great and ancient nation, is a study of contrasts, more than the sum of the events that shaped it. Raised by equal parts blood and sweat, and bent to the iron will of the ruling Kurita dynasty through wisdom and war, this realm has attained a unity and strength of purpose that cannot be denied or understated. It is a place where order reigns, hand in hand with honor and power, where even an Unproductive, a gaijin, can contribute to the beauty and grandeur of something truly everlasting. In this way, the Combine's soul is every bit as immortal as the dragon that is its symbol.

In our next four-part series, our tour through the history and cultures of the Inner Sphere will take us to the Wolf Clan Occupation Zone. Please join us as we continue our tour of the stars! I'm Bertram Habeas.

## Touring the Stars with Bertram Habeas

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06/08/3133

*We began on Terra, millions of years ago. Today, mankind stretches throughout the Milky Way, touching worlds as far from our home as Clan space, more than two thousand light-years distant. Yet who are we, really? What have we become in our relentless push outward and onward? I'm Bertram Habeas, and tonight, we'll find the answers to these and many other fascinating questions together, as we tour the stars!*

### Volume V: Kerenskys' Legacy--Rise of the Clans

Tamar is a large, high-gravity world with a thin ozone layer unable to shield it from much of the ultraviolet radiation that constantly bombards its surface. The brutal heat has transformed an entire equatorial continent, Sahara, to desert; the planet's heat and gravity have prevented the rise of any native life more complex than short, gnarled oak trees. People native to Tamar are rugged, often stout and muscular, blushed almost crimson by the solar rays. Visitors, obviously, find this world a challenge to their endurance. With these features in mind, it is little wonder that the Wolf Clan, the self-proclaimed chosen of Kerensky's descendants, have made Tamar the seat of their power in the Inner Sphere. No doubt the Clans, who honor strength and revel in hardship, would use this place to proclaim their dominance.

But before becoming home to the Wolf Clan, Tamar was a provincial capital in the Lyran Commonwealth, a center for trade and industry. The Wolf Clan did not originate here; they originated far beyond the borders of the Inner Sphere. Like all the Clans that arose from the fires of war and betrayal, the origins of the Wolf lie nearly two thousand light-years from Terra, and four centuries in the past.

*Where nature's laws threatened the weary,  
When food, water, and even air itself ran low,  
It took just a command, a word, a smile,  
From the General to light the way.  
He was comfort, stern courage, compassion  
To our sires as he led them from the fires  
That grew and fed on those they left behind.*

--The Remembrance (Clan Wolf), Passage 2, 14:18 - 24

After a 12-year struggle to liberate Terra from the grip of Stefan Amaris, the Usurper who single-handedly destroyed the Cameron dynasty and tore the once-mighty Terran Hegemony asunder in wave after wave of horrible war, General Alexandr Sergeevich Kerensky, Protector of the Star League and Regent of a slain First Lord, could not have imagined a worse fate for humanity's greatest experiment. Over a hundred million lives lost, four hundred million more wounded, and over a billion homeless were the toll for freeing the Hegemony and bringing down Amaris' empire. Even killing the Usurper himself could not extinguish the nuclear fires raging on dozens of worlds, or cleanse the air of others choking beneath lingering clouds of poisonous gas. The SLDF itself was broken; of the 412 BattleMech and infantry divisions and affiliated regiments that went in, only half came out alive--a mere shadow of the international defense force at its peak. The industrial base of the Hegemony, core of the Star League itself, was in shambles, and the interstellar communications grid was in ruin.

In spite of Kerensky's hard-fought victory--or perhaps because of it--the various House Lords, in one of their last demonstrations of solidarity under the aegis of a mortally wounded Star League, ordered General Kerensky, its Protector, to step down. They further ordered the SLDF disbanded. In the three years that followed, Kerensky labored in vain to stitch back together the shattered League, ignoring calls by some of his comrades to depose the House Lords and claim the First Lordship for himself, even after the League officially dissolved in 2781. When House leaders, scrambling to upgrade their own armies against one another, attempted to recruit the few remaining SLDF troops, Kerensky finally gave in to the inevitable.

On 5 November 2784, he issued his single-word order--"Exodus"--to a fleet of over 1,300 JumpShips and more than 400 WarShips, which had steadily gathered over New Samarkand, original capital of the Draconis Combine. The House Kurita leadership, though relieved at the fleet's departure just when an overwhelming assault seemed imminent, nonetheless wondered--as did the leaders of every nation in the Inner Sphere--where they were all bound. The Exodus, planned since February of that year, amassed over seven hundred modern-day line regiments from the former SLDF. Over two million troops and another four million civilian dependents--all loyal to the dream of the Star League and willing to follow its most loyal son, Alexandr Kerensky--vanished into the unknown.

*". . . we have left behind the only homes we have ever known to place the destructive capability of this armada beyond the reach of those who would use it, not for defense, but for conquest. Perhaps, with the might of our 'Mechs and ships out of their reach, the leaders who now grapple with one another will relinquish their dreams of subjugating their neighbors and learn to live in peace with them.*

*"Perhaps, one day, should mankind step back from the brink of the abyss, we, our children, or our children's children will return to once more serve and protect and guide the Star League in mankind's quest for the stars . . ."*

--General Alexandr Kerensky, 2786, recorded by the ISS *Invisible Truth* on 11 January 3060.

Whether General Kerensky truly considered the possibility of one day returning to the Inner Sphere to rebuild the fallen Star League is a matter of considerable debate. Indeed, as his exodus fleet traveled for more than a year in space, eventually landing

on five marginally hospitable planets dubbed the Pentagon Cluster, his words to his followers, often urging them onward, have been interpreted many different ways. His Hidden Hope Doctrine, for example, also known as General Order 137, began by saying "Return to the Inner Sphere is impossible for us," but then ended by saying, "When we return, and return we shall, our shining moral character will be as much our shield as our BattleMechs and fighters." Many have speculated that Kerensky himself didn't know his ultimate goals for the exodus fleet, which settled the five Pentagon worlds and underwent a forced demobilization that thinned the military's ranks for the sake of domestic productivity.

Alas, nobody may ever know what the man whom the Clans call "the Great Father" had intended, for he died shortly after his so-called "Star League in Exile" turned its collective back on him and descended into the same bitter feuding that was even then engulfing all five Successor States. Into this growing torrent of unrest, Nicholas Kerensky, Alexandr's son and chosen successor for command of the pared-down SLDF, rose to command a shaky alliance of loyal troops and civilians.

*From Kerensky's Stars came the eight hundred  
Beneath a banner of Truth and Righteous Light  
To lift up those who had suffered and to smite down  
With fearful vengeance those who had ruled  
In the name of Vanity or Greed.  
The thunder of their BattleMechs' feet, the lightning  
From their weapons, and the blood spilled in their name  
Created the Clan Spirit, the forge upon which  
We have fashioned ourselves to be the weapon  
Of the resurrected Star League,  
Honed to a razor's edge by Trials,  
By the Remembrance, and by the Words  
Of the Great Kerenskys, our sires, our saviors.*

--The Remembrance (Clan Wolf), Passage 98, 24:8 - 20

Although history records Nicholas Kerensky as a visionary, many would-be detractors came to regard him as merely another result of his times. Having grown up on Terra, hiding his identity as Amaris shock troops laid waste to anything connected to the SLDF or the Cameron dynasty, Nicholas saw the very worst side of humanity. In his later years, among his father's exodus fleet, he would witness the depths of human divisiveness as the forcibly downsized military force and a people struggling for identity reclaimed their old loyalties to the Successor States they left behind. As the Pentagon worlds erupted in civil war, and the conflict drained away the last of his father's life, many believe that Nicholas, suddenly thrust into a position of authority over the tattered remnants of his father's loyal troops, simply snapped.

But was it insanity, or a stroke of inspired brilliance that led Nicholas Kerensky, the man the Clans all acknowledge as their Founder, to lead his loyal eight hundred officers and their dependents on a second Exodus? Was it the lingering mental scars of the Amaris years that drove him to create the ritualized, stratified society of the Clans, or was it the well-learned lessons from history? The cause may never be known, but the effects will likely resonate throughout all time.

In the next installment of our four-part series, we will examine the ways of the Clans as Nicholas Kerensky conceived them, as honored by the Wolves today. Please join us as we continue our tour of the stars! I'm Bertram Habeas.

## Entertainment's Finest Flock to Towne for 3133 Golden Sun Awards

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06/10/3133

PORT HOWARD--It almost seemed like the entire population of Towne turned out at Prince John Spaceport to witness the arrival of the Lucky Money, the first of three Monarch-class DropShips that will ferry in over six hundred stars of the music and entertainment industry to the 3133 Golden Sun Awards. Eager onlookers got only a brief glimpse of their favorite celebrities, however, seeing them down the ramps to a fleet of waiting limousines and town cars, which whisked them off to hotels throughout the city, the eager cameras of the paparazzi in hot pursuit.

Security has been tightened throughout the capital city as the Golden Sun Awards, arguably the biggest awards show for the arts and entertainment industry in The Republic, has become the focus for hordes of screaming Towne residents. Although the show was originally planned to take place on nearby Addicks, event organizers admitted that the outbreak of violence on the neighboring world forced them to relocate the show to Towne at the proverbial last minute. The stars, however, don't seem to mind the change in venue, or the increased security that even now forms a virtual blockade around hotels in downtown Port Howard.

"I've been on this world for only, like, half an hour, and already I'm in love with it," said Dawn Huntington, who is up for the Best Female Lead for her role as Baroness Lionna Raines in Supreme Pictures' hit action film, *Burning Sky*. With a wink, she added, "Heck, some of the local troops even seem kind of cute."

"Well, [Addicks] may have been an interesting place," said comedian Daniel Fontaine, whose stand-up chip, *Who's Who*, and *What's That?* recently broke ten billion copies, Republic-wide. "I mean, can you imagine having the Best Actress come up to accept her award in a full flak suit, flanked by a few heavily armed local guards? That could start a new fashion trend!"

The Golden Sun Awards recognize all entertainers in the holofilm, trideo, and music industry, with award categories ranging from best solo artist in music to best producer for holovids. First established in 3095 and hosted by the now-defunct Golden Sun Entertainment Consortium, the annual Awards were originally held almost exclusively on Terra in Prefecture X. But upon the acquisition of GSEC by Bannson Universal, Unlimited in 3125, the Awards have become a traveling show, hosted by planets throughout The Republic. Event organizers say the change has been a positive one, both for the Awards and the people of The Republic.

"Since the Golden Suns went on the interstellar road, we've seen a dramatic increase in ratings," said Golden Sun promoter Andrew Kernackis. "Moreover, the image that the Suns represented only the Terran Prefecture, and were thus untouchable by the common man, has finally begun to wear off. People now have the chance to actually share their celebrities."

Nominees for this year's Golden Sun Awards were selected by a vote of nearly five thousand industry members, including representatives from holovid recording companies, the press, retailers, music-chip producers, disc jockeys, and promoters. The recently established Most Patriotic Selection awards, applicable to music, trideo, and holovid film categories, have brought the total number of Golden Suns that will be presented in the four-hour ceremony to 77. Some critics of the show, however, have suggested that the creation of some awards encourages a "culture of conformity" for the entertainment industry, stifling creativity in the name of recognition.

"I don't think it's really as bad as some people say," commented director/producer Jeffrey Sheridan. "If anything, [the creation of some award categories] gives a wider variety of options for the industry to aspire to, and fewer people go home disappointed."

"I'm personally still pulling for them to establish a 'Most Controversial Award,' because I'm all for that, baby!" said Bill "The Mouth" Mout, lead singer for Untamed Heat, whose latest hit single, "In My Genes," is banned on over 30 worlds in The Republic for its strong anti-Clan lyrics. With such dubious hits as "Tear It All Down" and "Blake Be Praised," Untamed Heat has sold millions of chips and packed hundreds of venues throughout the Inner Sphere, but has yet to win a Golden Sun.

And who's up for this year's coveted Best Actor and Actress Awards? Well, at the moment, Best Actor is a dead heat between Jude Martin, Adrian Delaurel, and Yuno Hu, while Best Actress pits the formidable talents of Lydia Greenwich against Sara Hohenzer and Kyalla Anulia. To see who wins, however, you'll simply have to keep your eyes glued to INN and Towne-Wide Broadcasting next Friday, when the Golden Sun Awards will air live, across The Republic, at 1800 hours, GST.

## Touring the Stars with Bertram Habeas

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06/11/3133

*We began on Terra, millions of years ago. Today, mankind stretches throughout the Milky Way, touching worlds as far from our home as Clan space, more than two thousand light-years distant. Yet who are we, really? What have we become in our relentless push outward and onward? I'm Bertram Habeas, and tonight, we'll find the answers to these and many other fascinating questions together, as we tour the stars!*

### Volume VI: Trials and Glory – Ways of the Wolf Clan

*We will purge our old ideals and ethics; those belong to the corrupt stars of the Inner Sphere, and will not serve as we begin anew. Now, while our minds are open and yearning for new insight, we must remold them and fill them with the truth of our destiny. For we are destined not only to be different from those we left behind, but also better. My father knew this, and saved us from the holocaust of the Inner Sphere. I accept it as truth, and have returned to lead you, the survivors of this most bitter trial.*

--Nicholas Kerensky to his loyalists on Strana Mechty, 2802

Eight hundred loyal officers, their dependents, and thousands of civilians joined Nicholas in their new exile on the "Land of Dreams," leaving behind their former comrades, family, and friends to two decades of bloody, vicious warfare. Nicholas reformed these loyalists, dividing them into 20 Clans, and forbade them to speak of the Inner Sphere or its failed and corrupt cultures. He then established new rules around which each Clan would then form a unique society, built around rigid precepts of honor, equality, and the rule of might.

*Much have speculated as to why these followers would so easily accept such radical changes to their old lives – such as the five-caste system, which rigidly segregated warriors, scientists, merchants, technicians, and laborers into a pseudomilitary hierarchy where the warriors held sole right to govern. Perhaps they were traumatized by the compulsion to leave their lives behind not once, but twice in as many decades. Perhaps they felt for Nicholas the same almost religious reverence for his beliefs and ideals. Perhaps the horrors of warfare erupting even as they departed the Pentagon was the very last they could accept of chaos and bloodshed.*

--Dr. Lorenzo Torres, Professor of History, University of Thorin

Though Nicholas Kerensky declared all castes fundamentally equal--their functions vital to Clan existence--he established the warrior caste as the most powerful of all. Held to exacting standards and enforced by a selective breeding program and a series of grueling tests that began soon after birth, every warrior must earn his or her right to lead. But only the most honored – the Bloodnamed – have a voice and a vote in their Clan's council. But where the concept of a vote among warriors may seem unusually democratic for a strictly regimented society, Nicholas Kerensky added special rules for the ways of the Clans, an ultimate expression of "might makes right" that ritualized combat to decide any matter. Essentially recognizing warfare as mankind's natural state, Kerensky sought to control and focus that aspect of humankind, both to minimize waste and to clearly define the goals for combat.

All growth, advancement, and judgments within and among the Clans are governed by six primary Trials – ritualized battles that Nicholas Kerensky established when he formed the Clans. To outsiders, a Trial is merely an excuse to do battle, but those who know the Clans understand that every battle has meaning and serves to strengthen the whole. When applicable, a Trial is often preceded by a formal bidding, in which the terms of combat are established by the competing parties. In such cases, the right to do battle falls to whoever bids the fewest resources to accomplish the goals of the Trial. Moreover, the right to choose the means and terms of combat – if any – is often declared by the party who issues the challenge, while the venue for the Trial is often declared by the challenged.

The Trial of Grievance is one of the most commonly invoked Trials; it is a legally available resource for civilian and warrior castes alike. Conflicting individuals declare the terms and field of a fair battle between them alone in this Trial. Civilians often settle such disputes by declaring a test of comparable skills over a given amount of time, though intercaste disputes often force the Clan council to get involved. Warriors, however, prefer to resolve such matters by combat, and do physical battle in a Circle of Equals over which one is right and which is wrong. The Circle may not be violated by any outside parties during such a Trial, and the Trial continues until one combatant is killed, disabled, or is forced out of the Circle.

In all such cases, the one left standing in the Circle is declared the winner and the matter is formally considered resolved. Though this Trial may theoretically be fought even using BattleMechs, among the Wolves, such resolutions are considered frivolous – even wasteful – as is a Trial fought to the death, which costs the Clan an otherwise valuable contributor to the society. Thus, most Wolf Clan Trials of Grievance are resolved using hand-to-hand combat.

The Trial of Refusal, used to overturn Clan council decisions either during voting or judgment of warriors accused of some crime, allows individuals or groups on the losing end of a formal decision to challenge the result on the field of battle. In this case, however, the challenger may face overwhelming odds, as the challenged party is allowed to involve the same ratio of forces as the outcome of the vote. The ever-present possibility that a political decision may be challenged in such a fashion has helped keep Clan laws lean over the centuries.

"Attention, Falcon swine! This is Star Colonel Renuit Ward of Clan Wolf! I declare a Trial for the Possession of the Blood heritage of Star Colonel Vanessa Pryde! What forces dare oppose the iron fangs of the Wolves this day?"

Words like these signal the beginning of a Trial of Possession, the single-most common inter-Clan Trial, and one that is even fought between individual warriors in the same Clan. Subject to the standard bidding and challenge rules, this Trial may be fought over any item the warrior or his Clan deems worthy of possessing, from a rival Clan warrior's genetic legacy to an entire planet, and can be waged using any tools of warfare available to both sides. With this Trial and the use of bidding on both sides, would-be wars of conquest have been transformed into quick skirmishes, minimizing waste and settling – however briefly – the ownership of a given resource.

Trials of Position are a frequent occurrence for the warrior caste, and one of the most important. Unlike many Inner Sphere militaries, advancement through the ranks of a Clan is not simply a matter of seniority and politics, but one of martial skill and battle training. In this Trial, warriors must defeat at least one enemy to obtain (or retain in the case of established warriors) a rank in the Clan's fighting arm. The aspirant warrior typically faces up to three warriors at a time, but usually fights each in turn, according to the standard Clan battle rules known as zellbrigen. With each victory, the warrior may ascend another rank, having demonstrated the skills necessary to lead and win.

The Trial of Bloodright is the ultimate Trial for a Clan warrior born of the eugenics program. Centered on the names of the original eight hundred warriors who followed Nicholas Kerensky in his creation of the Clans, each Clan was granted a starting allotment of Bloodnames based on these loyal officers. In honor of their loyalty, only these names have been allowed to continue over the years. Via this breeding program, the genes of an honored, Bloodnamed warrior are used to create another generation of warriors. Some of these names have been lost through Trials of Annihilation and other Clan rites, but of those that remain, only a maximum of 25 warriors in a Clan may lay claim to any given name at any one time. Upon the death of any Bloodnamed warrior (whose legacy will usually go on to the next generation), his or her Bloodname again becomes available, and a new Trial of Bloodright begins.

Fought more like a tournament than a standard Trial, but with the same sense of balance and rules of engagement as a Trial of Grievance, a Bloodright determines the next holder of a Bloodname purely on the basis of the last person standing. These Trials can take days to resolve, and can vary from unarmed combat to BattleMech duels in the course of their resolution. Because the holder of a Bloodname is guaranteed immortality--by contributing to the eugenics program upon his or her death--these Trials are often among the bloodiest fought, even among Clan Wolf.

The last of the known Trials is also the most final of punishments handed down by Clan law: the Trial of Annihilation. Invoked only on the most grievous of offenses to Clan traditions, the Trial of Annihilation suspends even the Clan rules of engagement. Bidding does not exist, as the goal for those invoking such a Trial is the elimination of the offending party and all genetic links to him (or her). Trials of Annihilation are rare, and have been declared on individuals, units, and even entire Clans, though the focus of Annihilation is often limited to warriors only. In the case of civilians who must be annihilated in such a fashion, sterilization will do.

Nicholas Kerensky himself presided over the most famous Trial of Annihilation of all when he ordered Clan Wolverine's Annihilation shortly after the reclamation of the Pentagon Cluster. Though rumors persist to this day that some Wolverines might have survived the bloody war (which they brought upon themselves through the use of nuclear weapons), there are no known survivors of the so-called Not-Named Clan anywhere in human-occupied space.

In part three of our four-part series on Clan Wolf, we'll discuss the Invasion years: how the chosen of Kerensky led the charge that would change the Inner Sphere forever. Please join us as we continue our tour of the stars! I'm Bertram Habeas.

## Prefect Kal Radick: Battling the Firestorm

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06/17/3133

TIKOGRAĐ, TIKONOV—In this time of darkness, when panic has overtaken many worlds, the people of The Republic are looking more toward the soldiers, once looked down upon, to help them through the strife. And where the Prefects have always taken center stage in the machinations of The Republic, their importance is now clearer than ever. It is individuals like Prefect Kal Radick who will lead us through the difficulties ahead and into the peace of the future.

Born into a Clan sibko, Prefect Radick began life as any other Clanner. He was raised in a warrior society and trained as a MechWarrior. He achieved the ultimate goal of a Bloodname at the age of 22 and continued his incredible rise from there. He very quickly rose through the ranks of Clan Wolf, reaching the rank of Galaxy Commander in short order and soon after was appointed Prefect of Prefecture IV.

To some, that appointment would be the crowning achievement of a lifetime, while others would use that as a springboard to even greater position within The Republic of the Sphere. In either case, most would take every opportunity to keep their names in the press and to be seen by the people they pledged to protect.

But not Kal Radick.

Even among Clanners, the art of politics is not unknown. There have been many very famous Clan politicians, especially among Clan Wolf. Kal Radick, however, is not one of those. He is a man devoted to his job--so much so that he has eschewed the political realm almost completely, concentrating instead on defending The Republic.

"He is not your typical military leader," said Exarch Damien Redburn upon Radick's appointment. "He is a great leader and incredibly loyal both to those under him and those he serves. We could not have chosen a better man to take this position."

Or Lord Governor Aaron Sandoval's assessment, proffered just last week. "There are few men in this universe who could do the job that Prefect Radick is doing with such grace and calm. He is a tribute to his upbringing. We are all lucky that we have this man to help us through this darkness."

Radick took the position of Prefect with little ceremony, at his own request. Attended only by the Exarch, Lord Governor Sandoval, and a close circle of advisors and commanders, the ceremony was both short and to the point, consisting of little more than the oath of office and a few brief comments on the part of the new Prefect. Immediately following the ceremony, the Prefect departed on a tour of the prefecture, visiting every single man and woman under his command before settling in a command center on Tigress.

Yet the very nature of The Republic makes it almost impossible for anyone in an office as prominent as Radick's to remain out of the spotlight--a reality the Prefect soon discovered first hand. And though he was provided a large and very competent staff, his opponents soon discovered that he had a tendency to speak his mind, often figuratively putting his foot in his mouth and forcing his public relations staff to run a campaign of almost-constant damage control.

As a result, in the almost three years that Radick has held his position, he has been categorized as an uneven leader by many, not the least of which is Prefect Tara Campbell of neighboring Prefecture III. "His words and actions prove that he is incapable of holding such a high office within The Republic. The Clans may have a long history of honor and duty, but this man's sole duty seems to be to his own goals--goals that do not include the continued existence of The Republic."

Prefect Campbell's comments, of course, refer to the political row that exploded between the two earlier this year, after Campbell publicly suggested that Radick was incapable of carrying out the duties of his office. In true Clan tradition, the Prefect challenged then-Legate Campbell to a Trial of Grievance. Exarch Redburn quickly stepped in to put an end to the bickering in an episode that received play throughout the Inner Sphere. But despite the Exarch's efforts, a battle of wits and wills seemed destined to break out between the two when the blackout descended, mercifully sparing both from the backlash that neither likely could have escaped unscathed.

In the months since the loss of HPG communications, Radick has been extremely busy, making the rounds and meeting often with Lord Governor Sandoval to discuss the continued security of his prefecture. In some ways, the blackout loosened the Prefect's shackles. No longer mere hours from a rebuttal from Campbell or a censure from the Exarch, Radick is free to exhort his soldiers in the ways most familiar to himself--talking of the Star League days and the honor won by reforming a society based on those principles.

Radick is, of course, a well-known proponent of a reformation of the Star League, a dream certainly held by many Clanners. He has also publicly questioned the mysterious origins of Devlin Stone, which has won him far more vocal opponents than his actions as Prefect have won him allies.

But, at least for the time being, his actions seem to be working. The prefecture militias are far calmer than those within other regions of The Republic, and the process of recruiting additional personnel seems to be progressing nicely. Likewise, Radick has ordered an increase in scheduled training cycles, and is determined to make sure his soldiers are prepared for anything that might happen.



The worst has, of course, come to pass now on several worlds, with outsiders armed with BattleMechs and other implements of war invading at least three worlds. The Prefect has relied primarily upon his own Steel Wolves to combat the invaders, with a detachment currently battling for control of the world of Ronel.

Perhaps the most interesting fact of the battles to date, however, is not which worlds have been targeted, but who has targeted them. Twice now the Steel Wolves have come up against warriors pledging themselves to the Swordsworn, a group by all accounts led by Lord Governor Aaron Sandoval. Even more interestingly, both remain close political allies.

"The Lord Governor has assured me that the individuals responsible for the attacks upon Ankaa are rogues and not a part of his personal guard," said the Prefect in a recent interview. "We are both still attempting to determine the exact nature of the conflict on Ronel. There is the distinct possibility that the reported fighting is just a misunderstanding. What is clear to me, however, is the duplicitous nature of businessman Jacob Bannson. Forces claiming loyalty to him have caused trouble that both the Lord Governor and I must now deal with. And make no mistake, we will show no mercy to that surat."

At the same time, the Prefect is confident in the men and women under his command. "They have performed exactly as I expected they would. They have fought with honor against honorless surats who deserve nothing but death. These are the ideals that propelled the Star League to greatness. We must rid ourselves of the corruption and instead exemplify those ideals in the days to come if we are to survive."

### Towne Log

+ As much as I agree with him on many things, this man is psychotic. He's got a fixation on the Star League, and he won't rest until it is reformed or he is dead. Why can't the Clanners get the fact that the idea of the Star League just doesn't work. I don't know how the first one lasted as long as it did. No, I take that back; I do: through the threat of military might. The first Star League worked because the Terran Hegemony had an army that put all others to shame. As soon as Amaris destroyed that, the League didn't have a chance. And that's why that nonsense a century ago didn't last—because the Successor Lords didn't have anything to fear. I just hope Sandoval can keep Radick reigned in. I don't even want to think about what might happen if Radick decides to go and slap Tara Bishop. Or make a drive on Terra. Dreams of being ilKhan are big things with Clanners.

:- PanzerGruppe

+ Kal Radick just confuses me. It's been 80 years since we first encountered the Clans, and I don't think there's anyone who really understands them yet. I've read the reports and all of the studies, and I can't quite figure them out. None of them. Every single one of those Clans is crazy in its own way. They've been here for almost a hundred years and they're all still fixated on Terra and the Kerenskys. They were both psychotics, for God's sake!

:- Goobs86

+ Not all of 'em got a thing for Terra. :-PanzerGruppe

+ So true. The Ravens are an interesting lot, and those two snakes . . . I don't even want to know what's up with them.

:- Bobaloo

+ Heh. Sure was fun to watch what happened with the Blood Spirits, though. Serves 'em right!

:- Kemo

+ Don't get me wrong, here, guys. I don't understand Clan culture, but aren't they what we need? Good warriors? Don't we need them to slap Bannson and the Dragon? I don't much care for their way of leadership, but they do have their uses.

:- TimE

+ Radick has his uses. And, yes, he is what we need. In some respects. He's the kind of Prefect who isn't going to take any [deleted] and is going to lead from the front. The problem is that he is fixated on the Star League. He wants to reform the League, starting right here in Prefecture IV, and it sure looks like his Steel Wolves have been more often the aggressors than the defenders. Notice also where he's pointing his Galaxy; he's been moving further and further coreward. I'm betting he's looking to cross over into Prefecture III to take the shot at Campbell that Exarch Redburn stopped him from taking last year. But on the bright side, he's not exactly what one would call a bright bulb. Governor Sandoval has been handling him pretty well for a couple of years now.

:- CMike

+ You saying that Sandoval's running the show behind the scenes?

:- DarkJaguar

+ No. But what I am saying is that Redburn has pulled Radick's fat out of the fryer numerous times. And there's got to be a reason for that. Where do you think all of Radick's political staff came from? Look at Radick's track record. There's no way in hell he should have been Prefect for so long after opening his mouth like he has. Unless he's had someone powerful, someone with all the right connections, watching his back.

:- CMike

## Touring the Stars with Bertram Habeas

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06/17/3133

*We began on Terra, millions of years ago. Today, mankind stretches throughout the Milky Way, touching worlds as far from our home as Clan space, more than two thousand light-years distant. Yet who are we, really? What have we become in our relentless push outward and onward? I'm Bertram Habeas, and tonight we'll find the answers to these and many other fascinating questions together, as we tour the stars!*

### Volume VII: Kerensky's Chosen – The Rise of the Wolf Clan

*"We will not 'do what we must to win.' We will simply do what we must."*

--Nicholas Kerensky, 6 February 2802

Nicholas Kerensky's vision for a bold new society created what has evolved into the modern Clans. He accomplished this by breaking the bonds of family and patriotism as we know them and reassembling them into a new culture. The Clans are driven by harsh laws and rigid guidelines, dominated by warriors who settle disputes both minor and grand through ritual combat – often to the death. The very heart of Clan society boils down to that simplest principle of evolution: survival of the fittest. Though stressing an almost totalitarian unity, Kerensky still went on to separate his Clans into 20 factions. He even encouraged each to battle one another for control of the limited resources in Clan space, a tiny region of some 40 stars a full thousand light-years beyond the Inner Sphere. While to some, such a concept seems bizarre at the very least, these divisions within unity further encouraged the Clans to evolve and grow stronger, continuously testing their strength against their only opponents: one another.

Sharpened by almost 20 years of training, the Clans returned to reclaim the Pentagon worlds they had left behind with Kerensky's Second Exodus. Operation Klondike, as it was called, assigned four Clans to each world, to crush the warlords they left behind and establish Clan domination with ruthless efficiency. The bitter fighting would last almost a year before the final resistance ended, and would be followed by many more months of brutal, humiliating punishments on the surviving warlords captured during the operation. The shock of millions dead at the hands of the warlords and the public punishments by the Clan "liberators" ultimately helped bring war-weary populations into the Clans' fold, but it would not be long before the Clans faced their ultimate tests.

It was in this period, shortly after the reclamation of the Pentagon, that ilKhan Nicholas Kerensky bestowed upon the Wolf Clan the ultimate honor: He and his wife joined with the Clan, allowing the Wolves alone control of the Founder's bloodline thenceforth. The momentous occasion was cause for celebration for the Wolves, but left all the other Clans – particularly Clan Jade Falcon – with the bitter taste of jealousy. But the feud between the Falcons and Wolves that would one day result in a great conflict of its own would take a backseat to one of the most defining moments for not only Clan Wolf, but also for all Clans.

*"Those who break faith with the Unity shall go down into darkness."*

--ilKhan Nicholas Kerensky, 11 October 2823

*These days it's common practice, I think, to ascribe a sinister intent to [Nicholas Kerensky] for declaring the Wolverines worthy of annihilation, but as the old saying goes, "Judge not, lest ye be judged." Nicholas had already seen the worst of mankind on Terra, during the first Exodus, and through the Pentagon Civil Wars. His father, a guiding light for the Star League - in-Exile, was dead, and Nicholas had to lead a second Exodus and forge a completely new society in the hope of averting more such holocausts. When the Wolverines started to break ranks – their Khan going so far as to declare Kerensky a megalomaniac in front of the other Khans – well, he saw the storms of fate for what they were. A mushroom cloud later and there had to be no doubt in his mind what had to happen next if he were to avoid another age of no-holds-barred fighting.*

*So, coming at it from that point of view, I would ask anyone what their own heroes would do. What would Victor Steiner-Davion have done? Or Theodore Kurita? Or even Devlin Stone?*

--Dr. Lanz Rettig, PhD., Professor of Inner Sphere History, University of Academia, Kessel

Even as the Wolves led the campaign to annihilate the Wolverines for the sake of all Clan-kind, it became evident that the cracks in Nicholas' unity were forming along inter-Clan lines. A rivalry between the Widowmaker Clan and the Wolves began even as the two battled for the right to annihilate the Wolverines. The Ghost Bears, slighted at being overlooked for the honor of the kill, allegedly allowed some Wolverines to escape, creating a rift that even today remains unhealed between them.

Shortly after the Wolverines were exterminated, their civilian survivors sterilized, and their names forever eliminated from the Clan eugenics program, a Trial fought between the Wolf and the Widowmaker Clans culminated in the unexpected death of ilKhan Nicholas Kerensky himself in 2834. The death so shocked the Wolves that the Clan flew into a near-insane rage and triggered an inter-Clan war directed solely against the Widowmakers. Only a handful of the Wolves' rivals lived to be absorbed into the triumphant Wolf Clan. Yet for all the death and destruction, and despite the loss of their founding father, the fall of the Widowmakers heralded a century of prosperity – if not true peace – for the Clans.

*The Golden Century is what truly defined the Clans. Not only did they survive the death of their visionary Founder, but the 18 surviving Clans also even prospered, their individual strengths and influences developing each to their own gifts. Some,*

*like the Jade Falcons and the Sea Foxes, became prominent merchant powers. Others, like the Smoke Jaguars, honed their fighting capabilities. Still others explored aspects of their social unity, like the Ghost Bear and Hell's Horses Clans. Through it all, of course, were the innovations that affected them all: the refining of the eugenics program, the first Elementals (and Elemental Armor), and advanced BattleMechs that rendered even the Star League - era machines then dying out in the Inner Sphere completely obsolete.*

*But I think what most people tend to forget is that gold always tarnishes in the end . . . .*

--Dr. Lanz Rettig, PhD., Professor of Inner Sphere History, University of Academia, Kessel

As the Clans prospered, internal pressures began to rise among their growing populations. Trials gave way to feuds as the Clans grew further apart. By the closing years of the Golden Century, these pressures took on a strange new form as Clansmen – warrior and civilian alike – turned longing eyes back toward the Inner Sphere. Many Clans gradually began to believe that the Successor States teemed with bountiful worlds now in the hands of “barbarians.” As decades passed, some grew to advocate a return to those worlds, to conquer and “save” the Inner Sphere from itself.

For the Wolves, however, any return to the Inner Sphere, per their interpretation of Kerensky’s Hidden Hope Doctrine, would be for the express purpose of guiding it after centuries of Succession Wars, or to protect the Inner Sphere from an external threat that was never named. This political viewpoint formed the heart of the Warden philosophy, and colored the debates that raged in the Clan Grand Council throughout the 30th century and the early half of the 31st century, but it was a debate the Wolves, and other Warden Clans, were eventually destined to lose.

In 3048, spurred by a chance encounter with a ComStar explorer ship in Clan space, the Crusaders, championed by the Jade Falcons and the Smoke Jaguars – both rivals of the staunchly Warden Wolves – won their fateful vote to launch Operation Revival: the invasion of the Inner Sphere. Ostensibly in honor of the Founders’ legacy within their Clan – but more, some say, as a punishment for their political views – the Wolves were given a place in the Invasion force. By 3049, the Wolves spearheaded a drive straight through the heart of the Free Rasalhague Republic, flanked by six other Crusader Clans who had to fight for their right to take part (Diamond Shark, Ghost Bear, Jade Falcon, Nova Cat, Smoke Jaguar, and Steel Viper). Despite their Warden leanings, the Wolves were ferocious in battle, making gains the other invading Clans could only dream of, until just three years later they claimed an occupation zone that included over 80 inhabited systems, forever changing the face of the Inner Sphere.

In part four of our four-part series on this remarkable warrior society, we will look at the Wolves today in an age of unprecedented peace and prosperity. Please join us as we continue our tour of the stars! I’m Bertram Habeas.

## Touring the Stars with Bertram Habeas

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06/25/3133

*We began on Terra, millions of years ago. Today, mankind stretches throughout the Milky Way, touching worlds as far from our home as Clan space, more than two thousand light-years distant. Yet who are we, really? What have we become in our relentless push outward and onward? I'm Bertram Habeas, and tonight we'll find the answers to these and many other fascinating questions together, as we tour the stars!*

### Volume VIII: Clan Wolf Today

**Fact Sheet:** Clan Wolf Occupation Zone

**Founding Year:** 3050

**Capital (City, World):** Vladivostok, Tamar

**National Symbol:** A brown wolf's head against a tan rectangular bar with six gold, five-pointed stars

**Location (Terra relative):** Coreward, between the Lyran Commonwealth and the Rasalhague Dominion

**Total (Inhabited) Systems:** 56

**Estimated Population (3130):** 467,000,000

**Government:** Clan (caste-driven, warrior-dominant hierarchy)

**Ruler:** Khan Seth Ward

**Dominant Language(s):** English (official), Russian, German, Swedenese

**Dominant Religion(s):** None

**Unit of Currency:** Kerensky (1 kerensky = 5.13 C-Bills)

*The Lyran standard still flutters highest over Old Connaught, capital of Arc-Royal, a mere three jumps from the occupation zone claimed by Clan Jade Falcon. But in front of the office of the Grand Duke, hereditary ruler of the planet since the close of the Fourth Succession War, the mailed fist of House Steiner is flanked by two others. On the left, the Arc-Royal planetary flag, crimson and black with a stylized hound's head in its center, reflects this planet's link to the famous Kell Hounds mercenary regiments who still call this planet home. On the right, just slightly lower than both, flies the brown wolf's head standard of Clan Wolf, set against the same black-and-red backdrop.*

*This is the flag of the Wolf Clan - in-Exile, often referred to as the lost brethren of the Wolf Clan.*

Though broken away from the Wolf Clan since 3057, and despite their symbiotic relationship with the Kell Hounds who also claim this world as their home, the Exiled Wolves maintain the same Clan traditions and culture. The warrior caste still claims sole governing rights over their enclaves. The Trials are still waged between fellow warriors. And the eugenics program still selectively breeds hundred-strong companies of troops. Only their politics, colored by the conflict that formed them and the decades since among the "Spheroids," differ from those of their estranged kin.

The fracturing of the Wolf Clan was the inevitable result of the events that brought the Wolves into the Clan invasion to begin with. Having long championed the Warden stance, believing the Inner Sphere something to be protected and nurtured, rather than conquered and ruled, the Wolves were forced to take part as a final punishment by the Crusader Clans who craved new opportunities in the Inner Sphere. Wedged between other invading Clans, the Wolves were not expected to succeed as spectacularly as they did, and in so doing, they drew only more ire from the other invaders.

In 3051, as part of perhaps another failed effort to force the Wolves into compliance, the Clans voted Ulric Kerensky, Khan of the Wolf Clan, to lead the invasion after ilKhan Leo Showers died at Radstadt. Rather than contain the Wolves, however, Ulric's position made it possible to negotiate for a potential halt in the invasion: by fighting a proxy battle for Terra – the Clans' stated objective – against ComStar's military. Each invading Clan fought for the honor of seizing Terra in what amounted to the largest Trial of Possession ever waged, but after a 10-day battle, only the Wolves could declare a complete victory, not just in the field of battle, but also on the political battleground as well. With the majority of the invading Clans defeated, the invasion was stalled under a new 15-year truce.

*What is 15 years? An eye blink, perhaps? To those of the Inner Sphere, perhaps it was. Or more like a loud clock, ticking down the days to Armageddon it made the leaders of the Successor States more nervous with every passing day. House Kurita obsessed about it, as did Victor Steiner-Davion, the man who would one day lead the final battles of the Clan War on Strana Mechty. House Steiner feared it, and all scrambled to prepare for the inevitable sounding of those bells of fate.*

*But to the Clans, who live in a constant life of battle, 15 years might as well have been eternity. In this eternity, they could hear their enemies laughing, knew the disgrace of having failed, and found themselves surrounded by barbarians, forbidden to strike further toward coveted Terra. In 15 years, almost two full generations of trueborn warriors would pass for the Clans, unable to test themselves in the crucible of war, while the industrial might of the Inner Sphere struggled to match Clan technology. Even the historically Warden Wolves began to chafe under this forced state of peace, and soon found more and more of their ranks embracing the Crusader ideals.*

*Is it any wonder they never made it even a third of the way through truce time before deciding to spill blood again?*

--Dr. Lorenzo Torres, PhD., Professor of History, University of Thorin

In 3057, Ulric Kerensky was branded a traitor to the Clans, charged with genocide by submitting to the Truce of Tukayyid to begin with. In an effort to discredit him, force the election of a Crusader ilKhan, and repudiate the Truce, the Jade Falcon Khans

stood as his accusers, and nearly celebrated when the Council voted in their favor. Kerensky countered with a Trial of Refusal, however, naming his entire Clan – Clan Wolf – to his defense.

The resulting Refusal War pitted the Falcons and the Wolves against each other in a brutal campaign that touched nearly a dozen worlds. The war decimated both Clans and left the Wolves sundered along Crusader and Warden lines. The Warden Wolves, under command of Khan Phelan Kell, an Inner Sphere mercenary captured and converted by the Clans early in the Invasion, fled into the Inner Sphere to eventually settle on Arc-Royal, while the Crusaders, under the rule of Khan Vlad Ward, declared them abjured and rebuilt his Clan with an eye toward glorious conquests.

Close communication – even limited cooperation – continued between the fractured halves of the Wolf Clan, particularly through the chaos of the Word of Blake Jihad, when the Clan and Inner Sphere Houses united to face a common foe. Yet a long-hoped-for reconciliation between the “original” Wolves and those in Exile never materialized. Today, there are still two Wolf Clans, the “original” Clan, which claims an occupation zone centered on Tamar, and the Wolves-in-Exile, whose scattered enclaves dot Arc-Royal and other nearby planets.

But what is the modern Wolf, exiled and otherwise? What sets them apart from the average Clans, or are they the standard by which all Clans are judged? Well, as with any culture alive in the Inner Sphere today, there can be no easy answer to those questions.

Perhaps it is merely sufficient to say that the Wolves are what their beliefs and their history have made them. Guided by the philosophies of Nicholas Kerensky, and sworn today to carry on his legacy through times even the Founder himself could never have imagined, they have much to live up to.

Through it all, both Wolf Clans remain true to their founding ideals. The warriors still rule, governing by the rights of the strong, and protecting their own people, right down to the lowliest Laborer, from all who would threaten their sovereignty. Progressive by Clan standards, they respect ability far more than birth status, and even those of the “original” Wolf Clan will recognize the contributions of a freeborn as equal to those of the “trues” (though chances are an Exiled Wolf freeborn will rise in status somewhat faster).

For the warriors who rule, the Bloodname remains the greatest treasure one could wish for, guaranteeing the immortality of the eugenics program. Honor, prized almost as greatly, helps keep them on Kerensky’s path. In battle, the Wolves resolve conflicts and Trials with the same frugality endorsed by the Founder.

Meanwhile, those of the civilian castes do what they do best, serving the Clan as needed, building the cities, starships, and BattleMechs that make their Clan stronger. It is a Spartan culture for a Spartan people, an almost family-like unity bred to survive in the face of certain chaos; everyone contributes, lest the entire machine break down around them. In this, the Wolves are the unity that Kerensky must have sought so many centuries ago, after the horrors of so many wars.

In our next four-part series, our tour through history and cultures of the Inner Sphere will take us to the Federated Suns. Please join us as we continue our tour of the stars! I’m Bertram Habeas.

## Rerani Coast, Circle Bay Favorites Among Developers, Tourists

07/02/3133

PORT HOWARD--Even as the war drums beat on, the peaceful world of Towne continues to grow into its own as a tourism hot spot, with the Rerani Coast and Circle Bay ranking among the favorites for both property developers and visitors. The renewed vitality of the tourism trade mirrors that of the local defense industry, which has taken off since the collapse of the HPG network this past August. Industry insiders, however, say that people should not be surprised that tourism on Towne is rising along with defense.

"Since the HPG network went down, we've seen nearly every world within a jump of Towne invaded or raided by hostile factions and renegades," explained Gladys Donnelly, spokesperson for Aquilonia Futures Development (AFD). "Meanwhile, Towne has remained largely untouched, save for a few isolated incidents that never posed a direct threat to its citizens. This has fueled defense spending in anticipation of a possible attack, but has also left our world unblemished by the recent fighting, making it a veritable island of peace amid a swirl of chaos."

Donnelly's assertion was made at the groundbreaking ceremony for Circle Bay's latest entertainment investment, a sprawling hotel and resort casino complex managed by the Port Howard - based realtor and Towne-Wide Entertainment. The complex, which begins construction next week, is expected to go on line in fewer than four months, just in time for the summer boom. AFD predicts the complex will create close to one thousand new jobs for area residents, and draw in over 50 million C-Bills in annual revenues.

At the same time, officials on the Rerani Coast, a popular spot for off-world travelers thanks to its native beauty and historic sights, is also experiencing a wave of new development to accommodate the increase in tourism; Towne-Wide Entertainment and the recently incorporated Cabo Industries are opening two new beachfront hotels. Still, not everyone is thrilled with the boom in tourism-based development. The Circle Bay groundbreaking ceremony, in fact, was marred by protesting students from the University of Towne, who proclaimed that the explosion of tourism will threaten Towne's ecology and lead to a dramatic increase in crime.

"Gambling casinos run by the mob, hotels that are little more than high-priced brothels with a view--that is the kind of thing we'll be seeing in just a few short years," proclaimed Victor Ashanti, a UT student. "By attracting tourists with more entertainment industry and less substance, Towne won't only lose its quiet and respectable feel, it'll also become a den for the worst parasites humanity has to offer!"

Already, Towne's burgeoning tourism industry has seen a sharp increase since the HPG blackout, estimated at nearly three times last year's figures. This marks the biggest-ever increase in visitors since Devlin Stone's resettlement directives. Though not quite at the five hundred percent level it was in January, nobody in the travel and hospitality industries seems to be complaining.

Among the hottest spots are the beaches of the Rerani Coast in the Turan province, historical Uthan Hel in the same region, and the ultramodern ocean-front resorts of Circle Bay, though even the tropical getaways of the Stygia province have seen a dramatic increase in visitors. With Towne also named host for this year's Golden Sun Entertainment Awards, travel agents say the surge in tourism may rise even higher still.

"Oh, we've certainly not seen the crest of this thing yet," said Kim Kanjori, a travel agent from nearby Helen. "With the Golden Sun Awards, I'd lay money on Towne becoming the place to be for years to come."

### Towne Log

+ Wow! This planet's becoming an armed camp \*and\* a tourism hot spot all in one!  
:- HayBS

Exactly right. Mess with the tourist trade and you'll get your head blown off!!  
:- Thawts1P

+ Seriously, though. Doesn't any of this seem weird to anybody else? We're attracting visitors here at the same rate we're building bombs. I mean, what are we? The next Solaris VII?  
:- HayBS

Well, nobody's announced setting up a 'Mech arena as far as I know, HBS. But if you ask me, a hoverblitz track might be really awesome. I know some great valleys in Ghesrt that could use the tourists.  
:- BlinkerLeft

+ You guys freaking nuts? I'm with the kids from UT: The closer we get to looking like Solaris, the closer we get to \*being\* like Solaris! With the HPGs down, it gets even worse, because you'll never know when the next Andre F. LaCope will waltz in and declare himself king! And I, for one, am scared enough about seeing 'Mechs come charging down the street without having to worry about my life being run by the mob.  
:- Ludikrust

Man, Ludicrous! Take a pill and calm down, will you? Jeez! Why is it lately that everyone on this board talks like it's the end of the world whenever INN reports on business booming somewhere? I mean, isn't this all supposed to be a good thing?  
:- Thawts1P

+ It all comes down to this, guys. One way or another, it seems, people are going to come to our quiet mountain planet. The question is, with a heavy defense industry and tourism trade, what are we going to be? Paradise or hell? Will our next wave of visitors be the cream of society or our latest conquerors?  
:- LevEOsa

Sigh! So much for intelligent conversation! I'm outta here!"  
:- Thawts1P

## Touring the Stars with Bertram Habeas

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07/02/3133

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### Volume IX: Rising Sun – The Dawn of the Federated Suns

The Federated Suns is a self-described bastion of freedom amid a universe of despots, and many of its citizens point to the Six Liberties of their national Constitution as proof of its egalitarian ideals. Critics, however, point to the ranks of armed 'Mech forces on FedSuns' borders, or the striking inequity between grand palaces on key industrial worlds and the impoverished masses who eke out a living on other, more far-flung planets. Both of these are faces of House Davion's Federated Suns, but does either face present the whole truth, or set this realm apart as better or worse than its neighbors? Like all such questions, of course, there can be no definitive yes-or-no answers. So instead we explore the history and the culture of today's Federated Suns. Where did it all begin? What compelled the formation of this realm from the chaos of the early 24th century to become the 434-world power it is today? Like all tales of great nations, the story of the Federated Suns is rooted in war and politics.

*What is interesting to note is that the Grain Rebellion itself was an interesting repetition of ancient Terran history, one that even led to the formation of a democratic state that eventually attained global prominence, just as the FedSuns itself eventually would do on an interstellar scale. A collection of angry locals – most of them farmers – raided the local spaceport, where their military-seized produce had been recently gathered for off-world shipment. They then sabotaged the assembled fleet of DropShips, essentially spoiling the efforts by Governor-General [Emil] Varnay to keep New Avalon in line.*

*In fact, short of dressing up like local bandit raiders and calling the whole affair the "New Avalon Grain Party," one might be hard pressed to come up with a more obvious link to the historical event that once signified the same fateful rallying cry for colonial independence on ancient Terra.*

--Dr. Byron Wolfe, PhD., Here We Go Again, Republican Publications, 3126

While the signing of the Crucis Pact in 2317 was the official formation of the Federated Suns, it was the New Avalon Grain Rebellion 80 years earlier, when the people of New Avalon said "no more" to Terran Alliance work quotas, that signified the birth of this nation. Sweeping aside the heavy-handed military governorship of the Alliance's strongman, Emil Varnay, the people of New Avalon first tried to rebuild their world in its newfound independence under a democratic rule, much the same way the former European colonists on North America did upon their own successful bid for liberty.

But where the North Americans would one day create a political, industrial, and military powerhouse from those seeds of a representative democracy, the "true democracy" implemented on New Avalon began to fail within its first decade. A handful of local industrialists quickly gained wealth, prestige, and their own private armies, and turned on one another as they jockeyed for planetary control. In their efforts to avoid the tyranny of oppressive rulers, the people of New Avalon soon found themselves ruled by the tyranny of chaos itself.

It was not until the cooperation of militia colonels Adam Davion and Nathan DuVall, who launched a seven-year campaign against the other feuding families on New Avalon, that peace and stability would return to this world, along with a neofeudal system to replace the failed experiment in "true democracy." The war-weary population readily accepted this change to an oligarchy for the stability and security it promised. But such security lasted only until rumors of a burgeoning Terran Hegemony reached New Avalon.

*It's striking to note that what brought New Avalon to such a position of prominence was the same anti-Terran concerns that led to the creation of the Draconis Combine, its greatest historical enemy. Lucien Davion, eldest son of Colonel [Adam] Davion, and successor to Prime Minister [Nathan] DuVall of New Avalon, perceived the rising Terran Hegemony as a threat to his world's sovereignty. Though many historians have called him a dreamer, Lucien was probably more pragmatic than most of his fellow New Avalonians, who tended toward isolationism. Fear of a new Terran domination and the need for a defensive alliance prompted him to devise and pitch his Crucis Pact to other world rulers.*

*Like Shiro Kurita did around the same time, Lucien spent a lot of time gathering political support for a local confederation of mutual defense. Unlike Kurita, however, Lucien stressed politics far more than military force; if a planetary ruler wanted no part of his deal, then he or she was on his or her own – theoretically speaking. This fair but pragmatic diplomatic approach won him a great deal of respect, and even got him elected President of the Federated Suns when that 20-world alliance formed officially in 2317.*

*But would it have worked out that way had there been no Terran boogeyman to rally against?*

--Dr. Lanz Rettig, PhD., Professor of Inner Sphere History, University of Academia, Kessel

Though the Crucis Pact theoretically granted the Federated Suns limited central authority to create an alliance-wide defense force, what existed at the end of Lucien Davion's reign was little more than an ad-hoc collection of local militias. Disorganized and ineffective, these forces were constantly mired in skirmishes on the Capellan frontier. Charles Davion, Lucien's youngest brother and successor to the dual titles of New Avalon Prime Minister and FedSuns President, addressed this problem by forming



the Federated Peacekeeping Force (FPF). This new standing army, loyal to the alliance as a whole rather than any individual world, became the core of the modern Federated Suns army. Henceforth, military strength would become a signature of House Davion's political power and resolve.

*The prominence of the military in the Federated Suns is a reflection of the ideals espoused by the ruling House Davion line since their original ascent in the 2300s. Even Lucien Davion, the dreamer and politician, hailed from a military background and resorted to the use of force to further his political aims. Though hardly as belligerent and eager to conquer as the Kuritas, the Davions were no less militaristic than their coreward counterparts. Indeed, their belief in military service as a prerequisite to political leadership – spelled out in the FedSuns Constitution – clearly demonstrates the value placed on the business of war.*

*Shortly after Charles Davion's death, his successor, Reynard Davion, would use the FPF in the realm's first true stab (but certainly not its last) at expansion through conquest, flexing the realm's military muscle against the neighboring Capellan states.*

*If the FedSuns' citizenry opposed the military adventurism of its rulers, however, few apparently felt the need to say so. With the clout of the FPF behind them, every Davion to become ruler of the realm was seen as a war hero, and through their military background they grew a powerful political base that would ensure Davion rule from then onward.*

--Dr. Lorenzo Torres, PhD., Professor of History, University of Thorin

By the time of Reynard Davion's death in 2371, the Federated Suns was completely dominated by the Davion family, who enjoyed the support of the military and no small degree of public opinion to effectively create the dynasty that even now continues to rule that nation. In the wake of Reynard's rule, however, successive Davion Presidents gradually drove the realm into a destructive, downward cycle. Some, such as Reynard's son, Etien Davion, proved mad or ineffective, while others, like Edward Davion, leaned toward the very despotism the realm was said to stand against.

The ascent of Simon Davion – ironically after willingly submitting to a trial for assassinating his cousin Edward – saved the Federated Suns from its decline toward corruption and collapse. Under Simon Davion, the Federated Suns was reorganized politically. The last vestiges of the Federated Suns' semidemocratic government hierarchy were swept aside in favor of an interlocking system of nobility – including several government leaders newly elevated to nobility – that would prevent future abuses of power. The March Lordships were created, establishing a secondary tier of national leadership that deemphasized Simon's personal rule over the Suns, but his fair-handed approach to this political reorganization still won him the title of First Prince, replacing the office of the President once and for all in 2418.

In part two of this series on the Federated Suns, we'll continue our exploration of the Davion realm. Please join us as we continue our tour of the stars! I'm Bertram Habeas.

## Arms Free Society Rises Again on Procyon

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07/07/3133

GUILDED HALLS, PROCYON (PREFECTURE X)—Most people believe that Arms Free, the peace group that rose amid the turmoil of the late 3080s, is only a footnote in the history books, but to the people of Procyon, history has once more come to life. Announcing the rebirth of Arms Free with a demonstration march in the capital city of Guided Halls, the Reverend Antoine Bellarius, grandson of original Arms Free founder, Kenneth Ballarius, reactivated the organization to speak out against what he calls “the death of paradise.”

“Dark times are once more upon us, and our leaders have given in to fear,” Ballarius told his followers from the steps of Procyon’s Parliament. “From that same fear, they’ve promised--they’ve warned--that they will do ‘whatever it takes’ to secure peace in our time! But when we look around, all we see is war! All we see is death! Is this the Republic our founders wanted? Is this the ‘peace in our time’ we have been promised?”

The original Arms Free disbanded after the end of the infamous Relocation Riots, which broke out on several worlds in reaction to military enforcement of Stone’s cultural-mixing policies in the newly forming Republic of the Sphere. The group’s call to end the use of military force against the people in order to assert governmental authority is partially credited with Devlin Stone’s decision to declare a moratorium on the use of such force in the mid 3090s. In the interim, Arms Free was perhaps the most outspoken proponent of the first Exarch, but also his most ardent detractor.

“Devlin Stone himself knew that using an army to enforce the government’s will on its own people is an ultimately self-defeating effort,” said Dr. Gershwin Vassilay, a 31st-century history professor at the University of Procyon - Guided Halls. “And yet he was forced to rely on that very technique to accomplish his radical changes in society. The original peace groups, such as Arms Free, didn’t know what to make of that apparent duplicity, alternately lauding and decrying his efforts.”

The demonstrations on Procyon, which is not actually gripped with any political or military upheaval at this time, has drawn a storm of criticism from Procyon government officials, who believe the reborn Arms Free is attempting to create a crisis where none exists. Ballarius, however, has offered his own explanation for why he and his followers chose to deliver their message to Procyon first, citing the brief reign of terror by Alisendar Gyn, who massacred many of the world’s intellectuals and political leaders after FedCom dissolved in 3057.

“Millions died on this world before the last age of war at the hands of a madman bent on using arms to impose his will on the people,” Ballarius declared. “Let our word therefore rise up from here, until the sacrifice of innocents for the sake of tyranny never again is made!”

## Touring the Stars with Bertram Habeas

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07/09/3133

*We began on Terra, millions of years ago. Today, mankind stretches throughout the Milky Way, touching worlds as far from our home as Clan space, more than two thousand light-years distant. Yet who are we, really? What have we become in our relentless push outward and onward? I'm Bertram Habeas, and tonight we'll find the answers to these and many other fascinating questions together, as we tour the stars!*

### Volume X: Manifest Destiny

New Avalon City, capital of New Avalon and the Federated Suns today, fills an area roughly six hundred square kilometers, and is surrounded by a three-river crisscross made possible by diverting the flows of the Albion, Rostock, and Burbank rivers to create what the locals affectionately call the New Isle of Avalon. The geography is no accident; it was a deliberately engineered effort to recreate a city—Avalon City—whose remains lie just 80 kilometers farther south, a ghost city of ruins, blast craters, and debris 50 kilometers in diameter. It stands as a silent memorial to the horrors of the Word of Blake Jihad.

Beneath an aqua-blue sky and lit by a small yellow sun, New Avalon City sprawls amid a collection of grand towers and the palatial estate of the Davion family—a dazzling modern castle as formidable as it is beautiful. Surrounding the city, beginning as near as the opposite shores of the Albion and Burbank rivers, the fertile plains of Albion give rise to massive agro-plexes, a rural landscape that contrasts sharply with the urban sprawl just one bridge-length away.

The Six Liberties of the Federated Suns' Constitution covers both the hard-working farmers who toil the fields of the agro-plexes and the First Prince, who resides in the castle at the heart of the city, with equal force, despite the presence of an aristocratic governing order. These rights – to personal liberty, fair treatment, privacy, ownership of property and weapons, and participation in planetary government – serve to protect the people and worlds of the Federated Suns from the excesses of a true dictatorship. These liberties imbue the people of the Federated Suns with a sense of pride and enthusiasm not often found in other realms, but has at times instilled equal – or even excessive – levels of arrogance and self-righteousness.

*For too many in the Federated Suns, pride in their democratic traditions easily turns to arrogance. The average citizen sees his homeland as the only truly free realm in human space and therefore superior to all others. Some take this righteousness a step further, believing themselves duty-bound to spread the Federated Suns' enlightened ways by any means necessary. They sincerely believe that, given a choice, any sane human being would live exactly as they do. When confronted with entire interstellar nations whose people live differently, they tend to either pity them as ignorant or despise them for intentionally rejecting a "better" way of life. Such attitudes bolster the promilitary mindset so prevalent in Federated Suns society, turning the frequently ugly business of war into an expression of manifest destiny . . . .*

--Anastasia Marcus, PhD., *On Setting Suns*, ComStar Press, 3064

The institutions that maintain fairness and help protect these fundamental rights date back to the original signing of the Crucis Pact. But as the realm grew more and more aristocratic, successive rulers tried to reign in the power of the nobility they themselves spawned. The 25th century, for example, saw the reign of Simon Davion, who assassinated his own despotic cousin, then threw himself on the mercy of the Suns' High Court in the name of controlling the excesses of the government. All but acquitted for his crime, Simon Davion established an interlocking checks-and-balances web of new nobility during his rule, while simultaneously dismantling the less-feudal government titles, including that of President. Power was decentralized, with five March Lords created to maintain a balance of power so that, in theory, no single Lord could claim command over the entire state—until the crisis of the Davion Civil War, that is.

*The Davion Civil War was a huge setback for the egalitarian system in the Federated Suns, and highlighted once again what's probably the feudal system's greatest weakness, just as the Amaris Coup would prove so aptly years later.*

*In the hope of ensuring that no single ruler stood above all others, the Davions planned to install five Regents, including two March Lords, to rule while young Alexander Davion grew up. Of course, by the time he had all but done so, some of these Regents grew ambitious enough to want to remain in power.*

*The details surrounding the kidnapping of the First Prince by two of his own Regents have proven bedeviling enough to fill a major holodrama or five on the matter. Living at first in captivity, then in hiding as his Regents fought for dominance, Alexander himself was the only person who apparently could bring an end to the situation—but only after more than 10 years of fighting had reduced the realm and its military to shambles.*

*Given the outcome of the war, Alexander can thus hardly be faulted for reorganizing the army, making military service for the First Prince mandatory, and curtailing the powers of the High Council and March Lords. Having seen for himself the horrors of ambition, it became clear to Alexander that there was indeed such a thing as **too much** power-sharing.*

--Arthur Luvonne, *The Long, Dirty History of the Federated Suns*, Commonwealth Press, 3100

The lessons that Alexander Davion learned from the Davion Civil War continue to have repercussions. Firstly, the powers of the March Lords and the High Council were redefined, placing more authority in the hands of the First Prince and effectively demoting all other nobles to emphasize their position in the hierarchy. Secondly, the FPF was reorganized and rechristened the Armed Forces of the Federated Suns (AFFS) to emphasize its loyalties to the entire realm, rather than to any March Lord. And finally, the First Lord himself would henceforth be required to serve in the AFFS for a minimum of five years before being eligible

to rule. These sweeping reforms strengthened the power of the First Prince, weakened those of the other lords, and more tightly bound the fate of the nation to its prominent military defenders.

Through it all, however, efforts to promote the freedoms of the people continued. Alexander Davion himself passed the Laws of Noble Conduct and Review in 2634, which granted the right of appeal to the common citizen, even against the ranks of nobility, and obligated planetary rulers to look into such complaints whenever they arose. Nobles could thus be judged for their conduct, found guilty of crimes, and stripped of title, land, money, and even their very lives if found to be acting in poor faith with the people.

But where the rights of the people are often looked after, the prevalence of the military throughout much of the Federated Suns' history created a far more serious imbalance that continues to plague parts of this realm even today. With so much of the national budget earmarked for defense, taxes are high and particularly hard on those worlds with fewer resources to draw upon.

On these worlds, the haves and the have-nots are sharply divided. Education is poor for those who work the fields and mines, particularly near the fringes of the Periphery, where children go to work as soon as physically possible. Perhaps a passing "vagabond school" JumpShip may happen by long enough for local children to learn at least how to read and write, but such government-sponsored measures are stopgap at best.

Yet, ironically enough, many citizens – even those who live on the poorer fringe worlds of Davion space – maintain their admiration for the military, either seeing service as a noble cause or as a means to escape a life spent in poverty. Still others cling to the freedoms they still enjoy, even without the prosperity known in the urban sprawls of New Avalon City. These are the people who look upon House Davion's neighbors and see nothing but oppression and hopelessness, for even the poorest citizen of the Federated Suns, they say, can hope for something better.

Join us for part three of this four-part look into the Federated Suns, when we'll look into the most well known of Davion rulers and the watershed events of the 31st century. Please join us as we continue our tour of the stars! I'm Bertram Habeas.

## Touring the Stars with Bertram Habeas

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07/16/3133

*We began on Terra, millions of years ago. Today, mankind stretches throughout the Milky Way, touching worlds as far from our home as Clan space, more than two thousand light-years distant. Yet who are we, really? What have we become in our relentless push outward and onward? I'm Bertram Habeas, and tonight we'll find the answers to these and many other fascinating questions together, as we tour the stars!*

### Volume XI: The Fox and His Legacy

In 3013, Prince Ian Davion, ruler of the Federated Suns, died in battle with Draconis Combine forces on Mallory's World. Because he was a bachelor prince with no wife or child to succeed him, it fell to his brother, Hanse Davion, "the Fox," to lead his nation out of a war that had already run for nearly a full century and a half. Though he was never raised for statesmanship, Hanse Davion would nonetheless become a pivotal leader in the history of the Federated Suns, both for his skill and infamous luck on the battlefield, and for the political savvy that would soon change the face of the Inner Sphere forever.

*Though some have credited such wisdom to Jerome Blake, there is an old Terran adage that says, "It is better to be lucky than good." In the case of Hanse Davion, that phrase perhaps rang truest. Though unquestionably brilliant in the affairs of all things military, and a gifted diplomat even in his youth, no small amount of pure, dumb luck characterized his entire career, often turning certain defeat into total victory.*

*For example, no sooner did Hanse step off the DropShip on New Avalon after being named First Prince, than an assassin (hired by his rival Michael Hasek-Davion) just missed killing him, burning off a part of the bulkhead behind the new ruler of the realm at the very second he stooped to adjust an errant boot spur.*

*That Hanse Davion was also a man of astute leadership and keen foresight is undeniable, of course, but anyone who thinks he made his mark on the universe by skill alone fails to give credit to the divine whims of Fate itself.*

--Arthur Luvonne, *The Long, Dirty History of the Federated Suns*, Commonwealth Press, 3100

Even before assuming responsibility for the Federated Suns, Hanse Davion took an active interest in learning and refining House Davion's military edge. He personally spearheaded an initiative to reform the crumbling state of military competence on the Capellan front during the closing years of the Third Succession War, an effort that helped turn the tide of battle on that border.

He also led a daring assault on Halstead Station, an airless rock where House Kurita forces were massing supplies in advance of a new invasion. While hardly extraordinary events in and of themselves, these successes would set the Federated Suns in good standing by the war's end in 3025.

Of course, the most famous of Hanse's decisions as ruler of the Suns was his alliance with Katrina Steiner, Archon of the Lyran Commonwealth, after her Peace Proposal of 3020. This momentous event forged the first true formal bond between Successor States since the collapse of the Star League, an alliance that, upon its consummation, would ignite the Inner Sphere in the shortest and most dramatic of the Succession Wars.

*"Husband, in honor of our marriage, in addition to this cake, I give to you a regiment of BattleMechs and the means to support them in perpetuity."*

*"I thank you for the gift, beloved. Wife, in honor of our marriage, in addition to this morsel, I give you a vast prize. Here, my love, I give you the Capellan Confederation!"*

--Archon-Designate Melissa Steiner and First Prince Hanse Davion, upon their wedding night, 20 August 3028, Hilton Head Island, Terra

As any school child knows, the marriage of First Prince Hanse Davion to Melissa Steiner, designated heir to the Steiner throne, heralded the start of the brutal, two-year war between the united Steiner-Davion realms and the rest of the Great Houses. Bearing the brunt of this invasion was the Capellan Confederation, which lost roughly half its territory to the war machine of the Federated Suns, but both Houses Kurita and Marik also suffered losses in the highly organized, lightning-fast blitzkrieg. Despite a loose alliance of their own, the Draconis Combine, Free Worlds League, and Capellan Confederation could not coordinate an effective defense against the Davions and Steiners, who had spent the past six years preparing for the campaign.

When it was over, a bridge of worlds cut through the Confederation and League to link the Federated Suns and the Lyran Commonwealth in a new entity known as the Federated Commonwealth, and Lyran troops tore deep into the Combine's Rasalhague Prefecture. Even a ComStar interdiction failed to impede the victory that Hanse Davion and Katrina Steiner declared in the final days of 3029.

In the two decades that followed that conflict, the Inner Sphere continued to reel from the effects of Hanse Davion's alliance, which produced the largest, most powerful military and economic force since the Star League. Though efforts to finish the job begun with the Fourth Succession War fizzled, such as the abortive War of 3039 against House Kurita's Draconis Combine, and though internal unrest spiked from the ongoing efforts to integrate the realms, the reality of the unified Steiner-Davion realm became more and more a fact of life.

That was, at least, until 3049, when the luck of the Fox – and the Inner Sphere at large – finally ran out.

*Who knows what might have happened if the Clans had not shown up when they did? Some have linked the FedCom Civil War to the strain of fighting the Clan invasion, which bore down more heavily on the Lyran half of the Commonwealth than on the Davion realm.*

*Others, however, believe that even without this impetus, the alliance would have crumbled anyway. After all, the Commonwealth was in a state of simmering turmoil, a hotbed of unrest from separatist groups, made louder and bolder as the economy stumbled its way toward equilibrium. The Skye region even tried to secede during this time, until Archon Melissa Steiner-Davion settled the matter with surprising level-headedness.*

*But if the Clans had not come, what then would have been the straw to break the proverbial camel's back? What pretext of tension would lead Katherine Steiner-Davion, sister of Hanse and Melissa's heir Victor, to assassinate their mother and launch a propaganda campaign to tear the realm in half and seize the two thrones for herself?*

--Dr. Lorenzo Torres, PhD., Professor of History, University of Thorin

Hanse Davion died of a heart attack shortly after the Battle of Tukayyid, leaving his wife, Archon Melissa Steiner-Davion, and heir-apparent Victor Ian Steiner-Davion, to guide the united realm through the turbulent times ahead. Unfortunately, Melissa's subsequent assassination in 3055 at once gave official birth to the Federated Commonwealth and marked the beginning of its end.

Victor (unlike his father), trained for warfare and poorly skilled in the affairs of diplomacy and politics, proved unable to stem the rising tide of chaos. Though he would one day lead in the final campaign to defeat the Clans, and later on win back both the Davion and Steiner realms from the rule of his treacherous sister, Katherine Steiner-Davion, he destroyed the destiny to which he had been originally born and bred. Victor Steiner-Davion would be a hero to his home realms and the Inner Sphere at large once again, fighting alongside Devlin Stone to defeat the Word of Blake and their brutal Jihad, but the dreams of a Star League under the Davion standard were lost forever in the fires of the FedCom Civil War.

*"We must never forget the awful price we have paid to finally win this peace. The Commonwealth my parents once forged from both nations is lost forever, so I ask this of the Lyran Alliance and the reborn Federated Suns: May we never turn down this path again."*

--Public address by Victor Ian Steiner-Davion at the end of the FedCom Civil War, 24 April 3067

In our final installment on the Federated Suns, we'll look at House Davion's Federated Suns as it stands today, after the triumphs – and the tragedies – of the 31st century. Please join us as we continue our tour of the stars! I'm Bertram Habeas.

## What's Really Going On

Editorial

07/21/3133

It's now been more than eight months since the communications blackout, and despite the best efforts of our political and military leaders to calm our fears, tensions are still high. Rumors of war on dozens of worlds within The Republic of the Sphere alone have spread like wildfire, causing us all more than a little unease. And if second- and third-hand reports can be believed, panic has taken over both major and minor cities on many more Republic worlds.

Who is behind these problems? No one knows—or at least no one is willing to say—but one thing is clear: There must be more than one group behind it all.

If we look back to the days following the disruption of the HPG network, it's obvious that our political leaders knew nothing of what happened, and subsequent investigations show no signs of sabotage or tampering to our local HPG. News reports we've received from other worlds indicate the same findings. The blackout took everyone, from the Exarch to the lowliest ComStar acolyte, by complete surprise.

Some postulated in the days immediately following the blackout that ComStar was somehow behind this. And those theories seemed credible at the time. For years ComStar has lobbied the Republican Senate for authorization to increase its rates, but every time the proposed bill came up, it was voted down. Sometimes ComStar took action, reducing the services it offered or making internal "realignment" that resulted in price hikes on certain services within The Republic.

But if ComStar were behind the current problems, the organization certainly would have come up with a "solution" by now, extorting a great deal of money and other concessions out of The Republic in exchange for returning the HPG network to service. No, the blackout is certainly the work of another entity.

Of course, the identity of that entity remains a mystery. Some have forwarded theories that a handful of hard-line members of the Word of Blake somehow survived to this day and, decades after the end of their downfall, decided to unleash an attack on interstellar communications. On its face, that theory seems logical, considering the legendary psychosis and fanaticism displayed by many Word of Blake personnel during the Jihad. Deep down, though, that theory is little more than an impossible nightmare. Military analysts throughout the Inner Sphere agree that there likely are a number of Word of Blake hardliners who escaped the final battles. Likewise, they all agree that these individuals would not launch an attack like this unless they were going to do so in conjunction with a military attack upon Terra or some other important world. To cripple the HPG network in conjunction with anything less would be a waste.

More of a concern is just who is behind the wars that seem to be popping up throughout The Republic. We have confirmed reports that forces belonging to Bannson's Raiders, the Dragon's Fury, the Highlanders, the Spirit Cats, the Steel Wolves, and the Swordsworn have been involved in assaults upon a number of worlds just within our own Prefecture, as well as within Prefecture III.

Just who the leaders of these warrior societies are is a matter of public record. Of course, every one of them has publicly denounced the warfare, and most have followed up with statements indicating that they are trying only to stop the spread of warfare or attempting to put an end to the fighting. Their motivations are, of course, extremely suspect, as each bears loyalties to more than just The Republic of the Sphere.

Perhaps more troubling are the rumors that more than just these six warrior factions are involved in battles elsewhere in The Republic. Lines of communication are still incredibly unreliable, but our government officials and ComStar have received reports from every Prefecture capital within The Republic, and the news is anything but hopeful. "Unnamed sources" have already revealed that news from Skye and Irian is grim. The panic endemic to the blackout has taken hold there as it has elsewhere, but the reasons are far worse. Worlds like Connaught are caught up in riots that could have been caused either by food shortages or entire companies of BattleMechs walking the streets of its biggest cities.

Likewise, Galatia, once known as the Mercenary's Star, is a world in chaos. The hiring halls are all open for business, as mysterious individuals are apparently paying premiums to MechWarriors and other soldiers—especially those who are able to bring their own equipment to the table.

Simply put, The Republic of the Sphere is going to hell in a handbasket faster than anyone can do a thing about it. Exarch Redburn has promised that the Knights of the Sphere are already on the case, checking into every credible threat, but his words obviously ring hollow. Neither he nor the Knights know what is truly going on, and until they do, they will likely remain bottled up in their secure fortresses on Terra.

And because of that, we will have to continue to trust that individuals like Lord Governor Aaron Sandoval and Prefect Kal Radick—individuals whose personal forces have clashed with each other on several occasions, yet publicly profess to be working toward bringing peace to our worlds—will watch out for our best interests. Whether they will is, of course, is another story.

And that is why there are many citizens publicly calling for others to step in and assist us. It is clear to many that The Republic cannot defend us, and if the legacy of Devlin Stone is not enough, then perhaps those nations that have survived through the Succession Wars are who we should turn to.

--Name withheld by request,

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Williams Bay

Note: The opinions expressed here are not necessarily that of ComStar, The Republic of the Sphere, or the government of Towne.

### Towne Log

+ You know, I don't know how to take this. It's half sensationalist conspiracy-theorist and half common sense. The mainstream media hasn't done much in the way of reporting from the other side of The Republic, but we've all seen the underground news and we've all heard the rumors coming out of the spaceports. Many of our leaders are running scared, and the rest seem to be out to get anything they can take. Damn! This is the last thing I needed on my mind now. I don't think I'll be able to sleep all night till I can dig up some more information from the other side of The Republic.

:- Chungabunga

+ Yeah, it does kind of sound like a sane FMLurder. Maybe he's back on his pills? ;-)

:- Addam

+ Well, let's all think about this for a minute. I think we're finally getting what's due. We've robbed Peter to pay Paul for so long that Peter is coming back with a vengeance. Everyone was so happy to blindly follow Devlin Stone that they neglected what their consciences were saying and what common sense demanded. Humanity has never had a time of peace. Ever. And yet we blindly go along with this swords to plowshares theory that leaves us open only to invasion? Stupidity is never an excuse, and now we're paying the price for ours. The best we can hope for here is that the FedSuns comes in with a few regiments. At least then we'll have a chance to ride out the civil wars that will rip The Republic to shreds.

:- PanzerGruppe

+ Do you really think we'd be better off under the Davion yoke? I'll assume you've read some history books and know about the two civil wars that barely left the nation intact? The only reason the Federated Suns is still around is because of Devlin Stone, and like everyone, they benefited from the peace he brought us.

:- Freebird

+ I don't think PG has forgotten about the FedCom Civil War, but I think you're conveniently forgetting a few facts. Like the fact that the Word of Blake threw most of their effort into breaking the Federated Suns' back. Like the fact that the AFFS sustained a higher casualty rate than any other nation, but also had a higher kill ratio. Like the fact that Devlin Stone could not have done what he did without the support of the Federated Suns.

:- CMike

+ Hell. I think this is all far worse than it seems. I just did a little digging and found something that the powers that be don't want anyone to know . . .

:- Chungabunga



## Return to Addicks

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07/22/03

NEO CARTHAGIA, ADDICKS—It's now been more than three months since the end of the conflict that pitted forces from Prefect Tara Campbell's Highlanders and the Dragon's Fury led by her former superior, Katana Tormark, and the people of Addicks are still picking up the pieces. But matters are no longer as grave as they seemed when the fighting first broke out.

"[The war] was terrible, make no mistake about it," said Addicks Governor Danielle Paterson, "but [Addicks' people] have rebounded from that dark time to create something better for themselves."

That seems a tall tale in light of the horror and disaster visited upon that world by the Dragon's Fury, but it's one that is amazingly true. Following the defeat that Captain Tara Bishop handed the Dragon's Fury, the people of Addicks flocked to the Highlander banner, praising Bishop and Prefect Campbell as their saviors. For their part, the Highlanders did what they could to assist in the reconstruction effort. Several of Bishop's MechWarriors remained on Addicks for the next two months to aid in the heavy recovery and construction projects. For her part, Prefect Campbell herself toured the areas worst hit by the battles and pledged to give whatever additional aid she could to further speed up Addicks' recovery.

The citizens of Addicks were both surprised and pleased by the Prefect's personal attention to their world. Said local businessman Trevor Young, "You hear all the time about politicians paying lip service to their constituents, but what Prefect Campbell did was beyond the call of duty. She pitched in with the cleanup on Terlecki Street (in Neo Carthagia), and even had her aides help remove debris."

Young wasn't the only one singing Campbell's praises, though. Consider the feelings of Adele Yu, an 88-year-old lifetime resident of the city. "I haven't trusted those Dracs since they landed here back in '64 and '65. They were up to no good then, and they were up to no good now. Campbell sent 'em running with their tails between their legs. Good for her!"

But not everyone has good things to say about her. Apart from obvious pro-Combine groups like the Voice of the Dragon and the Ivory Pillars, many are less than pleased with Campbell's actions. "She's come here to show everyone how good and just she is," exclaimed Engineer Bradley Scholz, "but she's just as responsible for what happened. She didn't dispatch Republican forces to deal with the Dragon's Fury; she sent her own Highlanders. And now everyone's treating her like the messiah? That's called empire building!"

And Scholz is not the only one decrying the Prefect and her Highlanders. To date, there's been at least one major demonstration per week protesting the Highlanders' continued presence on Addicks or the work programs Prefect Campbell has set up to aid those put out of work or made homeless by the military campaign. Of course, it's not that the Prefect set up these programs that people are protesting; it is the nature of the programs themselves.

"The Prefect has acted outside of her sworn oath to The Republic," said Vel Perrei, spokesperson for the Society for Interstellar Conscience. "Her programs are obviously meant to benefit the Highlanders more than they will help Addicks' people. These people are building military bases, weapons, and ammunition that will go directly to the Highlanders—and what are they getting for it? Minimum wage and communal housing while the Prefect continues to promise phantom Republican aid sometime in the future."

Protests and rallies aside, Addicks itself is beginning to come back together. To be sure, the entire world was not affected by the brief war, though several large cities, such as Neo Carthagia, suffered heavy damage. On the other hand, the recently discovered oil fields sustained little lasting damage, and already two dozen new wells are pumping at full capacity to meet the demands of both on-world and off-world needs. Revenue from this alone has delivered hundreds of millions of needed C-Bills back into Addicks' economy, bringing it out of the slump it fell into following the communications blackout.

This money was, of course, sorely needed and came at perhaps the best possible time. Economist Kaneda Drew explained. "As terrible as the war was, it did tend to unite Addicks' people behind a single banner. Where once there were a dozen or more groups protesting Weyland Industrials' exploitation of the recently discovered oil reserves, those protests have given way to a more-or-less united front. The people of Addicks now realize they need the money that these reserves will bring in and will do everything they must to keep those wells pumping."

Already Weyland Industrials has expanded its pumping and refining stations and is in the process of constructing another huge refinery that will quadruple its capacity. And that, more than Prefect Campbell's efforts, is providing the jobs that the people of Addicks need. In all, Weyland has added 300,000 jobs in just the past six months, during a time when most companies were cutting their workforces.

But, still, some matters on Addicks could be better. Thousands of refugees that fled the violence on the world have slowly begun to return to their homes, only to find themselves unwanted and the subjects of illogical retribution. Governor Paterson explained. "There is an unfortunate belief among some of our people that those who fled the violence are somehow responsible for it, or because they fled, they do not deserve to share in the wealth,' so to speak. We are, of course, doing everything that we can for these brave people."

But is "everything we can" good enough? The Governor has set up so-called "safe zones" for returning refugees. In some places, these people have been reintegrated back into society with few problems. Elsewhere, though, the safe zones have been turned into virtual prison camps, with residents fearful to tread outside lest they be accosted, or worse, by demonstrators.

In short, Addicks is healing, but it still has a long way to go.

### Towne Log

+ Funny, don't you think? No one wants those refugees. We sure didn't want 'em, and neither do their own people. Guess you just gotta learn to fight for your own freedom!

:- Raymar

+ I don't think it's funny at all. Those people left their home world behind to get away from the violence, and all they ever got from anyone else was grief, and for what? Nothing! These people did nothing to you or me or anyone else. They wanted to get away from the violence and death. They wanted to protect their families, but did we let them? Go shove a rod, Raymar!

:- Fight4Lif

+ Hehehe. Serves them right. Let them rot in those camps!

:- FMLurder

+ You know, I'm starting to think that INN is getting some decent writers. Or at least people who are willing to buck the company line. This isn't your typical INN pro-rah-rah article. They take some shots at Campbell, even though they don't say a word about The Republic, or more appropriately, the lack of Republican intervention in the conflict there.

:- PanzerGruppe

+ Hey, FM, I thought you and Hippee were the conspiracy theorists around here. What's with the attitude?

:- Pooky

+ I'd just like to point out that FMLurder and I are *\*not\** the same! I don't know who he is, but his beliefs bear absolutely no resemblance to my own! I, for one, welcomed the refugees. They deserve a place where they can free themselves of the bounds of those who would impinge upon our freedoms. They also deserve far better treatment than they received here and on their own home world!

:- FMLurder

+ PG, you're on the right track. The article didn't mention at all Knight Stephanie Hoover or what she did to help out Addicks' people. *\*Has\** The Republic lifted even a finger to put an end to all of this trouble? If so, I haven't heard word one about it.

:- Chungabunga

+ So you think we should just let anyone freeload off of us? Hey, I'll be over to your house tonight. I hear you've got a nice tri-vid and a cute daughter.

:- Raymar

+ I suggest that we just ignore the obvious flame-bait that Raymar is spouting and talk about what really matters here. We have been receiving more and more circumstantial evidence that the Exarch and the rest of The Republic are unwilling to involve themselves in the ever-growing unrest. So what are they doing? Are they fighting somewhere else that we do not know about or are they sitting on Terra, cowering in their boots. One would believe that the Exarch would have made another Republic-wide statement by now.

:- Shar

+ I'm with you, Shar. I think my viewpoint on the topic is well known. The Republic is failing. It would take someone with the charisma of Devlin Stone and the military mind of Aleksandr Kerensky to put together something that'll survive past the next year or two. Otherwise, we'll keep seeing people like Tormark and Bannson and even Campbell carving their own little empires out of the pie that once was The Republic, and when that happens, you know the Successor States will come looking for their due. There isn't one House Lord who still isn't steamed that they had to give up worlds to Devlin Stone.

:- CMike

## Touring the Stars with Bertram Habeas

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07/23/03

*We began on Terra, millions of years ago. Today, mankind stretches throughout the Milky Way, touching worlds as far from our home as Clan space, more than two thousand light-years distant. Yet who are we, really? What have we become in our relentless push outward and onward? I'm Bertram Habeas, and tonight we'll find the answers to these and many other fascinating questions together, as we tour the stars!*

### Volume XII: The Banner Yet Waves

**Fact Sheet:** The Federated Suns

**Founding Year:** 2317

**Capital (City, World):** New Avalon City, New Avalon

**National Symbol:** A silver sword, blade upturned, against a golden sunburst on a red disc.

**Location (Terra relative):** Outward-Spinward quadrant

**Total (Inhabited) Systems:** 434

**Estimated Population (3130):** 1,302,000,000,000

**Government:** Constitutional Aristocracy (Western European feudal stylings)

**Ruler:** Prince Harrison Davion

**Dominant Language(s):** English (official), French, German

**Dominant Religion(s):** Christianity (Interfaith Church), Buddhism, Judaism

**Unit of Currency:** Pound (1 pound = 0.97 C-Bills)

Orbiting fourth from a cool, orange, K-class star, New Syrtis, capital of the Capellan March (the stretch of worlds along the Davion-Liao border) is a world most hospitable in the tropical equatorial reaches. There, the island continent of Copplin is the only one of the planet's landmasses not reached by the ice sheets that cover most of the planet. Yet despite the presence of this lush paradise, it is the harsh climate of the northern Mawreddog continent that is home to Saso, the ancestral heart of the Hasek family and capital of this world.

Saso is a city built with the same grandeur found in New Avalon City today, complete with the towering palace of the Hasek family at its heart. It is said that anything a person could want on New Avalon may also be found on New Syrtis, and that is true – right down to the BattleMechs and armored vehicles that patrol the streets, sharing the road with midday commuters who pass by as if nothing were amiss.

Despite decades of relative peace, the Davion military remains on alert throughout the Federated Suns. In cities such as Saso, New Syrtis, and New Avalon City, troops are a regular sight, their presence not only accepted, but also expected. Security, ever of paramount importance to the people of the Federated Suns, has been a national obsession for centuries.

It is this obsession, the people of the Federated Suns believe, that has preserved their freedoms throughout the history of their nation. Contrary to casual appearances in the major industrial centers and border worlds, the Davion realm is far from a police state. Tyrants have come and gone, but the Davion people have always enjoyed their freedoms under the Six Liberties of the Crucis Pact. A free press reports the news – both good and ill – of wars, politics, and celebrity lifestyles. Holovids and holoscreens tirelessly entertain billions of House Davion citizens with improbable plots, special effects, or enchanting tales of love and honor. Political action groups champion their causes to their hometown representatives. There is even the fundamental right to worship as one pleases, with no official state faith declared or imposed.

All of these freedoms have bred a wonderfully diverse people, united only by common freedoms and their love of the same. Though their rulers may not always be so enlightened, the structure of the Federated Suns government--and the lessons of its history--have given these people every right to be proud of their diversity, and they are willing to sacrifice anything to preserve that way of life.

Diversity in the Federated Suns, of course, comes in all forms. For every major industrial center, rich in the conveniences of modern life, for instance, are a hundred small towns on worlds that the average Davion noble has likely never heard of, where the ground is worked by hand, and muscles are forged from blood, sweat, and tears rather than the local gymnasium. On these worlds, education is not always a public privilege, but a luxury done without, save for the visits of a traveling vagabond school. Faith in a god, practiced however and whenever one's traditions dictate, precede the patriotism and pride of state, though one rarely eclipses the other. The people of the Federated Suns thus run the gamut from the rich nobility to the poor ne'er-do-well. Always, however, there is a chance for hope, and the freedom to pursue a better life is always there for those who are strong enough to earn it for themselves. This, more than anything else, perhaps exemplifies the spirit of the Federated Suns.

Paul Alison was a 32-year-old farmer on Bonneau--a backwater world he describes as "pleasant, but routinely wet"--before moving with his family to New Syrtis five years ago. The move was expensive, costing the family the combined savings of three generations, but they left in search of a better life. His arrival, he said, was a classic case of culture shock.

"I never saw BattleMechs in person before, except on the HV, but I gotta admit it sure was an impressive sight, especially stomping down downtown Leesburg. I turned to my wife when I saw it and said, 'Why, that's a curiously useless-looking AgroMech.' Imagine my shock when she turned back to me and said, 'Paul, there ain't no farms 'round here that use a 'Mech like that. That's a BattleMech!'"

For Paul, a dedicated Catholic and father of seven, the urban world of New Syrtis, even in a suburban city like Leesburg, located over a hundred kilometers south of Saso, was a major adjustment, not just for the 'Mechs and soldiers in the street, but everything from the way people spoke to the ways they worshipped.

"Back home, we went to church every Sunday morning, already dog tired from five hours of morning chores, and listened to the pastor's sermon on the glories of Heaven and the fires of Hell in a small, one-room, one-story building where the heat never worked and the roof always leaked. Here, it took us a while before we even found a church that carried our faith, and when we did, we still thought it was the wrong one. A pastor half the age of our Father Mackie spoke of the Golden Rule from a pulpit of crystal, under the glow of lights so bright and so warm you'd have thought God himself had shined a light down upon us all. Of course, it took us a good month and a half just to get over his accent.

"And chores? Hell, before too long the kids and my wife managed to find enough modern conveniences that it seemed the machines did all the work around the house – all while I was still going to school and learning the things they say every Avalon lad knows by age 9."

Today, Paul Alison still lives in the suburban township of Leesburg with his wife, Marie, and three of their seven children. Their Bonneau accents have all but faded, though they still attend services at the Presbyterian church. Paul is a professional landscaper, while Marie works as a secretary in a Leesburg law office. Their two oldest children, Daniel and Marko, now serve with the Armed Forces of the Federated Suns, and their holographic pictures rest on a hutch beside flat pictures of the family they left behind on Bonneau. This winter, Paul said, he and Marie plan to travel back home for a visit, amazed that they can afford in just a few short years what their parents and grandparents spent years only dreaming of. And while their thanks go mostly to God and their own perseverance, both of them also give their heartfelt thanks to a nation where such things are possible to those who dare to dream.

"Only in the Federated Suns," said Paul, "can a man strive to be something other than he was born with, and rise up to be something more without having to ask someone for their permission to do so. To live in a land so blessed and so free surely is the greatest gift of all. We may not be the richest, and we may never live in a palace, but we've never been slaves, and we never had to compromise the way we lived or who we worshipped for anyone, anywhere. That's freedom."

In our next four-part series, we'll return to the Clan occupations zones for a look at Clan Jade Falcon, the Followers of Turkina. Please join us as we continue our tour of the stars! I'm Bertram Habeas.

## HPG Working on Achernar?

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07/26/3133

PORT HOWARD—The events of the past six hours tragically prove once again just how small a community Towne really is.

At 0835 Port Howard Local Time, the DropShip Red Sea landed at the spaceport in our capital city with a priority package (and dozens of other communiqués transported from the Achernar system via Ho) for the ComStar Chief Sacrist.

DropShips come in and out of the spaceport regularly, of course, and the Red Sea has made numerous trips to and from our world in the past several months, each time transporting heavy loads of cargo under contract with the Bulephron Chemical Corporation. Normally, its arrival wouldn't have raised concern from anyone, but today the ship landed with no cargo, which immediately raised red flags among space traffic controllers and spaceport longshoremen.

Within minutes of the ship's grounding, the Port Howard INN office had received calls from a dozen different individuals reporting the DropShip's unusual landing. A few minutes later, INN reporters took several more calls that indicated the ship's captain and some unidentified men proceeded with a police escort to the ComStar compound.

Several INN staff reporters attempted to confirm this with personnel at both the ComStar station as well as with members of the Red Sea's crew, but none of the individuals would comment on the nature of the packages being delivered to ComStar, or even confirm that such a delivery was being made. The Port Howard police were able to at least confirm that a delivery was being escorted to the ComStar station from Terminal 17, the closest terminal to the Red Sea's landing pad.

No one at the police department was willing to comment on record at the time, though department spokesman Lieutenant Romona Lung later gave this statement: "We don't make it a habit of escorting just any cargo to or from the spaceport, but in the past we have made exceptions in cases such as the transport of human organs or shipments vital to planetary security. We also have agreements with a number of private concerns for the security of particularly valuable items, but only on a noninterference basis, which means we will not pull officers off of cases or active operations to provide this security." When asked who they were providing security for, however, Lieutenant Lung declined to comment.

Within hours of the DropShip's landing, news of its "cargo" had spread throughout Port Howard and beyond. Rumors also started to filter out of the spaceport about the current situation on Achernar. Apparently, ComStar technicians believed they were on the verge of finding a solution to the problem that had been plaguing the Inner Sphere for the last eight months, though a hundred different versions of that rumor reached the INN offices over the course of the next several hours, including some that indicated ComStar would have the entire HPG network operational within hours.

More telling, however, was the package that the Red Sea crew delivered to INN shortly thereafter. Included was the usual collection of news stories that every INN office shares with those in neighboring systems. More importantly, though, were reports from the primary INN bureau on Achernar that did confirm the rumor circulating throughout Port Howard—that ComStar technicians were indeed close to bringing the Achernar HPG back online. The station had received several shipments direct from Terra, and the Sacrist reported that his station's personnel were in the process of replacing a number of critical components within the HPG's delicate hyperspace transmitter.

When INN staff researchers again contacted the HPG station here in Port Howard, the Chief Sacrist was unavailable, and even the station's Public Relations Director was unwilling to comment other than to say, "We are aware of the rumors that have been circulating, but at this time that is all they are: rumors."

Unfortunately, in the hours that passed, a number of media outlets brought the story to the entirety of the world. Worse still, most relied solely on the rumors that were circulating, simply repeating to the entire world the best and the worst of the stories, without gaining any independent verification.

The range of emotions displayed throughout the next few hours was simply astounding. The ComStar station was overwhelmed with calls from people all over the world who wanted finally to send communications they'd been waiting months to send, while crowds numbering into the thousands flocked to the Port Howard HPG station as well as the ComStar offices located in every other major city on this planet.

From there, the situation rapidly degenerated as ComStar representatives at the offices that were open refused to take any messages, while mobs broke into the offices that were closed. Police departments in every city cordoned off the areas, but are continuing to deal with still-growing mobs of citizens.

In response to the hysteria that has taken over the world, Chief Sacrist Lev Bouzerau spoke directly to every media outlet on the world. "I'm deeply saddened that what should be uplifting news has turned into a time of anxiety for so many of our world's citizens. I have spoken at great length about the troubles ComStar is facing in bringing the HPG network back on-line, and have given you my solemn oath to speak to you only when I know something of substance. Five hours ago, a ship did land in Port Howard with a priority package for our station. Within that package was a number of technical documents as well as a communiqué from the Chief Sacrist of the Achernar HPG station. In his message, he did indicate that he had high hopes that his station personnel would soon have the transmitter back on-line, but that there was still a significant chance for failure. He also included documentation to us concerning the repairs, which our own people are now going over in excruciating detail.

"I have to stress, however, that a solution is not imminent. Even if the repairs work on Achernar, it would take months before we could effect those same repairs here, because we simply do not have the parts necessary here on Towne. I say again, we are

no closer to a solution here on Towne than we were yesterday. Please go back to your homes and places of business and let our people do their jobs. As soon as we have information, I will speak directly to you again. You have my word on that. But you also have my solemn vow that I will not give you false hope. I will not spread the type of wild rumors that have plagued this world today."

Governor Renee Oscar followed up with these comments. "People of Towne, I exhort you to heed the Sacrist's words. Go home. I know the next few days will be difficult as you deal with the broken hopes we all experienced today, but that is what we must do. Do not blame ComStar. They did not concoct the wild rumors that some malicious individuals spread today. I have granted a limited immunity to all who have taken to the streets today, but you must disperse now or face serious penalties. Please, I ask of you. Disperse and go home!"

Unfortunately, relatively few have heeded the Governor's words. As of 1435 Port Howard Local Time, rioting crowds numbering in the hundreds and thousands have overtaken eight major cities, including the capital. Police departments across the globe have called in additional help and the Towne Militia is mobilizing to aid in crowd control and looting patrols.

### **Towne Log**

+ Whoa! You know, I was watching the newsfeed all morning. I am continually amazed at just how much people believe the media. Especially HNIS. They're the first ones who said that a fix was hours away, and even PNC was cautioning people to wait and see, and you know how sensationalistic they like to get! How anyone can keep listening to HNIS is beyond me. Doesn't anyone remember just how badly they screwed up their reporting of the Contrina Fire or the Kreszylev murder case?

:- Rai Den

+ It's human nature. We want to believe the best. Can you blame anyone?

:- Fight4Lif

+ Actually, I can. It's human nature all right, but not the way you think it is. People are inherently stupid. Those aren't intelligent people out there. Those are people caught up in the mob mentality. People who need to be a part of something, and what they're a part of is criminal action.

:- CMike

+ I've seen some of the preliminary reports to come out of Achernar. I've got some friends who are engineers and who watched some of the repairs that ComStar made on the HPG. It looks like they replaced the entire transmitter array. The Sacrist is right. Even if it works on Achernar, it'll take a long time before we can get ours working again. Think about it. The HPG is pretty much like a JumpShip's jump core, just with a transmitter attached. If the field generator has to be replaced . . . well, that's not something they're going to have just sitting on a shelf somewhere. That's got to be specially manufactured.

:- McDan

+ There's something wrong. Something's missing here. ComStar isn't telling us the whole story. Those rumors that got started this morning came directly from the ship's crew. They heard all the news from Achernar first hand, and they talked directly with the ComStar people in at least three systems. You don't think their information is good? And think about this. Lev Bouzerau is relatively new here. How do you think he got the job? The ComStar First Circuit put him here so that they could have someone who could put the right spin on things. I'm coming to think that the blackout was a surprise to the ComStar rank and file. But there's someone who's keeping things from working, and Bouzerau is working for them. There's a faction within ComStar that is keeping the HPGs from working, and now they've gotta keep that information from leaking out.

:- Hippee

## Book Review: *Myself in the Rubble*

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07/27/3133

*Myself in the Rubble: A Memoir of the Liao Massacre*

Lila Bogdonavich

Storytellers Press

§24.99

Reviewed by Imre Colton

In the nearly 20-plus years since the Massacre of Liao, Lila Bogdonavich has suffered three recurring nightmares. In the first, she is 12 years old, lying in bed unable to move, watching her bedroom ceiling fall in on her. In the second, she sits in an empty palace on a throne, speaking to a doctor who says he can't heal her hands; when she looks at her hands, her fingers are tentacles with a life of their own. In the third, she walks across a landscape of rubble looking for her parents. She finds instead her own body, staring at the sky. In *Myself in the Rubble: A Memoir of the Liao Massacre*, Lila Bogdonavich uses these three dreams as the framework for her story: the first symbolizes all she lost; the second her helplessness in the clutches of a heartless system; and the third as a point of departure for her ultimate salvation.

*Myself in the Rubble* is a first-person look at the Massacre of Liao of 3111-13. In the wake of nine years of low-level terrorism by Capellan Confederation sympathizers, a still-unidentified traitor allowed a CapCon DropShip to land at the Drop Port nearest to the planetary capital, discharging the first wave of an invasion force that would attempt to take possession of the planet. Over the course of the next two years, Liao saw some of the bloodiest combat the Republic has known since its inception. By the time that Republic forces prevailed, civilian deaths had reached the millions. In just the first five days, much of Chang-an, the capitol city, was destroyed. Lila Bogdonavich, 12 years old, ill and home from school, was orphaned in that first wave, and watched as her home and her life came down around her ears.

Pulled from the rubble by neighbors, Bogdonavich spent the next few days in a shelter in their company. When the next attacks came, the shelter was bombed. In one of the most wrenching passages of the book, the author describes digging through the rubble searching for her neighbors as they had searched for her, and finding only body parts. Bogdonavich spent the next few months living and running on the streets of a war-torn Chang-an, hiding in basements, drinking from puddles and scrambling for survival. Once the fighting ended, however, she was found, placed with Chang-an's Civic Child Care Services and forgotten. CCCS was unable to place Ms. Bogdonavich with relatives, most of whom lived off-world, or with a foster family—the fate of so many of the Orphans of Liao. She remained in CCCS care until her 18th birthday. The years that followed become the heart of the book, as Ms. Bogdonavich recounts living on the streets of Chang-an, navigating the social support systems of the city, and trying to live something close to a normal life.

Although *Myself in the Rubble* is certainly not the first memoir to portray the devastation of the Massacre of Liao, it is by far the rawest. Bogdonavich spares no detail as she describes the brutality of the combat she witnessed—Capellan BattleMechs crushing civilians beneath their feet, homes randomly carved to bits by laser fire—as well as the cruelty of the system that was intended to be her cushion against disaster. So many Orphans of Liao were shuttled into the already overtaxed CCCS that the legacy of the Massacre of Liao is still not fully understood by historians and sociologists. The intensity of emotion radiates from the page so that, in the end, when Ms. Bogdonavich finds herself first participating in and then leading support groups for Massacre survivors, there's a relief for the readers as well.

*Myself in the Rubble* will become a touchstone in the healing process for the people of Liao. It will certainly be required reading for anyone desiring an understanding of the social impact of the Massacre. For the Betrayer of Liao, whose act of treason prompted the ruin of a world, it will be another well-deserved indictment.

## Lessons from History Point to the Future

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07/28/3133

TIKOGRAĐ, TIKONOV—As humanity continues to come to grips with the realities thrust upon it last August, specifically the loss of the HPG network and the chaos that ensued, leaders are turning to historical lessons.

More than 50 years ago, the Word of Blake Jihad launched its Jihad against the Inner Sphere and effected an almost-simultaneous communications blackout. The Inner Sphere was gripped by chaos unlike anything it had ever experienced. Leaders were not only cut off from their subordinates but were also themselves embattled, forced to deal personally with Word of Blake assaults upon themselves and their home worlds.

It wasn't the military attacks or atomic strikes that were the most crippling. It was that the Inner Sphere had lost its ability to communicate. Political leaders had no information to base their decisions upon. Military commanders never had up-to-date intelligence on enemy movements. Orders could take weeks, or months, to reach the battlefield. Requests for reinforcements arrived long after additional troops could do any good. Worst of all, the people could no longer see their leaders' faces on a weekly basis, could no longer hear reassuring and comforting words.

In short, people were scared, and those in power were cut off from their superiors—two facts that directly led to the Word of Blake's incredible successes early in the war, the after-effects of which the nations of the Inner Sphere are still contending with.

Perhaps nowhere was this more evident than in the Free Worlds League. This one-time industrial powerhouse was in one fell swoop fractured into half a dozen smaller nations and scores more informal alliances and independent worlds. To be sure, it wasn't until the razing of Atreus that the true breakup of the Free Worlds League happened, but many historians have argued that the breakup was just as inevitable as the miniature wars that happened in its wake.

None of this information is new. The last stand of the Knights of the Inner Sphere is a tale told and retold across The Republic (though the most popular version of the story is mostly a fable, bearing little resemblance to the actual destruction of the Knights). The Free Worlds League's long, fractious history is well known and taught in every secondary school within The Republic—as are the deeds of both individuals known as Thomas Marik.

But, as historians are beginning to warn, the ultimate fate of the Free Worlds League may not be so far from that of our own Republic of the Sphere.

Most would say that our nation bears little resemblance to the Free Worlds League, but that is a misconception: The similarities far outweigh the differences. The Republic is made up of ten Prefectures, each invested with a great deal of self-control, with the leaders of each reporting to the Senate and Exarch—an arrangement not unlike the Parliament and Captain-General arrangement that characterized the Free Worlds League prior to the Jihad. Further, while in theory The Republic's citizenry is a homogeneous amalgam of individuals from all cultures and backgrounds, the fact is that many cultural groups have tended to conglomerate together in the various Prefectures. What's more, over the course of The Republic's short history, its citizens have also come to identify more and more with the people of the nations closest to them, a fact that can clearly be seen within Senate politics.

So what does that mean for us?

Historians are adamant that our fate is absolutely not set in stone and that The Republic may indeed be strong enough to withstand the pressures of the present crises. On the other hand, the history of the Free Worlds League may provide us some hints and clues as to what lies ahead.

Prior to the Jihad, the League's government was on the verge of chaos. Since his rise to power, Captain-General Thomas Marik, or at least the man pretending to be Thomas Marik, had used his contacts both inside and outside of the League to consolidate his hold over that nation. Prior to his rise to power, the League had been plagued by centuries of civil war and unrest even while the rest of the nations of the Inner Sphere were fighting the Succession Wars. The various duchies and other political divisions within the League had long had a great deal of influence within the Parliament and the military, enough that they held sway over the Captain-General. If the leader of one of the League's duchies didn't like a Captain-General's attitude or the decisions he was making, that leader could simply withhold military and economic support to the rest of the League, potentially crippling it if that withdrawal of support came at the wrong time.

As a result, throughout the history of the League, Captains-General would have to tread a fine line between doing what was best for the entire League and coddling to one of the regional leaders. Though every one of the Successor States had to deal with similar situations, nowhere was this more a problem than in the League, a nation that truly lives up to the term "Balkanized."

In just the past century or so, the League has lived through three separate civil wars. In 3014, Anton Marik, brother of Captain-General Janos Marik, with the support of more than a quarter of the League's provinces behind him, launched a coup against his brother. That conflict ended quickly, though, as Anton did not have the support of the two most powerful provinces, the Duchy of Andurien and the Principality of Regulus. He also made an enemy of Wolf's Dragoons, who crushed Anton and his close circle in a legendary battle that has been made into no fewer than two dozen holo-vids over the years.

Fewer than 20 years later, the people of the Free Worlds League were again thrust into the midst of a civil war. Instead of two brothers fighting for dominance, however, this time it was triggered by the secession of the Duchy of Andurien following the conclusion of the Fourth Succession War. This war raged on for a full decade, involving both the Capellan Confederation and the



Magistracy of Canopus, and, ultimately, there was a grab for power from within the Marik family – one that would haunt the Inner Sphere decades later.

The Free Worlds League did somehow manage to maintain cohesion in the following years, but only at the cost of a great deal of freedoms. The man known as Thomas Marik tightened the reigns over the member-states of the Free Worlds League, creating a tighter, more united nation—at least to observers on the outside. Of course, internally, tensions slowly began to boil. Many of the nation's leaders feared they would suffer the same fate as the Anduriens, who were returned to the fold, so to speak, but continued to quietly oppose their Captain-General in their own ways.

The Clan invasion of 3050 temporarily derailed matters, and actually turned the tables a bit, as the Captain-General was able to consolidate his hold over the League even more in the face of the Clan threat. He later gained quite a bit of popularity by leading an assault into the Federated Commonwealth to gain worlds lost during the Fourth Succession War.

But all was not well within the League, and the Word of Blake Jihad triggered a reaction that ultimately left the Free Worlds League in tatters. The last things that the people of the League found out before the Word of Blake disabled the HPG network was that an imposter had been serving as their leader and that Atreus had been razed.

Suddenly, decades—indeed centuries—of pent-up frustration with the Marik family was released. The worlds of the Free Worlds League found themselves confronted with enemies both known and unknown, and were forced to deal with those enemies on their own. Already independent-minded, the majority of the League provinces simply took their own destinies completely into their own hands. Some, like the Principality of Regulus and the Duchy of Andurien, were quite capable of taking care of themselves. Many others were not, however, and as the Jihad waged on, most of the League's member-states and worlds forged political, military, and trade alliances with each other, continuing the relationships they had forged throughout the League years.

Not all of the worlds and tiny provinces, however, survived this era intact. The “big boys” often played political hardball with their neighbors, absorbing those they could into their own folds. The Duchy of Oriente, for example, absorbed both the Duchy of Orloff and The Protectorate, leading the way for the Marik Commonwealth and Principality of Regulus to do the same, taking over those worlds they could and forcing closer political and economic bonds where they couldn't, and always on terms favorable to them.

By the time the centralized governments of the other Successor States could take control of their own nations again, the era of strong Captains-General had passed. In fact, were it not for the Capellan Confederation, the Marik family might not have even returned to any amount of power within the new League. As it was, the leaders of the League's new political divisions allowed a Marik to resume the posting of Captain-General only as a concession to the fact that they needed someone who could coordinate the defense against the Capellan Confederation's border incursions.

Of course, the leaders of the League's provinces did not truly realize the need for this until Chancellor Sun-Tzu Liao's troops had taken a number of worlds from both the Duchies of Andurien and Oriente and were successfully beating the surviving militaries of both. By that time it was too late to undo the damage that the Capellans had done, but it wasn't too late to strike back.

And so this latest incarnation of the Free Worlds League struck back with a vengeance, beginning a long series of border wars between the two nations that continues even today, if rumors filtering out of both the Confederation and the League can be believed. And even if those two nations are not gripped by war right now, both have struck at each other more than a dozen times since the end of the Jihad, sometimes simply for the sake of striking out, and others to take possession of whole worlds. Always these tiny wars ended on their own, never involving more than a few systems at a time, yet the two nations have yet to put aside their differences.

Perhaps the greatest victim of the post-Jihad era, however, was the office of the Captain-General. Once the most powerful individual within the Free Worlds League, commanding the armies of that great nation with a single word, today the Captain-General has been all but stripped of power. Indeed, three individuals now hold office as co-Captains-General, doing little more than coordinating mutual defense maneuvers and stepping in to arbitrate disputes between League members. Of course, those facts have done little to advance the status of the Captains-General in the eyes of other Inner Sphere leaders.

And that is the fate that some say will befall The Republic of the Sphere. Already it is clear that regional powers are rising up within the ten Prefectures, and we know firsthand that there are those looking to conquer some of our worlds. We can be sure that the nations surrounding The Republic are looking to take advantage of the confusion that has overtaken the entire Inner Sphere.

Perhaps the fate of the Free Worlds League will become ours, perhaps not. There are many similarities between The Republic and the League, but there are many more differences. Devlin Stone founded this nation on the basis of peace, and though he is no longer with us, his powerful legacy continues even today. A great man once said that “information is ammunition”; perhaps the knowledge of the past is enough ammunition to fight off even the inevitable.

## Touring the Stars with Bertram Habeas

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07/30/3133

*We began on Terra, millions of years ago. Today, mankind stretches throughout the Milky Way, touching worlds as far from our home as Clan space, more than two thousand light-years distant. Yet who are we, really? What have we become in our relentless push outward and onward? I'm Bertram Habeas, and tonight we'll find the answers to these and many other fascinating questions together, as we tour the stars!*

### Volume XIII: Turkina's Children – Birth of the Jade Falcon Clan

Sudeten is a fairly dry planet, with only about 40 percent surface water. Much of its interior lands is covered in rocky mountains and deserts. For centuries, its people mined the earth for common metals, and supported themselves with only sustenance-level agriculture. Once upon a time, this world was a backwater in the Tamar Pact, and a stop-over point on the trade routes to the Free Rasalhague Republic. That, of course, was before the Clan invasion, before Jade Falcon came.

Today the spaceport in Hammarr, the last city to be claimed during Jade Falcon's conquest of this world, is abuzz with activity. Clan merchant ships rise into the pale blue sky on pillars of flame, escorted by a squadron of Clan aerospace fighters. Falcon warriors stand guard outside the city and in the spaceport itself, ever vigilant, eyeing everything and everyone with suspicion, their weapons always in view. BattleMechs and armored Elementals make regular patrols, strictly enforcing the peace.

Today, the raptor-and-katana banner of Clan Jade Falcon flutters in a dry breeze over the domed Clan Council Chamber in Hammarr, seat of the military government of the entire Jade Falcon Occupation Zone since the Jihad.

Unlike most flags and battle standards, the Jade Falcon's banner is more than a mere abstract symbol of the Clan's power. The falcon it depicts, an example of the genetically altered peregrine falcons from which the Clan takes its name, is named Turkina. Falcon legend tells an extraordinary tale of Turkina, the magnificent bird that returned from the dead to give its mistress, Elizabeth Hazen, the drive to fight on through the darkness of the Pentagon Civil Wars. The katana, clutched in Turkina's claws, became the instrument Hazen used to defeat her enemies even after her 'Mech was shot out from under her. As fanciful as it sounds, within the halls of the Jade Falcon Clan Council, the sword of Turkina is said to reside as proof of this tale's truth.

Elizabeth Hazen went on to become the Jade Falcon's first Khan, after that terrible day when all she had lived for appeared lost in the fires of war. The Falcon's history begins with Hazen, who infused her Clan with the need to excel above all others, and her devotion to Nicholas Kerensky, the founder of the Clan way of life, but the same could be said of all Clans at the beginning. It was the fateful events following Operation Klondike, the Clans' liberation of the Pentagon worlds, which truly set the Falcons apart.

*"It is with great pleasure that I announce which Clan shall become home to my heart and the hearts of those Kerenskys who will follow. The Clan I have chosen possesses a collective intelligence I admire, the burning passion of true hunters that I desire, and, above all, is blessed with a spirit that will serve as a beacon to all the rest. I choose to mingle my blood legacy with Clan Wolf."*

--IlKhan Nicholas Kerensky, 2822

Nicholas Kerensky's decision to join the Wolves disappointed Jade Falcon more than any other Clan. Though all had fought hard to reclaim the Pentagon, the Falcon warriors had grown convinced during their training and the fighting on Eden that their victories would be the most glorious, and their strength would be most prized by their ilKhan. Though Khan Hazen initially tried to head off this vocal despair by suggesting that the Wolves needed Kerensky's guidance more than Jade Falcon, growing discontent and a sense of malaise took hold of her people. When that discontent verged on treasonous thoughts, such as Jade Falcon striking out on its own, Hazen and her saKhan, Lisa Buhallin, enacted "the Culling," a brutal inquisition and purge of the Clan's ranks.

Although the Culling brought Jade Falcon rank and file in line, lingering resentment over Nicholas Kerensky's perceived favoritism remained, feeding into what even today is a longstanding rivalry between the Jade Falcon and Wolf Clans. Since the Culling, Jade Falcon strove to follow the traditions and laws set down by Nicholas Kerensky to the letter, in opposition to the Wolves' seeming eagerness to "bend the rules" as it suited them. Even after Kerensky's death, and the so-called Golden Century that followed, the Falcon's way was to keep all castes under tight control, even as the Clans expanded among the worlds of their Kerensky Cluster.

Over the centuries that followed, Jade Falcon developed a reputation for rigidity and conservatism unmatched by any other Clan, denying their lower castes the relative freedom from Clan restrictions that those of other Clans enjoyed. Though in some cases such strictness prompted the lesser castes to rise up, swift and brutal punishment was dealt out by the Clan's warrior caste, reinforcing the tenets of Kerensky.

*For all the alleged oppression that took place, some scholars think it's a miracle that Clan Jade Falcon didn't simply shatter from its own social pressures during the century following Nicholas Kerensky's death. What these scholars often fail to realize, however, is that the Clan system was still forming, and many of the new Clan populations were at least the immediate survivors of those who lived through the Pentagon Civil Wars. The horror of the warlords and the promise of the Clan system to bring order made even the perpetual martial law of the Clan way much more appealing. And the Falcons, who followed these draconian measures to their limits, were simply one of 19 variations on the same theme. The only alternative to it, for most, was exile into chaos, and in the resource-starved Kerensky Cluster, that simply wasn't an option.*

*But Falcon leaders also had another reason to keep their people in line. Competition between Clans – particularly between the Falcon and the Wolves – increased during the Golden Century. This provided incentive for “loyal” Clanners to redouble their efforts to toe the party line. Thus, the constant threat of the Wolves’ rising power provided excellent motivation among the lesser castes – as well as justification for any draconian means to attain it by the warriors. This, too, was the Clan way.*

--Dr. Lanz Rettig, PhD., Professor of Inner Sphere History, University of Academia, Kessel

The strict adherence to the words of Kerensky and the occasionally excessive reinforcing of it among the lesser castes prevented Jade Falcon from expanding its territory as much as some other Clans, but did not impede its ability to stage effective Trials for new technologies and resources. At the same time, Falcon merchants worked on the overlooked aspects of intercaste trading, and became instrumental in the economic boom of the Golden Century. Accomplishing this while remaining strictly within the guidelines established by the Founder was a challenge, but one that paid enormous dividends in the years to come. And so the Falcon rose to prominence second only to the Wolves themselves – all without ever absorbing or annihilating another Clan to do so.

*“Because we adhere strictly to the words of Kerensky, all caste members, from the least-skilled laborer to the best warrior, hold only one opinion on the Crusader question.”*

--Khan Yvonne Hazen, addressing the Grand Council, 2980

Curiously, the decades of expansion and growth in the shadow of Kerensky’s legacy caused attitudes toward the Inner Sphere to change. More and more, the harsh life of the Clans led to a rising feeling, beginning among the lower castes but eventually infecting the warriors, that the worlds of the Inner Sphere were paradises, left in the hands of callous barbarians. Among the Falcons, who claimed that Kerensky himself intended the Clans to return one day, this changing attitude quickly gave rise to the Crusader movement. The rigid interpretations embraced by Falcon leadership soon guaranteed their leadership in the Crusader political movement that would eventually lead to Operation Revival.

In part two of this series on Clan Jade Falcon, we’ll explore the way of the Clans, Falcon style! I’m Bertram Habeas.

## Message from Achernar

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08/02/3133

PORT HOWARD—Less than a week after a couriered message from Achernar brought false hope to Towne that resulted in hundreds of thousands taking to the streets and three days of riots all across the world, inside sources say an HPG message from that same world arrived early today.

But could this finally be the beginning of the end of this long darkness we've been experiencing since last August?

Speaking on condition of anonymity, two senior ComStar officials both reported that a signal was received from the Achernar HPG station, but was cut off before the end of the message. The first ComStar official said this shortly after the transmission was received. "There is no question that this was a message from Achernar, but the transmission was cut off midstream. We received only a few seconds before the data stream ended."

"We continued to receive the carrier for another 30 seconds or so," said another member of the order. "But that went dead, too, though not before we picked up a huge broadband spike." When asked what could have caused that spike, the individual said that "There could be a lot of things, but my first impression was that the transmitter somehow overloaded and automatically shut itself down."

Initially, other representatives from the HPG station could not be reached for comment, but several self-styled "watchdog" groups came forward with more information shortly afterward. One of these groups, known as the Towne Investigative Committee, immediately released a short statement: "We have confirmed that an HPG signal was, in fact, received at 2245 Terran Standard Time this morning. Though we cannot determine where that transmission came from or what information it contained, we do know that it consisted of 2.9825 seconds of data followed by 27.5441 seconds of empty carrier wave. This transmission ended with a spike inconsistent with the normal operation of an HPG, one like no one has ever recorded before."

The secretive group known only as Cerberus later had this to say: "Our members have been watching ComStar for many years, but this is like nothing we have ever seen. Over the past eight months, we have actually picked up a number of stray HPG-like transmissions, and we've confirmed that the Port Howard HPG has made quite a few transmissions of its own, but the station itself is obviously not functioning. And now to get a transmission like this? If indeed the message came from Achernar, and we have no way of verifying whether it did or not—only ComStar can decode the transmission to do that—it represents both a leap forward and a leap backward. Whichever HPG sent that message is probably not in working order anymore. We've never recorded a surge like the one that ended this transmission."

Both organizations provided a great deal of mutually complementary information about the nature of HPG communications. While a hyperpulse generator is required to send communications across the cosmos, one only needs a device capable of picking up a broad bandwidth of signals to receive the HPG transmissions. These transmissions are encoded multiple times with constantly changing algorithms that only ComStar knows, preventing anyone from actually decoding them. A typical HPG transmission will last 30 seconds to a minute, but can carry literally hours of tri-vid, thousands of personal messages, and countless official communiqués.

Each HPG transmission is specifically targeted at a world, but because of every world's rotation, a number of receiving stations are constructed at different locations while satellites likewise act as back-up receivers and help to link the various receiving stations to the main HPG complex, where all of the processing is done. It is because of this fact that individuals and groups with the right kind of equipment can receive these transmissions, and likewise why ComStar uses at least three levels of encryption on the data sent (though the organization refuses to say specifically how much encryption they use or what its quality is).

The transmission that was received this morning was abnormal for many more reasons than just its length and the way it ended. Of primary concern was the fact that the transmission used a relatively narrow band of frequencies, which means it carried very little information. Engineers working with the two organizations also say that the signal was modulated in a nonstandard way. Finally, the carrier signal seemed to drift and vary in amplitude. INN engineers studied these readings and confirmed that there were obvious problems with the signal from the very beginning.

"There were serious problems at the source," said INN Senior Engineer Terek Ko. "It's as if the transmitter wasn't properly aligned or the antenna array tuned. While that in itself doesn't explain why the datastream ended, I could easily see something in the transmitter's finals blowing, causing that spike at the end."

When this story first broke this morning, people around the world were glued to their tri-vids and to the various newsfeeds while police departments quietly called in off-duty officers in case of trouble. Thankfully, from the very beginning, we knew that there were problems with the transmission.

Several hours after the transmission was received, Chief Sacrist Lev Bouzerou held a brief press conference in which he basically verified everything that had already been known, but gave very little additional information. "We did receive a hyperpulse transmission this morning, and I can confirm that it did originate from the Achernar HPG station. The data transmission lasted for almost three seconds before it ended, which it did prematurely and in midstream. We continued to receive a carrier wave for approximately another 30 seconds before it, too, ended. There were a number of irregularities with the transmission, not the least of which was its premature end. Other individuals have already weighed in on what those irregularities were, so I won't bore you with those details. What I do want to emphasize was that this was not a normal transmission, and so it did not contain any traffic. It consisted solely of a telemetry feed from the station and a few test patterns. Our technicians will analyze that feed and we will ultimately send several of them to Achernar to confer with station personnel there.

"This is the first step in the right direction, but we are very obviously quite a ways away from finding a solution to the problem that has been plaguing us all now for almost nine months. I don't want to get anyone's hopes up here. Any speculation on when we will have the HPG network up and running again is premature. As I said earlier this week, even if the Achernar HPG is brought back up soon, it will be months before we can effect the same repairs as they did. We are not giving up, though. We've had people working on the problem since the blackout happened. As soon as we have any more solid information, we will pass it on immediately."

Bouzerau went on to answer questions for almost another hour.

This is just the latest development in a problem that has plagued The Republic of the Sphere, and indeed the entire Inner Sphere, since August of last year. Interstellar trade slowed to almost nothing in the months immediately following the blackout, and many businesses were forced to close their doors. Earlier this week, a DropShip landed with a message for ComStar from Achernar, rumors of which sparked three days of riots, looting, and other violence that local governments are still cleaning up. Thousands were arrested, and Governor Renee Oscar imposed a worldwide curfew in its wake.

### **Towne Log**

+ You know, one would think that after four hundred years that ComStar would know how to fix their machines. I mean, these principles have been in use for how long? There's gotta be manuals lying around somewhere!

:- Sparks

+ That's just what I've been saying all along! ComStar knows how to fix them, but for some reason they can't?! It's someone, or many someones, within ComStar who caused the problems that they now can't conveniently fix. They might be losing billions each day, but they're covering up for someone. We've been hearing rumors from the Periphery for years of other forces on the prowl. Anyone ever heard of the Wolverines? ComStar knows where they are and what they've been doing for the last three hundred years!

:- Hippee

+ That's what I love about you, Hippee. Just when I think I've seen it all, I realize that you've got more where that came from!

:- Pooky

+ Okay, I'm not a neophyte when it comes to radio equipment, but there's got to be something weird going on with the Achernar ComStar techs. I don't think there's any way that they'd screw up something as important as aligning their transmitter and antenna before transmitting. Sure, there's something to be said for oversights here and there, but that's leaving tools behind or forgetting to put that extra layer of insulation over the waveguide. I worked comms on a JumpShip for 10 years before getting my land legs back, and our techies had checklists for everything, just like I did. Sure, those things may be written like a damn bible for the ComStar types, but you gotta know they've got the same thing, even though they're chanting something every time they tighten a screw. Their transmitter didn't "just" cut out, and carrier signals don't just waver all over the place like that without a reason. It was sabotaged or something!

:- Vasily

+ This isn't the work of man. It is the will of God. We've been living too long without Him, and it's now time for us to pay the price. The scriptures prophesied a time of darkness before the coming of the storm and finally the rapture. It is time to find your Savior.

:- Hop4lif

+ This has absolutely nothing to do with religion. God doesn't just make every HPG in the universe stop working. It's a virus or some sort of worm that someone created to do this. The question is, just who has the ability to do that? ComStar, of course. The Word of Blake. That is, if anyone survived. The Clans, but why would they do that? The NAIS, maybe? But the question is still why. It's not like we've heard of any major invasions kicking off. The Inner Sphere is big, but not \*that\* big. Even if something was happening on the Periphery, we'd have heard of it by now.

:- CMike

+ I gotta say you make some good points, CMike. But still and all, there's a lot of people going back to church just to be on the safe side, including me. Some may call it hedging your bets, but it can't hurt . . . and, quite frankly, the more people that do find God, the fewer riots we'll have like earlier this week.

:- PanzerGruppe

+ And considering how long we'll still be cleaning up after those riots, I've got no problem with people learning a little temperance and civility!

:- Chief\_Clancy

## Jurik: Centauri Lancers Coming to Towne

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08/03/3133

PORT HOWARD – Planetary Legate Jonathan Jurik released a statement earlier today to INN through a spokesperson in the Towne Militia command confirming the recent hiring of an element of the famed 21st Centauri Lancers mercenary force to provide additional security near the Port Howard region of Towne. Militia spokeswoman Captain Annabelle Kemiko briefed reporters from the legate’s headquarters pressroom earlier today, reading a statement from Jurik himself.

“In light of recent terrorist activities, such as the bombing of the Gherstwood Mall four months ago, and the rise in military operations in the nearby prefectures,” said Kemiko, “it was determined a prudent course of action, after consultations with Knight-Errant [Kristoff] Erbe, to retain secondary defensive forces in the event of an emergency.”

When asked to elaborate further, Kemiko said only that the mercenary forces consisted of a single lance of BattleMechs with appropriate supporting vehicles and infantry assets, a portion of the Lancer’s total military strength, and that their role would be strictly defensive. When asked for how long the current contract had been purchased and an estimated time of arrival for the mercenary troops, the militia representative declined to comment.

An anonymous source close to the militia command staff, however, informed INN after the legate’s statement, that the hiring of the Lancers’ unit coincides with recent communications traffic among nearby systems and reports from JumpShip commanders that a possible new breakaway faction has entered Prefecture III with an unknown agenda. The identity, strength, and motivations of this new faction remain unclear at this time.

### Towne Log

+ Oh, great! Another conquering army with delusions of grandeur in the neighborhood! Who are they this time? Capellan wannabes? Oriente mercenaries? Ooo! Maybe they’re some new Jade Falcon goons, coming to even some score with the Steel Wolves! Won’t that be fun?

:- FMLurder

+ Hey! What about Steiner loyalists? What if Archon Melissa’s making a play for power?

:- Draco041

+ Bah! Back off on Steiner, Draco. Everyone knows the Commonwealth stood to profit more from the free trade pact they had going on before the HPGs went dark. It’s just not cost-effective for them to invade. (But if they were, you can bet they’d kick everyone’s ass, though!)

:- EISi

+ Right, like any of THAT will ever happen! My bet’s that its really some Great House coming in to finally retake “their” worlds. Probably the Dracs. With all that’s been going on lately, I wouldn’t be surprised if the big boys got involved right about now.

:- WetWillie

+ Remarkably insightful of you, Willie, but of course what worries me is how rapidly we’ve built up this armed camp of ours here. I mean, it was bad enough before when we raised the militia to its largest force size in, well, all of history. Then a small Triarii Protectors detachment just happened to get arrive here as a “goodwill gesture”. Now, we’re hiring mercs? The government knows something more than they’re telling. Notice how even Erbe and Jurik were no-shows at that briefing?

:- PeaceOut

+ I can’t believe we’re hiring mercs. Have we learned nothing? Stone must be sick to his stomach...or more likely rolling over in his grave.

:- Chomper42

+ What’s so scary about wanting to hedge our bets, PO? The neutral pacifist line only gets us so far, and then it gets us killed. Look around on the nets; Towne is one of the few worlds in the region with a working HPG – that alone makes us a target.

:- CMike

+ So, you suggest we nuke the HPG, and Towne loses all its value to an attacker, perhaps? Maybe we should shut it down, then!

:- GreasL

+ Right. A one-way ticket to the dark age is just what the doctor ordered! (rolls eyes)

:- EISi

+ The dark age is upon us, infidels! But rest assured, the worthy shall be redeemed when Devlin Stone returns to save us all!

:- Hop4Evr

+ I see someone forgot his meds today again....

:- FMLurder

## Duke Aaron Sandoval: Where He Leads, Others Follow

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08/04/3133

TIKOGRAĐ, TIKONOV—Throughout these months of strife and turmoil, there are a few notable figures who have remained steadfastly calm in the face of adversity. Perhaps the most rock solid has been Duke Aaron Sandoval, Lord Governor of The Republic's Prefecture IV.

From the moment ComStar's HPG network mysteriously went down, Lord Governor Sandoval has remained a solid leader of his people without falling prey to the terror and panic like other Governors and military leaders.

"My friends, this is just another test that God has placed in front of us," he said in an address to the people of Tikonov in early August. "But it is one that we can best, for we are strong. But we will pull through only if we can work together, if we can put aside our fears and prejudices to do for what is best for all. It is clear that we may have to make sacrifices if this blackout continues for much longer. But I am confident that you have the strength to endure this, for we have all survived far worse."

Statements such as those are a staple of Sandoval, who throughout his political career has been seen as a strong and competent leader. Even his political adversaries acknowledge him as a principled man who bends to no one. Of course, little more could be expected from this scion of the Sandoval line, a key family in interstellar politics since the days of the original Star League.

The Lord Governor started his political life early, typical of anyone growing up within the Sandoval family, and doubly so for anyone named after a one-time Duke of Robinson and FedSuns March Lord. Though trained as a MechWarrior, he ultimately followed in his father's footsteps—and his family's calling—and sojourned in the political battlefields of The Republic, in rapid succession being selected as first the Governor of Addicks and then the Lord Governor of Prefecture IV. Even more amazing was his relative youth: He was appointed Lord Governor at the age of 29, taking responsibility for the welfare of billions of people long before most even start their own families.

There are those who say that he won the position of Addick's Governor solely on the strength of his family's name—his father had, of course, ruled Addicks for some two decades, during which time he had become known as one of that world's most popular leaders. But Duke Aaron's continued advancement was won solely on the merits of his own deeds. In the almost five years since he took the position, his popularity among the people has only grown, and even now, in a time when most individuals are losing confidence in their elected leaders, Lord Governor Sandoval's approval rating continues to climb, if ever so slowly.

The reasons are, of course, quite clear.

"I can't think of another politician who's been so dedicated to his people. Even counting Devlin Stone," said Zeljko Kippic, himself a retired Governor and now Director of Information for RonStar, an interstellar marketing and public relations firm. "The minute he stepped into office, he took the proverbial bull by the horns and began to make changes. As Governor of Addicks, he put those centuries of family contacts to use and brought a trade surplus to his world, without offending any of the Governors inside his own prefecture. And when he stepped up to lead Prefecture IV? Just in the last year, he's made interstellar news with the deals he's brokered."

Kippic was, of course, referring to the trade deals that Sandoval announced earlier this year, just before the communications blackout that nearly brought life within The Republic to a grinding halt. But those were just the latest in a long string of political victories that the Lord Governor has experienced. Within weeks of his appointment as Lord Governor, he set out on a tour of the prefecture when, instead of meeting with political kingmakers and the leaders of the prefecture's megacorporations, he met with the common man on the street. He held town meetings in which the citizens could talk to him and ask him questions directly. He arranged meetings with small business owners and local leaders so that he could find out what they needed without having to wade through the personal politics attached to reports generated by others.

These grass-roots tactics garnered him what one analyst termed "big-time brownie points" with the public. He never backed down from the hard questions and never gave what another analyst called a "politician's answer."

"He has his own personal views and beliefs, and he wasn't afraid to tell his people what they were," said Kippic. "We've already seen the autobiography from Rupert Crenshaw, in which he says that the Lord Governor's advisors thought him mad for speaking his mind so plainly, and began to line up new jobs before they even got their first poll back. And when they did, Crenshaw literally did have a heart attack."

Perhaps the following excerpt from Crenshaw's book is the most telling: "Everyone was talking at once. The speechwriting staff was working on bites they could work into his next appearances while the strategists were trying to figure out how we could get on the side of the big businesses. I remember someone screaming 'we can say that he had a stroke' at the top of his lungs. Then Abby [Zaffson, Sandoval's press secretary] walked in with the strangest look on her face, and I could feel the muscles around my heart contracting. The last thing I remember before waking up in the hospital was her saying '[deleted] 69 percent.'"

This 69 percent was the highest approval rating for any Lord Governor of any prefecture, and rather than decrease, it continued to rise. After his first tour of the prefecture, Sandoval held a two-week-long meeting with the very corporate leaders he had first snubbed; this ultimately led to dozens of official agreements between the participants. And those agreements resulted in dozens more contracts that brought trillions into the prefecture.

Only Jacob Bannson, Founder and CEO of Bannson Universal Unlimited, and an outspoken critic of the Lord Governor, refused to attend. The two have apparently been political enemies ever since, especially after Sandoval backed a Senate antitrust plan that seemingly singled out Bannson's corporation.

But Bannson is not the Lord Governor's only opposition. Katana Tormark, Prefect of neighboring Prefecture III, is perhaps Sandoval's most notable opponent, but even she is unable to do more than question his true motivations. On more than one occasion she's called him a "Davion puppet," and seems to question his lineage and loyalties at every possible opportunity.

But Sandoval answered those charges on the day he took the office of Lord Governor. "My family has ruled the Draconis March for more than five hundred years. Of course I have a vested interest in the Federated Suns. But my loyalties ultimately lie with you, those who depend upon me for their livelihood. And I will do everything I can to give you everything you deserve and to shield you from the dangers that lurk around the corner."

Since the communications blackout, most political leaders seemingly went underground—but not Sandoval. He has done everything but hide his head in the sand. He has traveled throughout the prefecture, visiting worlds hardest hit by the panic. He has even gone so far as to visit the war-torn world of Ankaa, bringing with him much-needed medical supplies and personnel to assist in cleanup and reconstruction, and has made plans to travel to New Rhodes III. He has also made a visit to Addicks, where war also hit.

The Lord Governor is constantly looking toward the future, and the people know that. His approval rating continues to be the highest of any political figure in The Republic of the Sphere. And while his detractors are accusing him of everything from starting the conflicts that have ravaged his worlds to the darkness that overtook humanity in the wake of the Amaris coup, Sandoval remains untouchable.

### Towne Log

+ Talk about a load of Davion crap! I thought the press was supposed to be equal and fair, not shameless shills for an obvious traitor!  
:- Troian

+ What's your problem? Afraid to see the truth? Aaron Sandoval has done nothing but work to bring more money and more jobs into this prefecture. I've never seen any politician work as hard for as long as he has. Where are the rest of our so-called leaders? Kev Rosse is apparently having a hard enough time dealing with the problems on just a handful of worlds; he can't detail his MechWarriors to assist in the cleanup. And in Prefecture III? Katana Tormark has gone rogue. Tara Campbell is cleaning up Tormark's mess, and just who is the Governor of that prefecture? Where is he? I don't see anyone else who is stepping up to be an actual leader.  
:- Goobs86

+ I agree with Goobs. We're lucky to have a man like Aaron Sandoval working for us. I'd hate to see where we'd be if he weren't our Governor.  
:- Akeo

+ Amazing how the writer just glossed over Sandoval's connections with House Davion, isn't it? The man has made half a dozen trips into the Federated Suns since he took office, two of them to New Avalon and two more to Robinson. There's something to be said for visiting one's relatives, but this is something more. I've seen figures that point to tens of thousands of work visas granted to Federated Suns citizens, and hundreds of unregistered cargo shipments have come into the prefecture, primarily to Tikonov, Sheratan, and Achernar. And what of the Swordsworn? The story didn't even bring up their existence, or the fact that Sandoval is their leader. And what they did to Ankaa and New Rhodes. Just who do you think gave the order to hit those worlds? And where do you think all of those troops came from? The man is fighting a war against his own people.  
:- FMLurder

+ We've known who his family is since he came onto the political scene. He never tried to hide that, and he's always been forthcoming about his trips into the Federated Suns, just as he has been about those trips into the Draconis Combine and on every other visit he's made. The man has single-handedly brought more business and more money to our worlds than anyone else has since The Republic was formed. Who cares if those monies came from the Federated Suns. Hell, it was because of his family connections that he was able to make those deals. Are you willing to give back all those billions in trade? :-CMike

+ I don't want it if it's blood money.  
:- Fight4Lif

+ Obviously, we're talking to someone who's not a citizen here, so let me clue you in to something. Freedom is neither free nor an inalienable human right. It's obvious that you're not willing to fight for your freedom, or the freedom of others. It's also obvious that you don't appreciate what others do for you, especially our leaders. Governor Sandoval has done nothing but bring peace and prosperity to our worlds, and you call his efforts "blood money?" Show some damn gratitude!  
:- CMike



## Touring the Stars with Bertram Habeas

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08/06/3133

*We began on Terra, millions of years ago. Today, mankind stretches throughout the Milky Way, touching worlds as far from our home as Clan space, more than two thousand light-years distant. Yet who are we, really? What have we become in our relentless push outward and onward? I'm Bertram Habeas, and tonight we'll find the answers to these and many other fascinating questions together, as we tour the stars!*

### Volume XIV: Honor and Tradition – The Ways of the Falcon

From the Falcons' Clan Council Chamber, a great 17-story dome on Sudeten, the warrior caste rules more than 40 worlds with the near-absolute authority of martial law. The Clan Council represents a system of legislation and jurisprudence that extends back to the days of Nicholas Kerensky himself, almost unchanged since the start of Golden Century.

Since conquering these worlds eight decades ago, the Jade Falcons have focused their energies on remaking these various worlds, with their various native governments, in their own image. Today, though the region is still called an occupation zone, there are few inhabitants who recall a time when the Falcon's flag did not fly overhead, when the currency was not the C-Bill or the kroner, when they did not live in the rigidly structured caste society of the Clans. Many of them, with the mercantile heritage of the Lyran Commonwealth behind them, became merchants themselves in the new order, as have their progeny. Others became laborers, and still others had the mental gifts to become scientists or technicians. Their descendants have continued to serve the Clan ever since, born into a society their forebears had thrust upon them, forbidden to learn of their past except through Clan-approved media sources.

A privileged and gifted few, however, became warriors, and today a significant portion of the Jade Falcon's martial strength now includes the freeborn heritage of these captured peoples. But even today, thanks to the strict beliefs of the Jade Falcon Clan, virtually no native-born warrior exists who can claim a Bloodname, or a vote in the Clan Council.

*Nowhere but in their hallowed eugenics program are the Clans so opposed to change, and there is no Clan in which such opposition is so strident than the Jade Falcons. Though exceptions to the rule have emerged from time to time – such as the case of the freeborn warrior, Diana Pryde – such exceptions were flukes, and caused tremendous uproar within the Clan in order to allow them even once. Like a cancer, this bone of contention has waxed and waned within Clan Jade Falcon. At times this matter has lain completely dormant, with such events rarely occurring, and barely tolerated, but with each infrequent instance when a freebirth is allowed to participate in a Trial of Bloodright (even if the warrior fails in the bid) the uproar once again rocks the foundation of Falcon traditions. In one such case, in fact, such uproar even led to the downfall of a Khan. How long can the Falcons ignore this issue and survive more such traumas, one must wonder? Or will they face it, sooner or later, and cut it forever from their flesh?*

--Dr. Lorenzo Torres, PhD., Professor of History, University of Thorin

The freeborn/trueborn issue thus takes on whole new meaning for Clan Jade Falcon than it does for other, more flexible Clans. Effectively speaking, the chances for any freeborn ever to become part of the eugenics program or earn a Bloodname (and with it, the right to vote) is related to how much "trueborn blood" flows through his or her veins, and even then, he or she had better be a truly exceptional warrior to boot. With none of that going for the average native descendant of the Jade Falcon OZ, the chances of a "home grown" Bloodname holder drops so low it doesn't even register mathematically.

The traditionalism of Clan Jade Falcon is almost legendary, extending from the six Trials of combat to the other rites and traditions that take on almost religious overtones in this Clan. The rite of surkai, for instance, offers a ritualized method to atone for one's errors. As the successful conclusion of a Trial provides a final resolution to any conflict by Clan law, so does willingly practicing surkai, which may involve any manner of self-punishment from fasting to self-mutilation, depending upon the severity of the crime. In rare instances, the offer of surkai may be refused by the wronged party, a decision that may then result in a Trial of Grievance. But for the Jade Falcons, their strong sense of personal honor and the sacredness of this rite has ensured that most who invoke it do so with the utmost respect and sincerity.

The rituals of Adoption and Abjuration are two other important rites acknowledged by all Clans, but practiced most piously by Jade Falcon. Essentially two sides of the same coin, the Adoption is the ceremonial acceptance of a new warrior into the ranks of the Clan, while the Abjuration rite expels troublesome individuals or groups.

Falcon children, trained from birth to become warriors, often experience the Ritual of Adoption shortly before their first Trial of Position in the warrior caste, while bondsmen captured during battle – in those uncommon cases where they are deemed worthy – undertake a similar rite before regaining their warrior status as abtakha. In either case, the adoptee must face a test of courage (such as running toward the blade of an outstretched katana) and one of strength (such as personal combat with a challenger symbolically opposing the adoption) to complete the ceremony and symbolize the individual's acceptance into the ranks of the warrior caste. A formal Trial of Position then ratifies the ceremony, providing physical proof of the candidate's martial skills.

The Ritual of Abjuration allows the Clan to peacefully eliminate disruptive or shameful elements from within the Clan without wasteful combat, and is generally invoked by the civilian castes. Essentially similar to a court trial, the offender or offenders are sentenced to exile, and are expected to depart within a specified time, leaving all Clan equipment behind. Offenders who remain past the exile date may then be killed as an invader to the Clan. The abjured may appeal with a Trial of Refusal, but would be doing so on borrowed time, as a loss in such a Trial leaves him or her closer to the deadline stated in the original ritual.

But today, not all traditions are held as sacred as these rites and rituals. Tempered by defeat at the hands of the Inner Sphere barbarians they so long sought to conquer, and by what many within the Clan have viewed as treachery by their fellow Clans, Jade Falcon reserves the honor of fair combat – zellbrigen – only for their own kind.

*For the cultures of the Inner Sphere, whose populations are not driven by the rigid principles of this warrior society, the concept of Clan battle customs might seem trivial, but for Jade Falcon, they are a defining truth of the universe. Nicholas Kerensky believed that war could not be taken out of humanity, and so sought to control it by transforming it into a ritual – a clearly defined arbiter of success and progress. To that end, he came up with the Trials and the concept of zellbrigen, reducing all military affairs to clean one-on-one duels far from civilians or properties of value.*

*The Jade Falcons, like all the invading Clans, soon realized that the Inner Sphere wouldn't honor such principles, but it took almost two decades before they resorted to similar tactics en masse. For them, such a move was sickening, another sign of barbarity they sought to destroy. Council meetings and internal Trials were fought over how far these "tactical necessities" would be allowed to "infect" the Clan. Even today, the question of "how far must we sink to win?" has become a rallying cry for countless Falcon warriors, who see constant contact with the Inner Sphere as an ongoing corruption of the Clan soul.*

*Now, ask yourself this: If you felt the universe around you had forced you to become something you truly abhor – and you are actually introspective enough to realize that – how would you react?*

--Dr. Lanz Rettig, PhD., Professor of Inner Sphere History, University of Academia, Kessel

Tradition and honor define the Clans, and for Jade Falcon, they are as all important as the principles of any religion mankind ever held dear. They combine to form a Clan that is both strong and proud, and provide a sense of cultural identity that goes beyond the mere "might makes right" philosophy of the Clans. A sense of destiny still drives these proud people, but what is that destiny? Join us next time as we explore the hopes and dreams of the Jade Falcon Clan.

Join us for part three of our four-part look at Jade Falcon, to see how this Clan of honor and tradition contributed to the highlights of the 31st century. Please join us as we continue our tour of the stars! I'm Bertram Habeas.

## Republic, Commonwealth Sign Historic Trade Agreement

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08/11/3133

GENEVA, TERRA—After months of talks, including ten weeks of intense back-and-forth negotiations on Terra, yesterday Republic Exarch Damien Redburn signed an historic long-term trade agreement with Lyran Commonwealth Ambassador Wilhelm Steiner.

Exarch Redburn appeared alongside Ambassador Steiner for a press conference just minutes after the signing ceremony. Said the Exarch, “We have had a long history of close relations, both diplomatic and economic, with our friends within the Lyran Commonwealth. This agreement simply represents the natural progression in that relationship.”

Ambassador Steiner had similar sentiments. “This agreement is nothing more than the official recognition of a prosperous interstellar trade that our two nations have had with each other for quite a long time. We have always had open and free borders with each other. It just took us this long to codify that.”

The agreement, which some insiders say weighs in at several thousand printed pages, opens The Republic’s borders to almost anything the Lyran Commonwealth may want to ship into our nation and likewise keeps the door open for trade the other way. There are, of course, conditions, riders and more legalese to codify the rules and regulations for this trade, but supporters all agree that this treaty will do nothing but benefit The Republic.

In an exclusive INN interview following the signing ceremony, the Exarch had this to say. “Our nation, like every other, was hit hard by the loss of the HPG network. Interstellar trade nearly ground to a halt, and that hurt us terribly. We may be the seat of Humanity, but even we still rely upon selling our goods and resources to worlds throughout the Inner Sphere, and beyond. We have been hurt by the events of the past year, but this agreement is a clear signal that we are on our way to healing those wounds.”

But what of detractors’ statements about the agreement? Many believe that this agreement will open the doors wide for the Commonwealth and result in a trade deficit that will bankrupt our already weakened economy, inviting in Lyran business to take over what they couldn’t possibly conquer through military action. Senator Warren Halverson, backed by ten of The Republic’s Senators, attempted to block this agreement with all their might, but in the end, especially with the Exarch’s vocal support, the treaty passed in the Senate.

Senator Halverson hasn’t been dissuaded from his opposition, though. “This agreement is a time bomb ready to explode. Already Lyran interests have invaded our nation and taken advantage of our devastated economy. They’re buying up land at cut-rate prices and extending lines of credit to businessmen driven to desperation by near-bankruptcy. The only thing this agreement will ensure is that the Steiners will own our nation before the end of the decade.”

If Senator Halverson represents the opposition, Senator Ross Kain, Chairman of the Senate Trade Subcommittee, is one of its greatest supporters. “We’ve argued the basics of this agreement [in the subcommittee] for more than half a year, and spent the better part of two months hammering out the legal wording before signing off on it. Our only concern is for our citizens, and I think we’ve more than protected the people of this great nation from any potential hazards. I’ve heard some individuals call this a minefield. I think it’s more like a map through the minefield.”

So what will this trade agreement do for us?

Well, first off it virtually eliminates the tariffs on all Republic goods shipped into the Lyran Commonwealth and likewise eliminates tariffs on most Lyran goods imported into the Republic. Certain goods, like military hardware and some restricted substances, would still have governmental license fees applied, but for the most part the border would be opened. Likewise, citizens traveling abroad within the Commonwealth will have an easier time of it at border stops and will find their taxes on most transactions reduced significantly.

Both governmental and private analysts agree that this treaty will bring a boon to The Republic within the next twelve to eighteen months. In the short term, The Republic will see a four or fivefold increase in exports to the Commonwealth, as the reduction in tariffs brings prices on our goods down below other nations’ products, especially when transportation costs are factored in. Our worlds are among the most heavily populated in the Inner Sphere, but are also resource rich. Many worlds export far more than they import, a fact that will only serve to increase the profits from this agreement. The treaty also considerably lowers the barriers for businesses from both nations to set up divisions within the other, potentially bringing even more Lyran money into the Republic.

But detractors concentrate on the flip side of this agreement. They argue that The Republic’s borders are now wide open to millions of Lyran capitalists, intent on one goal and one goal only: owning The Republic of the Sphere. The Commonwealth has always had a much more robust economy than The Republic, or any other Inner Sphere nation for that matter, and has managed to weather the economic depression of the last year with little difficulty. As Senator Halverson alluded to, thousands of Republic businesses, facing the prospect of bankruptcy and turned down by creditors here within The Republic of the Sphere, have turned to Lyran bankers, who in turn have been more than happy to lend money to these beleaguered businessmen at decent interest rates.

And what are the results of these cross-border loans?

Unfortunately, not good for many Republic businesses. So far there has been no exact numbers, but it seems that Commonwealth interests have called in quite a few credit markers and gained the assets of scores of bankrupt Republic

businesses in the process. More chilling to the opponents of this trade deal is that these Lyran bankers are reportedly selling the assets off to interests from their own nation, keeping the money "all in the family," so to speak, and leaving Republic businessmen high and dry.

At the same time, the Lyrans are already shipping hundreds of millions of tons of goods into The Republic, many with price tags that undercut similar home-grown products. Entire convoys of cargo DropShips are reportedly sitting just on the other side of the Commonwealth-Republic border, waiting for the trade agreement to go into affect (and, of course, for enough JumpShips to transport them into The Republic). Likewise, more than a hundred major Lyran corporations have applied for permits to conduct business within The Republic, business that will now be significantly less expensive to conduct thanks to the trade agreement.

"I can't believe the Exarch had the incredible short-sightedness to sign that damnable agreement," said Roderick Han, former President and CEO of the now-bankrupt T.C. Enterprises, a one-time major supplier of navigation computers to shipyards throughout the Inner Sphere. "First the Senate refused to authorize the short-term emergency loans they are legally required to provide in times of emergency, and now they hand over the keys to the house, so to speak. I have shipments worth well over two billion C-bills sitting in warehouses right now because the communications blackout prevented us from getting payment transferred to us. When the Senate refused to authorize short-term loans, we had to go to other sources to get the capital we needed to stay open, and the Lyrans were the only ones willing to make the loans. Now that they've called in the markers, and with this damn agreement in place, they get to liquidate our assets at ridiculous prices. Semier Data Tron on Tharkad now gets to buy up five years worth of stock at a quarter its value. You tell me who's benefiting here."

On the other hand, it's not just Lyran Commonwealth businesses that are benefiting from the economic depression that has hit The Republic. Jacob Bannson has made similar deals that in just the past three months have brought a dozen medium to large companies under his corporation's banner, with dozens more sitting on the potential chopping block, further increasing his own fortune and prestige. Likewise, Bannson, and a number of other Republic businessmen, are taking as much advantage of the opening of the Lyran border as the Lyrans are. Which means that the jury's still out on whether the trade agreement is a good thing.

So what should we do?

"This agreement gives us all the chance to get back to a state of normalcy," says Exarch Redburn, "and before any of the other nations can. We have an incredible opportunity here, but we all must have the confidence to take that opportunity and turn it into a reality."

### **Towne Log**

+ Somebody's living in a fantasy world here. We're already hemorrhaging cash to the Lyrans, and instead of using a tourniquet, the Exarch made the slash larger. Just who is he really working for? This is the first big move he's made since the blackout, and he's just given away the keys to the kingdom.

:- Chungabunga

+ For the first time in my life, I'm speechless. If this is a prelude of things to come, this entire nation is screwed. Chunga's right. We're just bleeding C-bills into the Commonwealth.

:- PanzerGruppe

+ What you're seeing is just the reactionaries. This thing will be good for us in the long run. Think of it this way: out of everyone in the Inner Sphere, the Lyrans have the most money and the best economy. If we're going to hitch our wagon to anyone, it ought to be to them. And we've got resources that they need, natural resources, that they'll now get for cheaper – and before you go there, they're going to get them for cheaper because all those extra taxes have been cut. Because they can get them cheaper here, they'll buy more. The more they buy, the more they spend. The more they spend, the more money we make. The more we make, the more taxes we pay. The more taxes we pay, the more the government makes, suddenly making up for all those taxes that got cut. And the more we make, the more we spend – preferably within The Republic – and the even more we make. The wonders of trickle-down economics.

:- CMike

+ Don't tell me you buy into that! Trickle down economics is a fantasy invented by a bunch of fascists looking for a reason to spend more money on conquering their so-called enemies. The Exarch just allowed the Steiners to do something they've been trying to do since The Republic was formed. But he's been in bed with them for years. He just needed the right time to spring his trick.

:- Hippee

+ Oh, boy, not again... Next thing you know, FM is going to go off on some sort of uber-conspiracy between ComStar, the Steiners and Clan Wolverine. Pretty soon, a dozen regiments of black 'Mechs piloted by genetically enhanced ants will drop on Terra and declare it their queen-hive-home.

:- Goobs86

+ So, if we assume CMike is right about the trickle thing and that Hippee is insane, there's still the thing about the Lyran bankers. They've been trying to get into The Republic for years. Decades, really. And this agreement opened the door for them. Hippee is right about that (but that only!). So we've got an almost immediate deficit direct to the Lyran coffers that we've gotta make back up. That's the hard part of it all.

:- Kemo

+ Well, who knows, this could turn out to be a good move. It may well open up some new avenues into the Commonwealth. And maybe Bannson can slap them around a bit on their own turf... nothing wrong with that, if you ask me. We know they're going to try to take advantage of this, and if we do, Redburn sure does. And if he knows, then he's got a plan. And if he's got a plan, then my worries are pretty much gone.  
:- Pooky

## Touring the Stars with Bertram Habeas

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08/13/3133

*We began on Terra, millions of years ago. Today, mankind stretches out among the stars of the Milky Way, touching thousands of worlds, as far from our home as Clan space, more than 2,000 light years distant. Yet who are we, really? What have we become in our relentless push outward and onward? I'm Bertram Habeas, and tonight, let's find the answers to these many other fascinating questions together, as we tour the stars!*

### Volume XV: The Falcon's Flight

*"This day, fellow Khans, will be remembered years from now as the dawning of mankind's rebirth... We are returning; we are the sun of righteousness that will illuminate those who dream of peace, and burn to ashes the demons and devils responsible for the darkness."*

- Khan Elias Crichell, to the Clan Grand Council, November 3048

If one were to ask any Jade Falcon what one single event defined the Jade Falcon Clan, the answer would be Operation Revival, the Clan invasion of the Inner Sphere. No other event, they say, comes close – not even the Jihad, or the Clan Civil Wars that soon followed. To the warriors of this proud and traditional Clan, Revival was the inevitable culmination of three centuries in preparations toward a goal that many in the Clans believe was divinely preordained. When the Falcon and Smoke Jaguar Khans finally swayed the Grand Council to that fateful "go vote" in 3048, it was the realization of destiny, the return to the hallowed worlds lost to the ancestors of the Clans. The time had finally come for the barbarians who tarnished the name of the Star League to face the just fruits of their decadent labors.

For the Jade Falcons, it was a homecoming that was long, long overdue.

By June of 3049, the Jade Falcons joined with the Clans Ghost Bear, Smoke Jaguar, and Wolf for the trek across more than a thousand light years, loaded with the best troops three centuries of selective breeding and brutal, birth-to-death training could forge. A year later, the Falcon flag flew over 26 systems once belonging to the Federated Commonwealth, and a host of Periphery worlds. By the time of the Tukayyid Truce in 3052, 19 more would fall, establishing a sliver of space today still known as the Jade Falcon Occupation Zone.

In just two years of fighting, the Clans overwhelmed nearly a full quarter of the Inner Sphere, forever changing a map that had remained virtually static since the collapse of the Star League (excepting the formation of the Federated Commonwealth and Free Rasalhague Republic, of course). The battles were fierce, with Jade Falcon officers bidding against one another for the right to claim each world with the least casualties, the trying to overcome the defending forces without resorting to the "barbaric" tactics of the Inner Sphere. Falcon warriors commented time and again on the ease of their victories, and dismissed as aberrations the very few defeats they suffered. One Star Admiral even summed up the sentiments by scoffing calls from other Clan leaders for caution as the invasion dragged on: "...We are the Clans," he said. "We shall triumph in the name of the Star League. Caution? Let us throw caution to the Wolves..."

For the Jade Falcons, the 15-year truce won by ComStar at the Battle of Tukayyid was a cataclysmic end to their way of life, and as many would tell you the invasion defined their Clan, those same people would proclaim that fateful 21-day proxy battle for Terra as the turning point. After Tukayyid, nothing would ever be the same for the Clan, and among such staunch traditionalists, change was death. The Battle of Tukayyid was at once the Falcons' finest hour and its blackest day, with victory so near, yet so unforgivably far. Those who fell that day were heroes, fighting for the Clan; those who did not were failures who seethed with rage for a fate denied them.

*Remember those events that brought us these fifteen years of shame.  
But remember also those who fell to restore the glorious Star League.  
Above all, remember the blood legacy of Aidan Pryde, child of Kerensky;  
He made the final sacrifice so that the Clan could continue.  
For eternity, we shall praise him; in fifteen years, we shall avenge him.*

-- *The Remembrance* (Clan Jade Falcon), Passage 417, 29:74-79

In the wake of their historic defeat, the Falcon leaders sought every means possible to repudiate the Tukayyid Truce. Rumors to this day even persist that then-Khan Vandervahn Chistu authorized a covert mission by a "bandit" force to raid the Inner Sphere, heading past the truce line, not only to demonstrate Inner Sphere inferiority, but to shatter the tenuous peace. They championed the fall of ilKhan Ulric Kerensky, and fell upon the Wolves in the so-called Refusal War, claiming a Pyrrhic victory. Even in the effort to avoid Absorption by another Clan in their weakened state, the Jade Falcons assailed the Lyran planet Coventry, a conflict that had the collected leaders of the Inner Sphere bracing for all-out war.

Under Khan Marthe Pryde, these years even saw a change in the Falcons' vaunted rigidity. The Trial of Position for the newest generation of warriors was now a live-field kill of a Spheroid opponent, rather than the ritualized and controlled arena-like battlefield environment. Freeborns rose in stature to fill the ranks of a depleted Touman. The most monumental allowance was the allowance of a freeborn warrior to claim a hallowed Bloodname. Some hailed these years as an age of progress for the Falcons, but warriors a generation later would see these events merely as necessary evils, and further proof of the corrupting influence of the Inner Sphere. This cycle continues to this day, with the debate among the Falcons of whether freebirths have the right to participate in a Trial of Bloodright as hotly contested as it was almost a century ago.

*It's hard, I imagine, for anyone in the Inner Sphere to understand the Jade Falcons because their concept of tradition is just so strong. Anything that forces them to change or deviate from what they regard as the will of Kerensky is resented. Where people on Inner Sphere worlds would hail the events of the late 3050s and 3060s as a time of change and growth – especially after the ejection of the Steel Vipers, who briefly shared their occupation zone when they were called in to reinforce the invasion – the Falcons themselves felt they had tarnished their own reputation. Passages in the Remembrance during that era are filled with bile and disgust, all aimed at the Inner Sphere or Clan Wolf, the two main influences on the Khan's decisions. And even though the Falcons did their part and helped the coalition under Devlin Stone resist the Word of Blake Jihad, the Clan clearly felt that the entire affair was the Inner Sphere's own just rewards for their corruption and power lust..*

--Sean Lasko, PhD, Professor of Clan Society and Politics, University of Thorin.

The fires of the Jihad left none untouched, not even the Jade Falcon Clan. Blakist terror agents and strike forces loyal to the fanatics appeared in the Clan's territory, waging a war on civilian and warrior castes alike, using underhanded tactics and weapons not seen even during the invasion of the Inner Sphere almost twenty years before. At the same time, Clan Wolf lunged forward soon after the original Truce of Tukayyid expired, launching a "liberation" of the Inner Sphere worlds now terrorized by the Word, and cutting off the Falcon corridor toward Terra. More insult to injury came when Clan Hell's Horses arrived from the home worlds en masse, their forces rolling over the weaker garrisons of both the Falcon and Wolf occupation zones. Though they would later on help to repel the Ice Hellion Encroachment, the Falcons and the Horses remain at odds today.

Then came what some experts have called the Homeworlds Civil War. Evidence does not prove conclusively what truly happened in the Clan homeworlds – or even if it was a civil war at all – but many have speculated about it ever since. The events surrounding what has, in effect, cut the Invading Clans off from their roots on Strana Mechty, remain a mystery, but enough clues have been revealed in the decades since to suggest some mass combat took place out there. Whatever happened, some say, was far more devastating, than even the so-called Wars of Possession of the 3060s, which followed the loss of the Ghost Bears, Nova Cats, and Smoke Jaguars from Clan space. Even the Jade Falcon Remembrance says little of this mysterious, yet monumental event, save to promise Falcons will one day return to those lost worlds and bring enlightenment back to their "lost brethren", just as they claim they have returned to the Inner Sphere.

In our final installment on the Jade Falcons, we will look at the Clan today, after the upheavals of the Jihad, and the Trials that followed. Please join us as we continue our tour of the stars! I'm Bertram Habeas.

## Touring the Stars with Bertram Habeas

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08/20/3133

*We began on Terra, millions of years ago. Today, mankind stretches out among the stars of the Milky Way, touching thousands of worlds, as far from our home as Clan space, more than 2,000 light years distant. Yet who are we, really? What have we become in our relentless push outward and onward? I'm Bertram Habeas, and tonight, let's find the answers to these many other fascinating questions together, as we tour the stars!*

### Volume XVI: Turkina's Chosen – Clan Jade Falcon Today

**Fact Sheet:** Clan Jade Falcon Occupation Zone

**Founding Year:** 3050

**Capital (City, World):** Hammarr, Sudeten

**National Symbol:** A jade falcon, clutching a katana, soaring against a blue and gray rectangular field.

**Location (Terra relative):** Coreward, between Lyran Commonwealth and Clan Wolf

**Total (Inhabited) Systems:** 44

**Estimated Population (3130):** 145,200,000,000

**Government:** Clan (Caste-driven, Warrior-dominant hierarchy)

**Ruler:** Khan Jana Pryde

**Dominant Language(s):** English (official)

**Dominant Religion(s):** None

**Unit of Currency:** Kerensky (1 kerensky = 5.13 C-Bills)

The city of Borealtown, on the planet Wotan, is a sprawling metropolis located on a large hill in the middle of the Boreal Heights. The view, on a clear day, is nothing short of breathtaking, overlooking not only some of the finest examples of 31st-century architecture, but an almost unspoiled valley below. Off to the east, on the shores of the large Lake Borea, one can just barely make out the towers of Oslo, the city that is home of the Jade Falcon Occupation Zone's largest MiningMech producer, a Clan-run factory once known as Wotan Mining Systems.

Today, Borealtown basks in the glow of its noon-day sun in eerie silence, the streets empty, save for a few utility vehicles and the odd merchant or warrior caste guardsman. Several sections of the city are little more than empty warehouses or patches of rubble. The largest structure is an administrative building, a half-domed complex over ten stories high, bearing the green broad-winged insignia of Clan Jade Falcon. This structure can hold over two thousand Clansmen easily, but today, a mere 57 laborers, technicians, and administrators perform their daily duties within.

The signs that Borealtown was once the heart of the Jade Falcon empire remain just evident enough to give a visitor the impression that he is standing in a ghost town. The site of a brutal, final battle between the Jade Falcons and the Wolves during the Refusal War, at which the Falcons ultimately claimed victory, this city was ravaged, but the waste-conscious Clan saw to its renovation and revitalization. Once centrally located in the Occupation Zone, the Hell's Horses invasion and the aftermath of the Jihad placed this world perilously close to one hostile border, and too far from the others to coordinate defense. Forced to relocate, the Falcon leadership moved its command centers to Sudeten.

Though this world no longer has the prominence it once did, the Falcons still station heavy guard here. Like all Clans, sharing a handful of worlds with oft-hostile neighbors for centuries has taught them to make the most of every square meter of soil, no matter how inhospitable or mundane. In and around the cities of Borealtown and Oslo, automated turrets lazily track every vehicle moving along the highways, and Elemental foot soldiers make irregular patrols. Occasionally, a pair of Donar assault helicopters fly overhead, backed up from time to time by a pair of Ares medium strike tanks.

More recently, the shorelines of Lake Borea, north of Oslo, felt the tremors of a BattleMech's footfalls, when a mixed force of Jade Falcon troops squared off against a Hell's Horses vehicle Star. The prize of this Trial of Possession: the contents of Oslo's IndustrialMech warehouses. Though the battle was intense, with no less than seventeen warriors killed or wounded from both sides, witnesses – most of them Falcon technicians – say the action was just a shadow of the greatness that once characterized Clan Trials.

"It was as if the warriors were merely actors upon a stage," said Myomer Specialist Rusl, who claims that he washed out of the Clan's strict training protocols. "They played at war, but there was no heart in it, for either side. Naturally, the Falcons carried the day, but even the Horses seemed to regard the challenge as a mere formality."

"This is what decades of imposed peace bring the Clans," said Marek, a third-level Actuator Specialist employed at the same facility as Rusl. "We engage in wasteful, empty Trials, as Spheroid barbarians watch and laugh, forgetting what it was like in the days when the Falcon soared over all, when BattleMechs marched across the plains of dozens of worlds, trampling all who would oppose them. The Inner Sphere forgets just how nearly victory lay within our grasp."

They are the words and thoughts of a frustrated people, a people trained for war, yet hamstrung by peace. The familiar pressures of the citizens, the lower castes, to whom Kerensky implied the warriors were beholden, once more rise up in anguish. Though it is a voice colored by those native to the Inner Sphere itself, that voice once more cries out against the Inner Sphere.

And it is a voice that is growing ever louder...



In the nearly empty city of Borealtown, people from all castes gather tonight, to witness another Trial of Grievance. The combatants are one of the planet's warrior administrators and the local emissary, himself a warrior. The scene, we are told, is played out almost weekly, and Wotan is not the only world where it goes on.

As the combatants grapple in their Circle of Equals, under the hot lights of the nearby street lamps of a broad – yet mostly empty – parking lot, those in the back of the surrounding mob can watch only through the closed-circuit holovid set up for the occasion. The entire scene is reminiscent of a Lyran prize fight, but with a far more informal feel.

In solemn tones, Star Captain Alis, the local emissary – her post regarded as an affront to the younger, more hot-blooded warriors of her Clan – is the challenged. The Grievance against her is one of politics, another subject that sickens the Clans, but which all acknowledge as a necessary evil. As an ominous hush settles across the crowd, her challenger, Star Commander Kynnet, proclaims his reasons for the Trial:

"I, Star Commander Kynnet, of the Borealton Garrison Star, do hereby declare this to be my Trial of Grievance against the Spheroid-lover before me," he snarls. "In clinging to your Wolf-like views of charity to the barbarians of the Inner Sphere, and for her disgraceful lack of ambition, I shall prove that no aging, dezgra 'emissary' can speak for the honor of the Falcon! In this solemn matter, let none interfere!"

Alis bears each insult in silence, though hatred burns her face ever-brighter shades of red with each verbal lashing. As Kynnet finishes, the crowd roars its approval, then it is her turn to speak:

"I, Star Captain Alis Jedefalcon, welcome the challenge of this surat-spawn, Kynnet, in the name of the honor of Clan Jade Falcon," she cries. "We are Falcons, and the blood of Kerensky flows through us all! Let none of the feral claims of this rabid vulture before you sway your hearts, and know that it is his own dishonor which shall bring him to his knees this day! In this matter, none shall interfere!"

The cheer on Alis' behalf is noticeably softer, punctuated only by both combatants shouting "Seyla!" as they drop into defensive stances, eyes locked only moments before the first warrior lunges, sword flashing in the light.

It is fought, some say, with more heart than the Horses' attack earlier this month, and in a blinding display of swordsmanship, Alis is dropped to one knee, her uniform in tatters, blood flowing from a gash in her belly. But it is her final thrust that carries the battle, nearly severing Kynnet's sword arm even as he prepares the final blow. Both warriors will be in the infirmary for days, but Alis has won.

The crowd, however, is not with Alis. Groans of disapproval fill the air as Kynnet drops to the pavement. Though the rights of the Clan say Alis has won her Grievance Trial, the issue remains a source of contention for warriors of every stripe. As the pressure builds, one cannot help but wonder how many more Trials will warriors such as Alis be forced to fight, while warriors like Kynnet continue to push for another showdown against the Inner Sphere.

In our next four-part series, our tour through history and cultures of the Inner Sphere will take us back to the Successor States, to House Liao's Capellan Confederation, a controversial – yet intriguing House . Please join us as we continue our tour of the stars! I'm Bertram Habeas.

## Who Can We Really Trust?

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08/25/3133

PORT HOWARD—News from around the Inner Sphere has been pouring in almost like a series of massive tidal waves, bombarding us with more information than we can handle and then trickling off to nothing for days at a time. We have all gained a much clearer picture of what is going on, but still the complete picture eludes us all, likely even our Exarch.

So, in and among all of the chaos and strife that has overtaken the Republic of the Sphere and even the rest of the nations of the Inner Sphere, the question is: just who can we trust? The answers, unfortunately, are far more difficult than they may seem.

Here on Towne, we've all experienced firsthand some of the same difficulties that are currently plaguing The Republic. The Dragon's Fury and their underground supporters have caused problems on a dozen worlds in Prefecture III alone. Riots, revolts and civil unrest are the least of the problems they've caused, all in the name of bringing more worlds under the influence of the Dragon – the Draconis Combine and its Coordinator. Then there's the true war they've brought to worlds like Addicks and Ronel, transporting BattleMechs, tanks and other heavy combat equipment to those worlds in an effort to cow the population into submission and rid them of any other defenses.

And who is the leader of this organization of rebel warriors? Former Prefect Katana Tormark, a woman who once pledged her life to defending the people of The Republic.

But Tormark and her Dragons aren't the only threats to The Republic of the Sphere. Jacob Bannson, maverick businessman and an outspoken man on almost every topic, has likewise set his sights on worlds within The Republic. New Rhodes III and Ozawa are just two worlds that have felt the touch of Bannson and his raiders, though on the latter world, it is still unclear as to which party involved in the battles there are most directly responsible. Galaxy Commander Kev Rosse has on more than one occasion publicly stated that his Spirit Cats made a move on Ozawa in an effort to release the world's people from Bannson's grips.

These are just the tip of the iceberg. Prefects Kal Radick and Tara Campbell, as well as Lord Governor Aaron Sandoval, are all apparently at the head of movements with a military component, each of which have been intimately involved in the continuing strife within The Republic. And they are not the only ones. We've been hearing more and more rumors of nominal "leaders" from throughout The Republic that are taking more and more advantage of the current state of chaos. Word from the other side of the Republic is hard to come by, but there are at least half a dozen worlds that have been plunged into the same kind of conflict that we've been forced to deal with.

So that begs the question: just who can we trust?

Within The Republic of the Sphere, there are still many leaders that we can put our trust into. For all of the faults that his detractors have attributed to him, Exarch Damien Redburn has been busy keeping a handle on everything that has been going on while traveling around the Sphere to let the people know that their leaders are still trying their best to end the chaos and bring some semblance of order back to The Republic. The Knights of the Sphere are working under his direction to find out just who is behind the troubles we have all been experiencing. There are only so many of them, however, and contrary to popular belief, they cannot be everywhere at once.

It is within the Senate and the military leaders of each of the Prefectures where most of our distrust should reside. The Senate, always a hotbed for pointless debate and politicking, has degenerated into a truly useless body of recrimination and buck-passing. Rather than attempt to solve the problems that they can, they spend their time blaming the Sphere's problems on everyone else, including their fellow Senator.

Take, for instance, a bill forwarded ten months ago that would have immediately released cash reserves to prevent hundreds, if not thousands, of Republic businesses from falling into bankruptcy. The bill sat on the floor for two months as the Senators debated the relative merits of keeping Republic businesses open and who was to blame for the communications blackout, along with scores of topics that had nothing to do with the economics of The Republic. Eventually, the bill died in committee, when the chair of that particular group came to the realization that any bail out would do nothing by then, and should have come months earlier.

That is just one instance of the Senate's total inability to deal with the crises at hand, but is completely indicative of that body's current state of affairs. If the Exarch hadn't declared a state of emergency, the government of The Republic would likely have ground to a halt and become just as ineffective as the Senate.

Every citizen of The Republic has his or her own views of our leaders, and in many cases, our only ability to judge their actions and words comes from what those leaders' spokesmen have released and from wild rumor and speculation. Current polls place Lord Governor Aaron Sandoval and Prefect Tara Campbell as the best-regarded leaders, at least within our corner of The Republic, even after both have been linked to continuing fighting and unrest on multiple worlds.

And what of our supposed allies outside of The Republic?

Well, again, we don't have all of the information. There are groups like the Dragon's Fury and the Swordsworn that have pledged themselves towards advancing the interests of the Draconis Combine and the Federated Suns, respectively, within The Republic. And there are strong rumors that they've invaded several Republic worlds. Yet the governments of those two nations continue to maintain impartial neutrality when it comes to relations with The Republic. In fact, both have pledged economic support for

Republic worlds that have been gripped by conflict. Armed Forces of the Federated Suns engineering units have already been dispatched to Addicks, and more are on the way. Likewise, the Combine is sending civilian advisory groups to aid in reconstruction.

Then again, both nations are traditional enemies and continue to spar with each other. More than that, both lost worlds to The Republic of the Sphere when Devlin Stone rose to prominence, worlds they likely still have their eyes upon. The question on everyone's mind is whether these nations will make an attempt to take worlds like Addicks through backdoor politics rather than by military force. Opposition groups have sprung up almost overnight on the worlds bordering these two nations and, based on reports coming out of Terra, private citizens and professional campaigners are working hard to build additional bridges to these two nations within the Senate.

The Capellan Confederation, on the other hand, seems to be on the warpath more than any of the other Successor States. The Confederation has been pursuing systems within the Free Worlds League for decades, and the two have fought a number of significant border wars just within the past few decades. There are reports of significant troop buildups on Sarna, with additional movements to Mandate and Wazan, and while Sarna is a regional Capellan capital and a likely spot for military maneuvers, the other two worlds are not. This could be nothing more than a normal reshuffling of troop deployments, or it could be the prelude to a three-pronged assault directly into The Republic—or alternately into either the League or the Federated Suns. At the same time, the Confederation has neither offered official assistance to the Republic nor have its diplomats attempted to develop any closer relations with the Republic.

In fact, of any of the Successor States, it is the Lyran Commonwealth that is apparently building the best bridges with the people of The Republic. For the last year and a half, the Commonwealth has been working to sign new trade agreements with The Republic, agreements that even before the communications blackout and the resulting economic depression were quite generous to Republic interests. Since the blackout, Lyran interests have extended loans and other forms of economic assistance to quite a few businesses in Prefectures VIII and IX. Rumors coming out of Terra indicate that Lyran diplomats and trade representatives have been consulting with the Exarch and his close circle of advisors for over two months now, certainly adding to the theory that the Commonwealth and The Republic are close to signing some sort of treaty or agreement.

Then there's the Free Worlds League. By all accounts, that nation is still in the process of dealing with the chaos that befell its people, and is having numerous difficulties bringing its own leaders together in some sort of consensus, more than in even our own Senate. So what does that mean for us? It means, now more than ever, that we are apparently on our own. There are those both within and without our nation that are apparently working to help us deal with current events, but there are even more who are apparently working to advance their own concerns. Who we can truly trust is still up in the air. At the very least, we have a better idea on who we can't trust.

### Towne Log

+ So, what, now we're replacing news with some writer's suppositions and prejudices? Rumors and innuendo? I could have read the same thing on any public forum. Anyone want to tell me why this drek made it into the so-called "news."  
:- Romundo

+ It may not be news, but it does nicely summarize what's been going on in the Inner Sphere. Is anyone willing to say that Tormark isn't looking to grab territory or that Bannson's motives aren't entirely profit-related? It doesn't break anything new to someone who's been keeping up on current events, but there's a lot of information in there that a casual reader probably hadn't heard before.  
:- Dross

+ Yeah. Like what's the deal with the Feddies and Addicks? This is the first I've heard of it!  
:- Renko

+ That was a story that had been buried deep, at the request of the government, specifically Aaron Sandoval. He doesn't want anyone to know how far he's willing to go to. He doesn't want anyone to know that he asked for the Davions to come in to his old stomping grounds. He doesn't want anyone to know that he's got business interests still on Addicks that will benefit directly from that assistance. But he's not the only one with secrets. Tormark is just as corrupt, and she's covering her tracks better. She at least didn't have the gall to call in the damn Combine military!  
:- Synnik

+ Well, it's a little more complicated than that. It was the governor of Addicks that requested aid, and then only after she was turned down by the Senate on three different occasions. Her world needed help, and The Republic government wasn't willing to give that help. So she went to someone who was willing. The people of Addicks have had a long relationship with the Federated Suns. You don't think that was the natural place to look for help?  
:- WetWillie

+ Yeah? So we'll just ignore the fleet of Freddie DropShips that have been coming and going from the world? Or the reports of unidentified activity on the continent of Auskel. There's more going on than anyone wants to admit, certainly more than just some engineers assisting with rebuilding on the world.  
:- FMLuder

+ And what about the Steiners? They've got two ways of conquering – dropping a couple regiments of assault 'Mechs or buying someone out. Just what are they doing on Terra with Redburn? Other than successfully doing what Bannson's never been able to

do?

:- Koop50

+ I had to read this story a couple of times to really figure out what's going on in the article. There's a definite bias going on there, but it seems like the author is against everyone except the Lyrans, though with a minor Feddie thing. Which, well, is pretty typical for a Lyran sympathizer. This isn't anything but propaganda. What's it doing on INN?

:- DoctorNick

+ Getting past the whole bias thing – and, come on, don't tell me there isn't some serious bias going on within INN – the article does bring up some good points. The Senate is completely useless right now. The rest of the government is barely working. Sure, the Combine and FedSuns are probably jockeying for position right now, but what is going on in the Capellan Confederation? If they're building up forces just on the other side of the border, then we should all be worried. If they jump across the border with troops, we're suddenly in a much worse situation than we are right now. The Knights of the Sphere aren't going to be able to stop them. Who is going to defend us, then? The Triarii, Principes or Hastati? They're all paper tigers thanks to continual downsizing. Personally, we'd be better off living in either the Combine or the Federated Suns than living under Liao rule!

:- CMike

## Official Urges Calm as Unidentified DropShips Land Near Capital

08/27/3133

PORT HOWARD – Speaking on behalf of planetary governor Renee Oscar, spokesperson Leopold Ulger told reporters this morning that the sightings of inbound DropShips over the Hyborian skies last night were nothing out of the ordinary, despite reports that several vessels were seen grounding in the open fields forty kilometers north of the capital, rather than at the Prince John Spaceport. Attempting to assuage public fears of an imminent invasion by an unknown force, Ulger appeared nervous even as he issued a brief statement on the recent developments, which unfolded just past local midnight, and included the apparent activation of several local militia units and recently assigned Republic troops in the vicinity.

“The governor wishes it to be known that there is no cause for alarm or panic at this time,” said Ulger. “Several civilian DropShips, operating as part of a trading convoy, have indeed made a close pass over Port Howard’s aerospace. These ships were apparently suffering from communications difficulties, which technicians have attributed to a recent spike in sunspot activity. In the absence of communications, these craft were diverted to alternate landing zones to minimize a chance of overcrowding normal traffic at Prince John, and are even now being met by representatives of the Towne government in the hope of rendering assistance.”

Ulger’s remarks came despite scattered eyewitness reports that the unidentified DropShips unloaded military equipment, including armored vehicles and BattleMechs, in an apparent defensive perimeter. He also refused to take questions from reporters regarding the whereabouts of the governor or the rumors that the recently hired 21st Centauri Lancers elements on Towne have also been called up as part of the mobilization. These reports, initially received through eyewitness accounts and anonymous officials in the Towne militia, remain unconfirmed at this writing.

Despite the spokesperson’s claims, militia and Republican troops have already made their presence felt on the streets of Port Howard, complicating the usual morning commute for thousands of local residents, while military helicopters maintain a patrol overhead. The sighting of large concentration of troops in the vicinity of the Government Building and the Towne HPG has likewise been noticed by Port Howard residents, as have the blockades erected in the northern districts, where officials speaking on the condition of anonymity have claimed a faulty gas line has ruptured and represents a hazard to morning commuters.

On the streets of the city, Towne citizens expressed their worries despite the government’s insistence that all is well. Though some remain optimistic that any crisis can be easily contained, many local residents have stormed the nearest grocery stores, frantically stocking up on preserved foods and medical supplies in anticipation of a looming attack.

“They want us not to panic?” asked an unidentified resident. “The governor’s got to be out of her mind! I mean, how can we not panic when there are troops and cops everywhere – all this for some DropShips with nav trouble? I know I, for one, ain’t buying it!”

“I’d like to believe everything’s under control,” said another, “but the vids have been filled with too much war news for my tastes lately; I’m not taking any chances.”

### Towne Log

+ Mein Gott! What the hell’s going on out there? We’re actually under attack or what?

:- EISi

+ Hell yeah! Don’t believe any of that drek the government’s handing you! Those “gas pipe” explosions they’re talking about are live rounds being fired in the city. A friend of mine who lives in the area says he even saw a couple ‘Mechs duking it out near the Prince John Spaceport! It’s a freaking war zone!

:- Klider

+ I coulda told you it was an attack. I have a cousin in Port Howard who says he got a look at those ‘Ships when they came down last night. From the silhouettes, he said he recognized a Union-class and an old Excalibur type – all military DropShips. No way those were civilians.

:- CSJ0038

+ Any word on who these guys are? Anybody see an insignia?

:- Draco041

+ Someone told me they saw an insignia on one of the attacking tanks – looked like a blue hammer with lightning or something coming out of it.

:- XSOkay

+ You sure? That sounds a lot like Bannson’s, doesn’t it?

:- MerryZander

+ How should I know? It’s not like anyone can make heads or tails of the situation since a lot of the nodes to Port Howard went dark all the sudden – or didn’t anyone notice that?

:- XSOkay

+ I sure as hell did. Like the government or maybe even the invaders want to shut down net access in or out of the area. I

wonder if FMLurder's okay, though. I think he lives in that area...

:- Synnik

+ Does he? What a shame...

:- GreasL

+ Blue hammer you say? That's a new one...

:- EISi

+ Well, crap! Now what? The governor's in hiding, there's fighting in the capital! And did anybody notice Erbe's nowhere to be found? Where's a Knight when you need one? I told you guys something like this was going to happen! Now look where all our war-mongering's gotten us!

:- PeaceOut

+ Maybe you should reconsider that remark, PO. Right now, it seems to me the militia, the Republic forces, and even some of the 21st Centauri are right now on hand to hold off whoever these guys are, and Erbe is likely attached to the command staff nowadays. This is a defensive war for us. Rather than feel vindicated that we finally got attacked – which was going to happen anyway, the way things were going – you MIGHT consider thanking your lucky stars that we have an army to defend our world with!

:- CMike

## Touring the Stars with Bertram Habeas

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08/27/3133

*We began on Terra, millions of years ago. Today, mankind stretches out among the stars of the Milky Way, touching thousands of worlds, as far from our home as Clan space, more than 2,000 light-years distant. Yet who are we, really? What have we become in our relentless push outward and onward? I'm Bertram Habeas, and tonight, let's find the answers to these and many other fascinating questions together, as we tour the stars!*

### Volume XVII: Celestial Unity—Birth of the Capellan Confederation

*You should never seek to hold any one thing, any one person, any one system, any one ideal above all others. For when you hold that single thing, that single person, that single government, that single value above all else, that thing, that individual, that order, that principle will come to control you and you will have forfeited your basic humanity. . . . Seek therefore to free yourself from unnecessary entanglements, and thereafter seek to free your neighbor, whether he would be free or no.*

—Elias Liao, leader of the New World Disciples, c. 2182

For many, mere mention of the Capellan Confederation conjures up images of a brutal and warlike police state, even more rigid and caste-driven than the Draconis Combine. Images of the Maskirovka, a secret agency of the state, watching over everyone and everything, empowered to drag helpless citizens away in the middle of the darkest night, haunt many a holodrama set in this realm. But is this the real Capellan Confederation, or merely an exaggeration of propaganda? What created the modern Capellan state, ruled almost absolutely since its formation by the iron fist and dao sword of House Liao?

Like most of the Successor States, the birth of the Confederation can be traced to the origins of its ruling family, House Liao. The Liao family effectively begins with Elias Jung Liao, an English-Nepalese political philosopher and one-time statesman in the later days of the doomed Terran Alliance. Elias Liao vanished after the Offshore Chinese Republic seized the Hong Kong Free State he presided over for barely a year. Resurfacing three years later as the head of a fanatical anarchistic cult known simply as the New World Disciples, he masterminded a campaign of terror that lasted from 2182 to 2188. Dozens of lives were lost in what Liao, personally, called "cleansing actions" aimed at shattering all local authority in Terra's Asian continent. It was only after government troops all but annihilated his Disciples and killed half his family that Liao departed, leading his two sons and scores of followers to an unremarkable world he dubbed Cynthiana.

*The fact that the Republic of Liao (formerly the colony of Cynthiana) was accepted so readily after Elias Liao's death has to be one of the biggest ironies of the Terran Alliance's final years. Here we have a planet founded by the very man who terrorized Terran citizens for over half a decade, ruled now by his grandson, Victor. No apologies or reparations for the hundreds killed in Hong Kong are ever demanded of Liao; it's like the Terrans just forgot about the 2180s.*

*Nor were any serious concessions demanded to assure Victor's loyalty; he was simply taken at his word and his signature when his world became part of the crumbling Alliance. When he set up trade deals with his neighbors, he refused—absolutely refused—to rely on Terran currency, instead working on a barter system, independent of the Alliance economy. All of these should have been signs that here was a man who was looking out only for Number One.*

*One has to wonder, then, if it really surprised the Alliance leaders that not only did Victor refuse to help them fight their Expansionist War to keep the colonies in line, but that he announced his own breakaway by beheading the Alliance ambassador to Liao.*

—Pedro Anderson, *Tyrants and Treachery: A Capellan History*, SPC Publications, 3121

After the fall of the Terran Alliance, many former colonies found themselves alone—far more independent than many had truly desired—and sought to keep their shaky settlements going by forming loose trading pacts with their neighbors. In addition to the Republic of Liao, the region rimward of Terra also included the Capellan Hegemony (nee Co-Prosperity Sphere), the Nanking Collective, the Sarna Supremacy, the Tikonov Grand Union, and the Sian Commonwealth.

Collectively, history books describe these minor realms as the Capellan worlds, but in their day each one had its own ambitions, and its own way of doing business. With the Free Worlds League forming on one side, the shrinking Terran Alliance on another, and the growing Federated Suns on a third, the worlds and resources available to these loose alliances were few and ever-threatened. In a desperate bid to claim dominion in the region, these small states battled one another through trade embargoes, blockades, and even military invasions. In all this fighting, even the one-world Republic of Liao was not immune from strife.

By the early 2300s, the Capellan worlds were in a state of crisis. Constant fighting between the Capellan Hegemony and the Sarna Supremacy had dissolved much of the Hegemony's infrastructure, pushing the economic alliance to its breaking limit. Worlds began to defect, starting with Arboris, to join with Liao, gaining the stability of the tiny mercantile republic's stability in an age of unabated chaos. At the same time, the Terran Hegemony, successor to the ruined Terran Alliance, began an invasion of all systems around Terra itself, even going so far as to seize Capella in 2320. Though the Terrans would eventually be repulsed, after fifteen years of guerilla warfare, the region remained dangerously unstable.

It was a combination of the ever-present threat of the Terran Hegemony's expansion and the Davion invasions that began in the 2330s that finally prompted the formation of a pan-Capellan union, the brainchild of Duke Franco Liao of the so-called Duchy of Liao. Decades of mutual distrust bogged down the negotiations to form a unified Capellan state, but in the end Duke Franco Liao

proclaimed the creation of the Capellan Confederation in 2366, with himself as its supreme Chancellor. The various states entering into this union became known as commonalities. Each commonality would be headed by ten military commanders, who were granted sweeping powers to govern their regions for the sole purpose of defense against foreign encroachment. Just five years later, how far the newborn Confederation would go to survive was demonstrated for all to see.

*Davion peacekeepers occupied Capella without opposition in mid-August 2367, scant hours after the departure of Chancellor Liao and his wife. Invading commanders were puzzled at finding the capital practically deserted by its citizens. That did not stop the 1st and 5th Victoria Lancers from setting up shop, preparing for a long stay. Plans for an extended occupation were cut short the following day, however, when combined elements of the Sarna and St. Ives navies, backed by hastily armed merchantmen from Franco's own commercial fleets, suddenly vectored into orbit above the Davion flotilla. In a seven-hour engagement, the newly constituted Confederation Navy destroyed the transports and supply ships of the Davion peacekeepers, establishing themselves in complete control of the Capellan skies. Having deprived the invaders of their way home, Chancellor Liao next ordered the unconditional surrender of Davion occupation forces.*

*Refusing to believe that Liao would ever order the destruction of his own capital, the Davions declined to surrender. Two minutes after the ultimatum expired, Chancellor Liao ordered an all-out laser and missile barrage of Capella Prime, and with it, the annihilation of three hand-picked Davion regiments . . . along with more than 2,000 Capellan citizens still in the city. . . .*

*Thereafter, the Capellan capital was moved to Sian, where it has remained ever since. Subsequently, a black-edged border was added to the official Confederation triangle, commemorating the sacrifice of the Capellans who died under their own navy's guns that day. It is interesting to note that the Davion regiments lost on Capella that day have never been re-formed.*

—Adal Corvin, ComStar Archivist, *Hell on Capella Prime*, 3025

The shocking destruction of Capella Prime, original capital city of the newborn Confederation, so stunned and unnerved the Davion commanders that they withdrew from Capellan space, though then-President Raynard Davion refused to recognize the Confederation. While fighting against the belligerent Free Worlds League would continue for some time, the extreme measures taken at Capella would forever be an example of the fanaticism of Capellan forces in battle. The Confederation, to this day, remains committed to taking any steps necessary to survive, regardless of the cost.

Thus did the Confederation rise, from the mind of a Terran statesman turned radical madman to a major Inner Sphere power whose equally dedicated warriors would stop at nothing to assure their realm's survival against any aggressor.

In part two of this series on House Liao's Capellan Confederation, we'll take a deeper look into the fascinating and ancient cultures that combined to create this small, yet powerful nation. I'm Bertram Habeas.



## Kelswa-Steiner: The Hour of Steiner Has Come!

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08/28/3133

PORT HOWARD – For several hours this morning, the HPG on Towne was overrun and briefly commandeered this morning by elements belonging to the Stormhammers, one of the newest armed factions to arise since the collapse of the interstellar communications network. Led by Landgrave Jasek Kelswa-Steiner of Skye, in Prefecture VIII, the Stormhammer forces immediately opened all communications channels from the HPG to both planetary and local interstellar networks, and continuously broadcast the following prerecorded manifesto until elements of the 21st Centauri Lancers and the Towne militia were able to drive the invaders back:

"People of Towne, and those systems still able to hear my voice across the stars, I, Jasek Kelswa-Steiner, Landgrave of Skye, bid you welcome on behalf of the Lyran Commonwealth and my fellow Stormhammers! I am at once honored and dismayed to speak to you this evening, but duty demands that you learn the truth of the universe beyond your world. The noble experiment that was The Republic has failed. Even now, armies great and small turn upon you with an eye toward carving their own personal empires. Devlin Stone has left us alone in the dark, and he is not coming back to us – ever.

"And yet, in the darkness, I bring you hope, the hope that comes to save those who remain loyal to the dreams of House Steiner! I know that many of you have felt it in your hearts – the yearning to return to your roots, to embrace the glory of the Lyran Commonwealth, a legacy of peace and order, a realm free from the chaos that swirls around and threatens to consume all!

"To you I proclaim that I have come to bring you back into the fold! As the Terran Hegemony before it, and the Star League it once bore, The Republic of the Sphere shall crumble into dust, and as it does the armies of the greedy Successor Lords shall descend upon you all! Those who do not wish to be absorbed by force of arms must join with us! The Stormhammers will protect you as we bring our people – the Lyran people – back to their birthright, back to your true ruler, the compassionate and generous Archon, Melissa Steiner! Together, we shall raise the mighty fist of Steiner, and together we shall overcome the chaos and the darkness! No nation, no Clan, no band of renegade terrorists will you ever need to fear again!

"Come quickly, my brothers and sisters. My warriors in and around Port Howard shall protect you from those who seek to keep you in the darkness. All of the true children of Steiner may come home now, safe from the persecution of a dying Republic, or those invaders who will inevitably consume it.

"Return to House Steiner! Join with the Stormhammers, and we shall salvage the legacy of peace, prosperity, and order that Devlin Stone once promised! Together, we shall reunite with the noble Commonwealth, and right all wrongs!"

At this hour, fighting continues to rage in and around Port Howard, as the Stormhammer units rally against a combined defense force consisting of the Centauri Lancers, local militia, and the Triarii Protectors. Casualty estimates remain unconfirmed at this time, as do the number of Towne citizens who have already been witnessed answering Kelswa-Steiner's call, braving the battle lines under a flag of truce to board the Stormhammer DropShips.

INN will keep you posted on the latest developments in an around Port Howard as they occur.

### Towne Log

+ Don't believe a word of this drek, guys! I'm freaking IN the battle zone, and these Stormhammer clowns are anything but the noble sods they're making themselves out to be!

:- FMLurder

+ Lurder? You outta your mind? You got gunplay in that city, and you're staying online, yammering about it to us??? Don't they have shelters in PH?

:- WetWillie

+ Steiner bastards are going too far this time! Bad enough to have the soldier wannabes around here, but some money-grubbing Lyrans sniffing around? I'll be damned if the Archon's gonna take Towne without a fight!

:- GreasL

+ You heard the message, GreasL. Jasek is just calling all the Steiners home. Even you can't be too blind to see that, any day now, it'll be the Snakes or the Feggies coming here to claim Towne. You want to be around for that?

:- EISi

+ Spoken like a Sweiner, EISi. Knew all along you had a soft spot for the Archon! Why don't you just go and join up with your darling heroes out there? Can't miss 'em, I'm sure – they're the ones SETTING BUILDINGS ON FIRE!!!!

:- FMLurder

+ Well, maybe if the Towne militia let 'em land, they'd not have to fight their way in!

:- EISi

+ Cripes, EISi, this ain't some rugby game we're watching on HV. It's the real deal! We're under attack here – all of us!

:- FMLurder

+ Speak for yourself, Lurder! I'm outta here!  
:- EISi

\*\*\* EISi has left the server (To hell with all of you!) \*\*\*

+ What the - ?  
:- Draco041

\*\*\*FMLurder has left the server (Connection Error at Source)

+ !!!  
:- CMike

## Fighting Rages in Port Howard!

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08/29/3133

PORT HOWARD – Stormhammer units continued to engage in a desperate street-to-street battle with local militia, Republican, and mercenary troops, continuing their campaign to secure the planetary capital on the third day of their invasion. Despite losses on both sides and action on other fronts, the forces of Landgrave Jasek Kelswa-Steiner continued to press into the city's northern sectors, though a fierce defense coalition effort has so far managed to recapture the Towne HPG station.

"With support from the 21st Centauri Lancers and elements of the Republican Triarii Protectors, both under the command of Knight-Errant [Kristoff] Erbe, the [Towne Militia's] Third Port Howard Company was able to force back a second thrust into the northern downtown district, pushing the pro-Lyran forces north of Charles Cedar Avenue," Captain Willem Rolfos told INN in a hasty interview from his command center near the beleaguered government building. Just two days ago, spokespeople for Governor Renee Oscar at the same location told the people of Towne that the DropShips carrying the invaders posed no threat to planetary security.

When asked about the governor's whereabouts in the wake of the first shots fired between local defense forces and the newest confirmed armed faction to rise since the HPG blackout last August, Rolfos reported that he did not know her whereabouts or that of several other leading administration officials, but did insist that all the absent leaders were alive and well.

"[Governor Oscar] and her staff have been evacuated by order of the militia command under the authority of Sir Erbe and of Legate [Jonathan] Jurik to a secure location, but I am not at liberty to disclose that location at this time," said Rolfos. "At this hour, however, I am assured that all the government staff are alive and well, and directing the defense effort as we speak."

The arrival of the Stormhammer forces was detected during the last few hours of their DropShips' silent descent onto the plains north of Port Howard. When the DropShips refused to communicate with the ground-based traffic controllers at the nearby Prince John Spaceport, air defense forces and militia units were immediately activated and placed on alert. Shortly afterward, this alert expanded to include all defense forces on Towne, scrambling not only the militia, but elements of the 21st Centauri Lancers mercenary command and the Republic's Triarii Protectors. The Lancers were recently added to the planetary defense force, while the small Triarii detachment was on planet for a good will tour of the local militia forces.

Within hours of their arrival, rumors that the incoming DropShips were anything but the "civilian convoy" that Oscar's representative described them to be became fact as weapons fire shattered the still morning air and a combined force of roughly two battalions of mixed infantry, armor, and BattleMechs converged on the northern sectors of Port Howard, briefly overrunning the first line of defenders and penetrating deep into the city. From that point on, the battle for Port Howard has raged almost non-stop, with fighting between militia and Stormhammer infantry turning once-quiet suburban neighborhoods into bloody, house-to-house battlegrounds.

Casualty reports have yet to be released at this writing, though militia commanders have admitted their losses could be as high as 500, while area hospitals are reporting a shortage of bed space due to the number of civilian and military wounded. INN field reporters in the contested sectors have reported armored vehicles and 'Mechs on both sides have produced an "astonishingly high" level of collateral damage in the fierce fighting, with Stormhammer forces only slightly giving ground. Meanwhile, additional actions occurring outside the general vicinity of Port Howard appear to have already begun to taper off as Stormhammer elements continue to fall back and consolidate near the capital, but at present, all estimates place the current fighting as a virtual standstill.

"It remains unclear at this point how much damage we have inflicted on the enemy," Rolfos said in a rare moment of candor, "but rest assured the combination of our defending forces will soon prevail."

### Towne Log

+ Crap! Steiners! We're surrounded by Drac, Feddie, and Clanner wannabes, and who invades us in the end? The freaking, money-grubbing Steiners! This universe is going to Hades in a handbasket!  
:- Synnik

+ I hear you! I would have laid odds the Dragon's Fury would land here first. Heck, I expected this to be White Hand, even! But Steiners? That I never would have seen coming, not after all the good vibes we were getting before the HPGs went dark.  
:- WetWillie

+ Guys, try and remember this is another breakaway group! You heard that manifesto, yesterday! Kelswa-Steiner's Skye, not Steiner, no matter what the name says. He's in it for the same reason as all the others – power, pure and simple. And his troops aren't here to set up housekeeping, I think, or they wouldn't be so indiscriminate with their weapons fire – they hit a hospital last night, for Stone's sake! Maybe it was a missed shot, but it shows the lack of concern. This is a raid, now! A simple smash-and-grab operation!  
:- Chungabunga

+ At least Erbe has finally shown up in all this – sort of. I was beginning to worry our homegrown Knight actually lost his nerve to the Sweiners! That would be such a drag!  
:- GreasL

+ Or maybe more than that. Has anyone seen EISi on lately?  
:- Draco041

+ Huh?  
:- CMike

## Stormhammers, Supporters Withdraw After Port Howard Clash

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09/02/3133

PORT HOWARD – Following a short, yet brutal three-day clash on the outskirts of the planetary capital and in the neighboring countryside, elements of the Stormhammers and an estimated 200 supporters of the pro-Lyran military faction—the latest to arise since the August collapse of the HPG network—have departed from Towne aboard a fleet of military DropShips. The brief invasion has left many area residents and citizens shaken, especially in downtown Port Howard, where Stormhammer units seized control of the local hyperpulse generator to broadcast a brief, pre-recorded message from Stormhammer leader Jasek Kelswa-Steiner. At this hour, it remains to be known exactly how many casualties or how much damage was sustained in and around the capital, though Knight-Errant Kristoff Erbe, who coordinated the defense, has admitted the figures could prove shockingly high.

"Elements of the planetary militia, the Triarii Protectors, and the Twenty-first Centauri Lancers engaged the invading forces both inside and to the north and east of Port Howard," Erbe told reporters. "All told, friendly forces suffered only light damage, in terms of personnel and materiel, though we estimate the renegade force sustained a full mixed company of infantry, armor, and BattleMech losses."

The fighting inside Port Howard itself receded after militia and mercenary troops were able to force a small Stormhammer unit out of the capital city HPG station, and though shots were fired and damage was inflicting in and around the compound, ComStar officials have assured INN that the station remains fully operational at this hour.

The same cannot be said of much of the city of Port Howard, where stray autocannon, missile, and laser fire demolished buildings and set fires amid a raging thunderstorm that swept into the area during the early morning hours on the 29th. In several of the northern sectors, where fighting was heaviest, rescue workers remain hard at work, freeing those trapped in the rubble of fallen buildings, or recovering those who were not so lucky.

"We've seen over a hundred patients admitted here in the past six hours alone, and from what we hear, that's been typical of the entire area," said Doctor Nadia Sanyi, of the Prince Ian Memorial Hospital, who estimates that civilian and military casualties alike may rise as high as 1,500 before the week is out. The majority, she adds will almost certainly be civilians.

"The fighting broke out at the morning rush hour, and we're seeing a lot of dead and injured who were on their way to work at that time, some of them crushed in their cars or struck by shrapnel and missed shots. It's ugly. Very ugly."

### Towne Log

+ 1,500 dead is "very ugly"? Now, there's the understatement of the year!

:- Chungabunga

+ You said it! I heard that the death toll will most likely wind up around two grand after all this, but nobody will know for sure how many really died because the 'Hammers ran off with a lot of defectors.

:- CMike

+ Fraggin' LCs. Should've known they couldn't be trusted! First sign of some Steiner flag-waver, and the LC-wannabes go and split! Running off with a bunch of money-grubbing, bloodthirsty turncoats! How is that any way to show your respect for a nation that feeds and clothes you? Ingrates, all of them!

:- NsinR8R

+ Fear not the foolish. The hour of Devlin Stone's return is close at hand, and those who stayed behind shall be rewarded as the loyal citizens they have been!

:- Hop4Evr

+ Oh, put a cork in it, will you, Hop? All Nsin is trying to say is that it takes a real moron to run off with the guys who come in and profess honorable intentions AFTER shooting their way into town! As rallying cries go, that stunt was pretty malfed up!

:- GreasL

+ Say, has anybody seen Lurder since the attack?

:- Draco041

+ Nope. And I got a bad feeling about that one. Same with EISi and a couple other guys. Not a word since day two....

:- Chungabunga

+ Well, the news did mention a storm hit Port Howard, too. Maybe it was a power surge...

:- ViIEM07

+ Right. And maybe I'm a Capellan WarShip captain...

:- CMike

## Touring the Stars with Bertram Habeas

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09/04/3133

*We began on Terra, millions of years ago. Today, mankind stretches out among the stars of the Milky Way, touching thousands of worlds, as far from our home as Clan space, more than 2,000 light-years distant. Yet who are we, really? What have we become in our relentless push outward and onward? I'm Bertram Habeas, and tonight, let's find the answers to these and many other fascinating questions together, as we tour the stars!*

### Volume XVIII: Eternal Balance—The Ways of House Liao

Zi-jin Cheng (Forbidden City), Sian, is a city of remarkable beauty and grandeur—as might well be expected of the home of the Celestial Throne, and the heart of the Capellan Confederation. Nestled between five gently rolling hills and surrounded by a wall vaguely reminiscent of Terra's once-mighty Great Wall of China, every structure in Zi-jin Cheng features the delicate lines of classical Han Chinese architecture. Gardens, painstakingly landscaped for maximum effect, are common throughout the city, but few are so resplendent or so lush as those surrounding the soaring heights of the Celestial Palace, which dominates the city's western edge. Nowhere in this spectacular place can one find evidence of its near extinction during the Jihad, for House Liao invested billions of C-Bills in its reconstruction, down to the very last brick.

All over Sian, monumental cities mimic the style of Zi-jin Cheng, a style revived by the efforts of Sun-Tzu Liao, He Who Ascended. Even in death, visitors to Sian can easily understand how his people deify him, the Celestial Wisdom, who guided the Confederation away from a cycle of self-destruction, rebuilt and revitalized in the spirit of Xin Sheng (Rebirth). Were it not for him, who could imagine the Confederation's fate?

In the Confederation today, Chancellor Sun-Tzu Liao's name is still revered, uttered as if sacred for what he accomplished in his six-decade rule. It was he who reclaimed St. Ives, he who brought a cultural renaissance to a broken people, he who led his nation to throw off the yoke of Blakist oppression during the Jihad—with little help from Stone's coalition. These are the reasons the citizens of the Confederation praise Sun-Tzu, but for all Liao chancellors before and since one might find the same reverent tone. Indeed, to the people of the Confederation, all Capellan chancellors, as the Chinese emperors before them, hold the same godlike standing—above reproach, above shame, and above all others—but none so much as the Liaos.

*Only four times in Capellan history has the Confederation lived under the rule of a non-Liao, and few of them have been viewed as positive for the nation. Adren Baxter, the first of these, may in fact be the single most reviled chancellor in Confederation history, because of his pathological hatred of the Liao family and all it stood for. Thanks to the near-disastrous effects of his rule, he had the Confederation and the Federated Suns ready for war on the eve of what many experts call their golden opportunity for peace.*

*But more than that, he gave the succeeding Liaos all the ammunition they needed to curtail the House of Scions, perhaps the only check on the chancellor's authority placed in the Confederation's charter. By the time of Edmund Salindar, who was technically not a chancellor, but a Liao regent, the House of Scions—once the voice of the Confederation nobility—had been reduced to a rubber-stamp office, with almost dictatorial power in the hands of House Liao.*

*Their authority was so absolute that it would not be until Chancellor Normann Aris' reign began in 2599 that anyone would think to change the path the Liaos had set, and even then it was only to strip away more of the powers of the Capellan people in favor of the state. When Normann Aris died—a most untimely death, I might add—he left behind a system the Liaos used to further cement their authoritarian regime.*

—Pedro Anderson, *Tyrants and Treachery: A Capellan History*, SPC Publications, 3121

Regardless of who was ultimately served over the centuries of Liao rule, the formative years before and during the Star League era created many of the basic aspects of Capellan society still seen today. The absolute rule of the Liao family, for instance, forms the backdrop of Capellan culture, thanks to the Liao family's own Chinese background. Mandarin Chinese is the official language of state, and while Buddhism and other Asian faiths are not mandatory, those who seek the favor of the Capellan leadership often worship as the chancellors do. Unlike the brutal imposition of Japanese traditions on the people of the Draconis Combine, the fact that most of the Capellan worlds already leaned toward Terra's Eastern nationalities made this cultural dominance a fairly painless process. Still, the fact that this facet of Confederation life rises from the personal beliefs, traditions, and upbringing of a single ruling line demonstrates the power of the chancellors over those they rule.

The rigid, caste-driven system, another major part of Capellan society, arose from the combined systems of controlled peerage established by past rulers, which limited the powers of all nobility, and established requirements to attain the privilege of citizenship in the Confederation. Unlike other realms, the right to the basic liberties as a citizen of the realm is available only to those who first serve the Confederation. Established both as a control measure and as a means to stave off economic collapse, this system assures that every Capellan has his or her place in society, and that all contribute for the betterment of the whole.

Reinforcing these beliefs, the Confederation formally adopted the Korvin Doctrine and the Sarna Mandate, two philosophies that loosely state that the role of the citizen is to serve. These rules helped to establish the rules for citizens that have gradually given rise to the caste system. The Troika, the realm's three-branch ruling body, described by the Chancellor, the Prefecture (legislature), and the House of Scions (nobility), forms the unofficial ruling class, but the actual castes of Capellan society are known by different titles. There is the directorship, which consists of highly placed administrators and bureaucrats, followed closely by the intelligentsia, who represent the Confederation's intellectual elite. After them are the supporters, the professionals

such as business leaders, teachers, and other aides to the intelligentsia and directorship. Then come the entitled, who include medical professionals, and finally the commonality, which represents the lowest of the Confederation's official castes. Below them are those who do not have Capellan citizenship. Often known as servitors, this class has none of the rights and privileges of the others, occupying a role somewhere between criminal and slave. Changing castes is a tricky business, but not as difficult as it might be in a Clan structure. Nevertheless, most Capellan citizens born into one caste will live out their lives within it, and carry their expected societal role with them all the way to the grave. Such is the life of a Capellan citizen.

But the rights of the citizens are not overlooked, contrary to popular belief.

*The mid-twenty-fifth century was a defining time for House Liao, especially in regard to its relationship with the common folk. Having just been pushed to the brink by Chancellor [Arden] Baxter's best efforts to destroy their realm and anything connected with the Liaos, the economy was a shambles from their effort to recover. The Capellans call this era their Time of Tribulations, but that doesn't begin to describe the social unrest that affected the nobility and the lower classes equally.*

*Chancellor Jasmine Liao's brutal imposition of her authority over the House of Scions and the Capellan military, curbing the powers of the nobility and the armed forces alike, helped stabilize the government, but more was needed to stabilize the people. Wisely, she enacted the Capellan Concordat, affirming the rights of all Capellan citizens to fair and just treatment by the military and ruling classes. Though one might have trouble believing it, more often than not these rules are followed—"state emergencies" notwithstanding.*

—Vanessa Cedrik, PhD, Professor of Capellan Studies, Cambridge University, Terra.

This Concordat remains in force today, and in addition to its laws, the citizens of the Confederation are promised free education, free health care, social security, and even the right to own properties free of government interference. Though, from time to time, many of these rights have been set aside for the duration of a state emergency, the most law-abiding and honest of the Confederation's citizenry may generally expect a remarkably high standard of living.

For all this, the people of the Confederation seem to be secure—perhaps even content—in the strict way of life they live. Though, in many ways, this police-state mentality may seem brutal and oppressive, it has accomplished the one thing the Confederation's founders set out to do: secure the freedom of the Capellan nation.

In part three of our four-part series on the Confederation, The Liao Himself brings rebirth and hope to a downtrodden people, guiding the fate of millions in a time of chaos and horror. Please join us as we continue our tour of the stars! I'm Bertram Habeas.

## Touring the Stars with Bertram Habeas

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09/11/3133

*We began on Terra, millions of years ago. Today, mankind stretches out among the stars of the Milky Way, touching thousands of worlds, as far from our home as Clan space, more than 2,000 light-years distant. Yet who are we, really? What have we become in our relentless push outward and onward? I'm Bertram Habeas, and tonight, let's find the answers to these and many other fascinating questions together, as we tour the stars!*

### Volume XIX: Xin Sheng and Beyond

" . . . In honor of our marriage, in addition to this morsel, I give you a vast prize. Here, my love, I give you the Capellan Confederation!"

—First Prince Hanse Davion, to Archon-Designate Melissa Steiner on their wedding night, 20 August 3028, Hilton Head Island, Terra.

With those words, the now-united rulers of the Lyran Commonwealth and the Federated Suns began a war that would profoundly change the face of the Inner Sphere, dramatically shifting a balance between the five Successor States that had held through nearly three centuries of constant war. No single nation in the Inner Sphere would feel the impact of that union as terribly and as profoundly as House Liao's Capellan Confederation, however.

In just two short years of fighting, the Steiner-Davion armies smashed through the Confederation with unprecedented efficiency, aided by spies insinuated at the very highest level of the small nation's high command. The Tikonov and St. Ives Commonalities seceded with help from House Davion's political machinations, with the former absorbed into the Commonwealth less than a year later as the latter formed its own independent state. At the same time, every other Capellan world within 175 light-years of Terra was simply absorbed into a region of space that would eventually become known as the Sarna March (and later, during the 3050s and 3060s, as the "Chaos March"). In all, over half the Confederation's worlds were lost to defection or conquest, the most proportionally devastating losses ever suffered by any Great House during the Succession Wars.

*For all his fabled strategic brilliance, the aftermath of the Fourth War was perhaps a key example of Hanse Davion's greatest military blunders. In 3039, instead of targeting House Liao once again and completely removing a potential threat to his realm, he instead turned the might of the FedCom against House Kurita, leaving the Capellans to stagger on. Or was it a blunder? After the way the Confederation handily repelled the Anduriens and Canopians just a couple of years after having its realm torn in half, perhaps "the Fox" was thinking more of the old adage about trying to corner a wounded animal. . . .*

—Arthur Luvonne, *The Long, Dirty History of the Federated Suns*, Commonwealth Press, 3100

The determination to survive—already a mainstay of the Capellan peoples—only grew stronger in the shattered Confederation, even as the so-called "War of Davion Aggression" left the nation's economy and infrastructure in ruin. Romano Liao, daughter of Maximilian Liao, who ruled during that war, instilled in her people a renewed devotion to the state. When the Magistracy of Canopus and the Free Worlds League's Duchy of Andurien launched a war against the Capellans in 3031, they faced a fanatic army determined to die to defeat them, and eager to drag as many of their enemys as possible along for the ride. This fighting spirit, sacrificing all to save the state, became the hallmark of the Liao people, who would not rise again until the ascension of Romano's son, Sun-Tzu Liao.

Though his Xin Sheng—literally, "Rebirth"—mandate did not officially begin until a few years after he assumed the mantle of Chancellor in 3052, Sun-Tzu Liao was intent on recovering all that had been lost in the Fourth Succession War. He backed the efforts of pro-Capellan guerillas in the Sarna March, allied his realm with the Magistracy of Canopus and the Taurian Concordat, the two nearest and most powerful Periphery realms. He even fostered an alliance with House Marik's Free Worlds League to check the ambitions of the Federated Commonwealth, and built up his defense forces quietly, preparing for the inevitable invasion of the Sarna March, which came in 3057.

Ironically, the creation of the new Star League in 3059, as part of a final effort to end the Clan threat, gave Sun-Tzu the means to carry out his Xin Sheng and reclaim the St. Ives Compact. Having been denied the time to complete his reconquest of the Sarna March by the League's declaration of an end to hostilities in 3058, Sun-Tzu instead used his elected position as First Lord to motivate his people and usher in a "brave new age" for the Confederation.

Opinions and theories vary wildly about what came next, but during Sun-Tzu's tenure as First Lord he ordered the new SLDF's peacekeeping troops into key parts of the Chaos March as well as the St. Ives border—the latter event after a strike by a pro-St. Ives mercenary command nearly killed Isis Marik, Sun-Tzu's then-betrothed (and one-time heiress to the Free Worlds League). The conflict that arose afterward, however, had nothing to do with the SLDF and, indeed, even the apparent assassination attempt on Marik may have been a planned event, according to Sun-Tzu's own words.

14 April 3062

*She served her purpose, and today I have set her free. Though I should not care one iota for the naïve child, our conversation today still echoes in my head. She clearly did not understand what it would be like to truly be Capellan, to be downtrodden, to always have to capitulate or compromise. No. No more. We have given up enough. Now it is time for our*



*rebirth. This is not my moment, as poor, short-sighted Isis [Marik] would have believed. This is our moment. This is the moment my people have waited for, like shadows in the darkness.*

*No. There will be no compromise this time. The Confederation deserves better.*

- excerpted from *The Words of Chancellor Sun-Tzu Liao*, by Talon Zahn, Celestial Press, 3125.

Xin Sheng was far more than a military campaign. In fact, the earliest stages of Sun-Tzu's mandate were entirely cultural and political in nature. The return to their proud Chinese heritage gave the Capellan people a sense of identity and pride that had been stripped away in too many decades of mere survival. Meanwhile, new alliances with their Periphery neighbors (downplayed in today's Capellan history texts, even when considering the state's long-standing friendship with the Magistracy of Canopus, which remains evident even today) gave them the strength that comes from knowing they were not alone. New BattleMechs with Han names were developed. The ages-old standard and uniforms were given a makeover. Everything was reborn, fresh, new, and above all, Capellan. Some of the draconian measures enacted under Romano Liao's reign were relaxed, including the bloody purges meant to ensure loyalty. In doing so, Sun-Tzu made his people feel freer while conveying a sense of belonging and strengthening their political might. Nationalism colored the survival-by-any-means doctrine, but more than simply maintaining the status quo, the Capellan people began to realize they didn't have to just be survivors. They could, in fact, be winners—even leaders.

It took the Confederation three years to reabsorb the St. Ives Compact, a victory that effectively validated Sun-Tzu's plans and clearly demonstrated the renewed strength of the Capellan people. Indeed, in his state address after the final truce in 3063, he even addressed the Compact citizens as fellow Capellans, at once declaring an end to the fighting and to decades of hatred.

*"What we accomplished today has been bought at a high cost—paid by people of the Confederation and the St. Ives Compact, Capellans all. In paying this price, we find ourselves in unfamiliar territory. We can actually pity the Federated Suns."*

—Sun-Tzu Liao, 3063, except from his statewide address from Sian.

Xin Sheng continued long after the recapture of the St. Ives Compact, not only cementing the hard-fought victories of its early years, but also bringing back hope and the strength of the Chinese culture to the Confederation. During the FedCom Civil War, efforts began to reclaim the Confederation's next prize—the former Tikonov Commonality—but the Jihad would intervene. What followed would once more test the resolve, the unity, and the newfound national pride of a recovering people, in a ten-year crucible the Confederation faced all but alone.

*Of all the states hit during the Jihad, I'd have to say the Capellans showed the most heart while defending their lands, and that's only to be expected after centuries of being the smallest kid on the block and having nobody backing you up the whole time. I mean, think of it. After literally sneaking off with much of the Tikonov worlds during and after the FedCom Civil War, they stood accused of aiding the Word right alongside the [Free Worlds] League just because Sian was one of the last capitals hit. Nobody trusted Sun-Tzu but his people, and they fought—and died—for him and the nation he stood for. Leading people through that, no wonder they revere him as a god now.*

—Jaime Kalasko, *Who Speaks for Liao?* Underground Press Interstellar, 3112

In our final installment on the Confederation, we'll examine House Liao and the children of Xin Sheng today. Please join us as we continue our tour of the stars! I'm Bertram Habeas.

## Mercenary Life: The Final Frontier?

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09/16/3133

HARLECH RUINS, OUTREACH – A blasted wasteland is all that remains of a once booming metropolis. Useless, corroded, poisoned hulks of great towers, low-slung apartments, ruined DropShips, and industrial complexes now stand in eerie silence. The atmosphere is toxic, the soil tainted by chemical and nuclear fallout. Long-decayed remains of those who fell both on that fateful November day in 3067, and those who came afterward, many scavenging derelict war machines that remain visible all about, often lay unburied. The ruined city of Harlech, once-capital of Outreach, once-capital world of the mercenary trade, is today a shadow of a bygone era.

Or is it?

Just south of this ghost city stands the scattered domes, scaffolds, and bunkers of a newer city, raised from the mangled suburbs of Harlech itself. New Kearny, named for the dead sea of hard-baked clay that once was Outreach's largest freshwater body, is mostly underground, invisible to the surface observer. Yet below the tainted earth, life goes on, a hub of commerce, of trade, and even of professional soldiering.

Perhaps it is sentimental attachment to the place, the same lure that has brought lostech prospectors to brave the lethal badlands of Remus even now, seven decades after the holocaust, that allows this world to carry on a tradition that, some say, should have died with it. The Jihad burned life from more than this world, it ran home the concept of total war to anyone enamored by the romance of the mercenary profession. The horrors of the Blakists' "Holy War" were such that entire generations have grown up in an Inner Sphere sworn to put an end to war, in a Republic where the average citizen is encouraged to live the pacifist's life.

Why, then, do mercenaries still make their pilgrimages to this world? Why do empires great and small still seek their help here? Why have the Wolf's Dragoons and the Spirit Cats jointly reclaimed a dominion over this cinder?

Since the fall of the HPG grid almost a year ago, the population of New Kearny has swelled from its typical 90,000 inhabitants, most of them hydroponics farmers and commercial laborers, to over 500,000, mostly visiting mercenaries. A similar population boom has been seen on the world of Galatea, a much more hospitable venue. So, why the renewed interest in professional soldiering? Why are so many returning, to once more risk life and limb for the sake of money?

On Outreach, the answer varies with who you talk to:

"I don't know about no mercenaries," says Andrei Schubert, a MiningMech mechanic employed by New Kearny's municipal Project Development Department. "Most of what comes through here, year in and year out, are prospectors. They dig through the old city [Harlech], or they hunt their fortunes in the old Outback [Remus continent]. Selling a 'Mech, even a bashed up one, can earn a body citizenship, or just a DropShip-load of cash. Sad thing is, though, most of them don't come back from the wastes..."

"Sure, most of the Dragoons left when the planet was bombed, but a few stayed behind, fought in the resistance, helped turn back the tide, just like old Jaime would've done," says Maria Worthington, a local entertainer. "Since then, [Outreach] has been sort of the unadvertised center of the merc business. Sure, lots of wannabes go to Galatea for contracts, but those in the know come here, the source of anything anybody needs to know about anything."

The rumors abound. A black market in anything from scavenged weapons and parts to information and services, allegedly thrives here on Outreach. But if the rumors are accurate, this market may not keep to the shadows any longer. The recent return of a small contingent of Wolf's Dragoons as guides for the Spirit Cats, whose mysterious ways have led them here to forge the unlikelyst of new enclaves, signals that a new dawn is coming for Outreach.

"The HPG grid is down, new armies are appearing all over, and the future looks bleak," says Brianna Wolf, legate of Outreach, who claims to be a proud descendant of Meave Wolf herself. "Somehow, it seems only natural to assume the worst, especially in these surroundings. This place, once the place to go during the height of humanity's wars, seems to still hold on to that mystique. Maybe it's a bad sign, proof that we are rolling into a new age of war, but what many of the people see here is some old friends—and some new friends—coming home.

"Yeah, strange as it may sound, it's actually a reassurance to me. I mean, if anyone were to inherit the legacy of the Dragoons, shouldn't it be their rightful heirs?"

Perhaps that is the answer, after all. With a return to dark times, people instinctively reach for the familiar, the comfortable. For mankind as a whole, that familiar thing—all too often—is an instrument of war, a tool for self-defense or conquest. For the Wolf's Dragoons, that thing is their once great home, Outreach. For the Spirit Cats, who share the ties of an orphaned Clan, perhaps, this too can be home as well. How does this bode for the rest of the Inner Sphere? Only time will tell.

### Towne Log

+ Huh. Spirit Cats and Wolf's Dragoons conquer Outreach and INN does a puff piece on it! The wonder of it all!  
:- Noeticist

+ I don't think I'd call it conquest, really. From what I heard the other day, the planet "fell" without a shot being fired.  
:- Draco041

+ So much for patriotism, eh? Given the first chance offered, and Outreach goes Clanner again. Stuff all that about "reaching for the old and the familiar"; I wanna know why the Spirit Cats had to go there, and how far in advance they had it planned if the Wolf's Dragoons were just gonna give them the keys to the city.  
:- RepoMan

+ Would you rather they gave them to the Steel Wolves, RepoMan? If some of the rumors I've been hearing are true and the Dragoons and Cats have discovered a possible cache of lost Dragoons weapons and 'Mechs on Outreach, which of the petty warlords scurrying about out there would you rather see get a hold of them?  
:- GreasL

+ I'd RATHER they told the Dragoons and the Cats to malf off, actually. Outreach is a REPUBLIC world, not a Clanner enclave, and any hypothetical weapons there should go to The REPUBLIC, not an upstart bunch of Clanners with a fondness for hallucinogenics!  
:- RepoMan

+ I dunno. I heard stories of what Outreach was like before the Jihad. Sounds to me like the Dragoons did their best to keep mercenaries honest and honorable. A fair job too, I might add. If anyone should claim Outreach again for that kind of end, I say it's a good thing that the Dragoons do it.  
:- HonkiTonki

+ We wouldn't need mercenaries if these crackpots didn't go around forging armies and fighting each other all over. They could all have banded together and helped hold off the chaos swirling around us now. But did they? NO! It doesn't matter to me who decides to make their own Mecca for MechWarriors. The concept itself is just plain wrong!  
:- RepoMan

+ Ladies and gentlemen, I think we just found a topic that RepoMan is rather passionate about. Everyone jot this date down; you're watching history in the making here!  
:- Noeticist

+ Malf off, Noeticist!  
:- RepoMan

## Touring the Stars with Bertram Habeas

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09/18/03

*We began on Terra, millions of years ago. Today, mankind stretches out among the stars of the Milky Way, touching thousands of worlds, as far from our home as Clan space, more than 2,000 light-years distant. Yet who are we, really? What have we become in our relentless push outward and onward? I'm Bertram Habeas, and tonight, let's find the answers to these and many other fascinating questions together, as we tour the stars!*

### Volume XX: From the Ashes – The Capellan Confederation Today

**Fact Sheet:** Capellan Confederation

**Founding Year:** 2366

**Capital (City, World):** Zi-jin Cheng (Forbidden City), Sian

**National Symbol:** A green arm raising a green dao sword, against a green triangle, edged in gold.

**Location (Terra relative):** Rimward

**Total (Inhabited) Systems:** 166

**Estimated Population (3130):** 228,280,000,000

**Government:** Dictatorship (Chinese feudal stylings)

**Ruler:** Chancellor Daoshen (Centrella-) Liao

**Dominant Language(s):** Chinese (Mandarin, official), Chinese (Cantonese), Russian, English, Hindi

**Dominant Religion(s):** Buddhism, Taoism, Hindu

**Unit of Currency:** Yuan (1 yuan = 0.56 C-Bills)

A tropical wind blows through the city streets of Tian-tin, warmed by a yellow sun that appears almost ghostly in the overcast sky. The capital of St. Ives is a busy metropolis, a sea of traffic that never stops, even well into the night. Rising proudly over the city, a magnificent palace dome, surrounded by lush gardens of native flora, and flanked by elegant spires, stands the ancestral home of the Allard-Liaos, heirs to the St. Ives Commonality.

If one looks closer, at the magnificent stone walls that separate the palace from the rest of the city, the telltale signs of carbon scorching on some of the rock become noticeable. Rusty grooves on the odd stone here and there hint at a previous life in some other structure, every one a memorial. It is said that Duke Kai Allard-Liao himself approved the use of the rubble as a major part of the rebuilding of the palace wall, and even the palace itself. Each stone used in this construction project, it is said, represents a building or life lost in the destruction of the city at the peak of the Word of Blake Jihad.

Over two million Confederation citizens and soldiers died beating back the fanatics' onslaught in Tian-tin, and a popular rumor says many of their ghosts now dwell on the palace grounds, where their memory is enshrined in the very structures.

The death of the original Tian-tin may echo the similar fate meted out to so many major Inner Sphere cities during the Jihad, but unlike the other Great Houses, House Liao stood alone when war came to it on the eve of recovery. From the ashes of this terrible crucible, the Capellan nation rose alone. To them, any aid rendered by the coalition under Devlin Stone was immaterial, for nearly every drop of blood spilled to win back the Capellan worlds was that of the Capellan people.

Sun-Tzu Liao led the Confederation on its own path through the Jihad, even though he was never trained as a warrior. His greatest tools, throughout the war and its aftermath, remained his gifts for motivating his people, and for misleading his enemies. These gifts would be put to their ultimate test even as the Blakists rained death upon the Confederation worlds. Nuclear bombs, chemical weapons, orbital bombardments—some with almost as much ferocity as was shown to the Free Worlds League later on—tore into the ravaged worlds of the realm, but Sun-Tzu survived to rally his people. Indeed, after the fall of Forbidden City on Sian in a massive bombardment, he thought that they had lost the first leader in centuries to make the Confederation believe in itself drove its warriors to incredible acts of bravery and fierceness. When Sun-Tzu returned just weeks later, and emerged again and again after Blakist terror agents sought his destruction, his aura of invincibility became a rallying point for the embattled nation. Sun-Tzu could not be killed, so neither could they.

Ironically, in the fires of the Jihad, Capellan nationalism became almost as fanatic as that of the Blakists themselves. Even those who once considered themselves enemies of the chancellor became grim-faced devotees as the darkness continued.

"I remember those days, as clear as though they happened yesterday," says eighty-seven-year old Quinn, a citizen of St. Ives who claims the dubious distinction of being part of the forgotten Free Capella dissident movement. "We wept—we actually wept—when the Celestial Palace fell. We couldn't believe it would have ever happened, no matter who sat on the Throne. My buddy, Pham, he said [Sun-Tzu] Liao was still inside. But even though we'd spent years hating him. . . Though we thought he'd put us through hell enough in the March, seeing those towers fall, and realizing the head of the Confederation was gone—just like that—we knew what we were seeing was bigger than any of us. We wept for all Capellans, even the Liao.

"When he showed up on the holo vid a few days later, smiling confidently and planning revenge, some of us thought it was some kind of trick, the kind you know all Liaos are capable of. 'Maybe it's a body double,' I even said. But in the days that followed, the speeches, the plots and clever strategies . . . We knew then we had a leader—the leader—who could get our people through this. That's when I decided I was done fighting for myself."

To drive back the Blakists, the Capellans and the Canopians—their only “true” allies in that nightmarish war, according to Confederation history texts—unleashed the same firestorms as their enemies, demonstrating ruthlessness as never before, with every means at their disposal. As many as half of the nuclear and biological attacks that took place on Capellan soil are believed to have been launched by desperate Confederation forces. House Liao took few prisoners that weren’t shot soon after, no matter what their role in the Word of Blake’s Order was. It was at once the Confederation’s darkest and most valiant hour.

In the years that followed, a war-weary Confederation once more picked up the pieces under its Chancellor’s direction. Pride in the nation and its invincible ruler had become galvanized. In recognition for Devlin Stone’s “limited role” in saving his realm, Sun-Tzu ceded many burned-out worlds to The Republic, then focused his efforts on stabilizing the shattered remainder. But even this recognition could not dim the knowledge in the minds of the average Capellan that they owed their survival only to their own determination to survive, and to their Chancellor. Over the years, this nationalism continued to drive the Capellan people, as it does today, where only the Canopians are regarded as true friends of the realm—and then only because their ruler is the sister of the great Sun-Tzu’s heir, Chancellor Daoshen (Centrella-)Liao. It also explains in part why the CCAF was the last great BattleMech army to be decommissioned in the Inner Sphere in the years after the Jihad.

Sun-Tzu Liao’s spirit has not left the Confederation even today, over twenty years after his mysterious death on Liao. To many of his people, in fact, he did not die, but actually “ascended” to some higher state, and on some worlds there are those who still await his return, even while his son rules from a rebuilt throne, a son who emphasizes his father’s surname out of respect for the man regarded as the Capellan messiah.

The reverence for the Chancellor and the scars of the Jihad—still visible on many Confederation worlds—have created a curious mixture of pride and paranoia. Dedication to the state and to its rulers is expected to be absolute, and often is. The same level of devotion is also expected to the Chinese culture, which serves as a unifying standard throughout Capellan society and creates an atmosphere of quiet harmony, laced with underlying tension and almost xenophobic fear. Foreigners, even tourists and traders, are looked upon with scorn and suspicion. As the people remain determined to drive off or destroy any who would encroach upon their lands, all Capellans are taught that all their neighbors—save perhaps, those who dwell in the poor, misguided, but nevertheless well-meaning Magistracy of Canopus in the near Periphery—are potential enemies.

Despite the fires of cataclysmic war, House Liao’s Capellan Confederation remains a realm of great beauty and potential, albeit one where the natives have learned from the harsh lessons of history. Always on guard, even during peace, the Capellan spirit today resonates with that same defiant will that carried its people through four of mankind’s bloodiest centuries.

*“Our unity is our strength. Our Chancellor is our will. These two things no army of men, or of BattleMechs, can ever deny. Though we may die this day, or the next, first, last, and always remember this: we are Capellan.”*

—Sang-jiang-jun Talon Zahn, CCAF Strategic Military Director, Capellan statewide address, 3072.

In our next four-part series, our tour through the history and cultures of the Inner Sphere will take us to the Rasalhague Dominion, the peculiar fusion of Clan strength with Inner Sphere diversity. I’m Bertram Habeas.

## Triumph of Republic – Lessons for a Wayward Generation

By Amaris Anon, INN Special Political Commentator

09/21/3133

My fellow citizens, we stand at the crossroads of an era, the true path before us, and yet it is as if we lost our way. The Republic—our Republic—is in danger, darkened by terrible menaces, from both within and without. During this time of strife, we have all started to turn inward. We have all grown isolated. We have all come to know fear.

Have all of you forgotten how we came to be here? Or the triumphs of The Republic?

+ ++ALTERATION: *This Anon speaks some truth, good people, but don't be afraid to think for yourselves. This is an opinion as much propaganda as fact.* —Archangel+++

Perhaps a reminder, then. Most of you were born to a nation of plenty. The Republic, however, emerged from a war that may have been the worst ever seen by mankind. Not since the Amaris Crisis that brought down the original Star League, not even since the First Succession Wars, had weapons of mass destruction rained down on worlds not just on state borders, but across the entire Inner Sphere. No Successor State, no Clan in the Inner Sphere, great or small, was spared the horrors of the Word of Blake Jihad. Their war of terror—a war whose purpose we may never understand—swarmed across the Inner Sphere and spread even into the Periphery, their nuclear bombs and chemical weapons struck even in the boondocks, without rhyme or reason, for theirs was not a war of conquest, but of chaos, of fear. Beginning in November 3067, a decade of horror reigned.

+ ++ALTERATION: *Truth in glossover. The Jihad was probably THE worst war ever fought. Had the new Star League not been disbanded at that time, maybe we would have avoided Blake's wrath. Some say the Blakists planned to merge their hidden ships and troops in support of the League until that moment, a moment that was prophesized to them as one of greatness, yet the politicians of the day instead robbed them of this glory, and people who never knew the cruelty of nerve gas attacks and orbital bombardments on their soil paid the ultimate price. In this, the Jihad cannot be understated enough; nobody had seen the likes of this kind of war in ages!*

*However, though the true horror and scope of the war is evident, once again Anon glosses over the most important part and one that makes this war like none ever waged on an interstellar scene: it was not about territorial gain. They did not 'swarm' across planets like the Clans during their initial invasion of the Inner Sphere in 3050; the exception being those worlds in the immediate vicinity of Terra, of course. Using surprise and unprecedented mobility, the jihad forces struck surgically at both military and political targets, stunning the Inner Sphere and Clans into temporary immobility. ComStar was completely paralyzed, as a new mass wave of defections left them reeling and extremely vulnerable. By eliminating the ability of anyone to effectively use the HPG network, the Word of Blake further hamstrung any effort to deal with the threat. With their foes thrown onto the defensive, further such surgical strikes continued to sap strength and morale. To the Inner sphere leaders of the day—not to mention many, like Anon, today who hide their heads in the sand and still wish to think of the Word of Blake as mindless animals—the initial phases of the Jihad looked completely chaotic; random attacks that no intelligence could unravel into a pattern. However, the followers of Word of Blake were not animals (monsters, but not animals) and the Jihad was executed with the skill of the finest surgeon, accomplishing the exact goals they set out to. Just bad luck for them a hero came along..*

*As for what those exact goals were meant to accomplish in the end, no one has ever been able to determine to anyone's satisfaction. The leadership of the Word of Blake was simply too devastated—both from their own crazy attacks, the retribution strikes against them by coalition forces and their own suicides in the end—and their organization too dependent upon cells (which blocked critical information from getting to too many individuals) for any coherent picture to emerge for those captured, regardless of the means used to extract information. Perhaps a key will be found a century from now to unlock the enigma, but for now, we can only speculate.* —Archangel+++

Worse still, the Blakists' Holy War struck at a time when the nations of the Inner Sphere were still recovering from a string of costly wars. The FedCom Civil War had just ended, leaving central authority in the Steiner-Davion realms at their lowest ebb in centuries. The Draconis Combine reeled from no less than three border conflicts. Even the Clans were rebuilding strength lost in their own internecine fighting. The heart of the Inner Sphere was a no-mans land, dubbed the Chaos March, where no power held sway and laws and rulers changed in an eye blink, while people lived in poverty and fear. When the new Star League disbanded, it brought down the wrath of the Blakist zealots in a fire of pure rage that left few untouched.

+ ++ALTERATION: *Truth again; Anon is batting 1.000 so far. The Lyran and FedSuns states had problems reigning as a number of local lordships took advantage of the civil war to build a power base. In an even more unprecedented move, Dukes Sandoval and Hasek, who each reigned over vast sections of House Davion's Federated Suns, defied Davion leadership during their civil war, with ol' Hasek practically taking the worlds he ruled on behalf of House Davion into autonomy there at the end. The Free Worlds had similar problems with Alys Marik (cousin to whom she thought was a 'real' Marik sitting on the throne of House Marik) calling for a repeal of Resolution 288 to depose the man who would one day be known as "the false Thomas Marik". Only the Capellan Confederation really maintained a solid command structure when the war started, and with so many people suggesting Capellan Chancellor Sun-Tzu Liao was in league with the Blakists—until they hit Sian, that is—they had to fight the war alone. More conquer-and-divide strategy from the masters of the day, as if an almost useless HPG grid didn't do that already.* —Archangel+++

We survived that war, fortunately. But would we have done so nearly as well without Devlin Stone? Had this man of vision not risen from the ashes of the worst war ever to darken mankind's history, where would we all be? Would we even here to talk about it? Would we have seen a new age of peace? Would we have seen the prosperity we have taken for granted all these many years?

+ ++ALTERATION: *Ah, we come to Stone. Hard to be objective about the Chosen One, I'm sure... —Archangel+++*

Devlin Stone was a messiah for a new age, and even those among us whose business is war—those who resent our Republic and its triumphs in peace, be they here or abroad—recognize him for the hero he was. Without backing at first, he alone managed to unify a resistance to stand up to the zealots from within, to wage a war in the name of a lasting peace. It was Devlin Stone, not Victor Steiner-Davion or Hohiro Kurita, or Sun-Tzu Liao, or any of the other “great leaders” of that time, who pulled together the international coalition against the darkness. While other nations fought on against a fanatic, implacable enemy, it was Stone who drove toward an even greater unity of purpose.

+ ++ALTERATION: *The real architect of Devlin Stone's "vision" was Doctor David Lear, son of the famous—infamous, if you're among his detractors—Kai Allard-Liao. Of course David is a whole other enigma with history more full of holes than answers, but that's for another day. Lear and Stone escaped a Blakist internment camp on Kittery together and formed a resistance "Prefecture" in that area. Stone was simply the charismatic leader who could sell this vision to the people, like a modern-day Kerensky or—dare I say it?—Julius Caesar. What Anon also doesn't add in here is that the two came at a time when the Blakists and their allies and mercenaries (yes, the Blakies had allies and mercenaries at their beck and call; you'd be surprised how many like-minded monsters crawl out of the woodwork when real evil rears its ugly head!) were stretched to their logistical limits. Even a total war of terror, made possible by a rapidly shrinking stockpile of nukes, WarShips, and ComStar and Free Worlds League defectors—not to mention the drying up of support from those aiding the Jihad from within the Great Houses themselves; exactly who or what they were is as much a mystery as the reasons for the Jihad itself, but there can be no doubt that such aid existed—can tax the command capabilities of those who wage it. —Archangel+++*

When the Jihad finally ended, and the Blakist terrorists were finally driven from our worlds, Stone again saw a vision of peace, a means to end the wars that had claimed so many billions of lives. From the ashes of war, like a rising phoenix, he forged The Republic—our Republic—starting with some of the worlds hardest hit during the Jihad. His Republic, formed not by force of arms but under a mandate of peace, would be a new society born of equality, where the people could decide their fates, but without fear of imminent war. Our new Republic was to be a beacon to the other realms, both the nations and Clans who fought alongside Stone, and those who struggled alone. There could be another way.

+ ++ALTERATION: *By war's end, there weren't many armies in any shape to stop Stone, who by this point had tons of followers from across the Inner Sphere, Periphery, and even the Clans. Like any cult of personality—don't deny it; you all thought the same thing!—it was only natural he use his influence to build his own empire. Sure, some of the allied realms gave worlds up to Stone, the Lyrans to surrender some of their most battered and rebellious worlds while saving the cost of rebuilding, the Combine to satiate honor they felt owed to Stone, the League to spare these worlds the effects of their own fragmentation. But others were forced to relinquish worlds, pure and simple. House Liao, anyone?*

*Also, touting democracy when the dominant political leaders were still rooted in hereditary nobility, and forging "equality" by using enforced relocations of entire populations to break down cultural barriers (badly) is hardly an original concept. Nicholas Kerensky did much the same when he built the Clans by proclaiming his 800 most loyal officers the core of the Bloodname (nobility) system, placing the warriors in charge of a martial democracy, and deliberately scattering warriors of different national backgrounds to form his new Clan society. Stone (and Lear, mustn't forget him!) applied the same principles in a more slapdash fashion, with which, after a decade of horror—like the survivors of the Exodus Civil Wars leapt to the new Clan mold—the shell-shocked peoples of the Inner Sphere (or more specifically those worlds nearest Terra who had born the brunt of the Jihad more so than any other) were only too eager to comply. —Archangel+++*

Stone further blessed us with peace by decommissioning much of the military. The private citizen armed with his own BattleMech would be a thing of the past. The factories that once existed solely to build the tools of war could once more turn their services and products toward those—the vast majority of us—who wanted to see an end to war. Cities could now be rebuilt. Worlds nearly shattered could now be restored. As the period of reconstruction ended, the people prospered as never before, under a democracy, a free and peace-loving nation. Stone's triumph became our triumph as the swords became plowshares, and the rest of the Inner Sphere—even those who stood alone, or who otherwise claimed not to share in his vision—followed suit. All of you have benefited from this vision. All of us have reaped the fruits of Stone's Herculean labors, coming of age in a time when war is once more a blessedly unknown thing. To remind us of what we left behind, the graveyards of broken 'Mechs, the monuments to fallen regiments and obliterated cities, can be found everywhere. Our tribute to the fallen heroes is to live on, and live well, above tyranny, war, and death. The nations beyond our Republic learned these lessons slowly, some of them still fighting from time to time, but even they came to know the prosperity of peace and the improved standard of living that comes when nations turn their energies away from raising mighty armies of conquest. They know the satisfaction of rebuilding lives for a people long starved of hope and homes.

+ ++ALTERATION: *Truth, with a twist of lemon. Stone's Military Material Redemption Program was a guns-for-money program, plain and simple, an effort used (sometimes to good effect) to disarm an inherently criminal population. Here, the added enticement of land and citizenship (hence voting rights) made it possible for mercenaries to make out like bandits, creating a whole new breed of nobility and supporters through bribery. It worked well enough to disarm the independents and keep the heavy weapons in the hands of The Republic, and the implied criminalization of weapons made The Republic a kind of police state. Still, the "peace dividend" did pay off nicely; I'd attribute that to Stone and Lear again. Nothing sways folks to your banner and makes them feel better about their nation than prosperity, and when the government spends lots less on building its army and more on new schools, cleaner water, and shining new cities, it's a real winner of hearts and minds.*

*Now, what made the rest of the Inner Sphere and the Clans follow suit is the great rub. Let's just say that Republic propaganda machines went into overdrive there. Most of these nations were decimated by the Jihad and struggling to rebuild their pre-war militaries to even half-strength. Offering similar incentives to civilian 'Mech owners allowed them to buy up a lot more guns than their blasted factories could build. The Lyrans hardly needed a better incentive than money to downsize when the "peace*

*dividends” proved workable, and the FedSuns wasn’t far behind. The hostile realms (former Free Worlds and Capellans) wound up doing the same only after a media blitz that showed their people what they could have if their leaders weren’t selfish pigs.*

*We also can’t forget that the Jihad, along with the antecedent wars, had not only weakened central authority within each of the Successor States, but in many cases had actually tarnished the noble Houses themselves. Between the squabbles of the Steiner-Davion family that sent a thousand worlds into a five-year civil war, to the knowledge of an imposter sitting on the throne of one of the Great Houses—not for centuries had the House Leaders looked so bad. People will do anything for a leader whom they admire and oft-times worship, but when they lose respect for not just the person but for the very seat of power that person represents, they can turn against them in the flash of a PPC. Needless to say, the propaganda blitz fit hand in glove with this reduction of both respect for and the real power behind the leadership of the Great Houses. As such the general populations were able to bring immense pressure to bear to follow suit with The Republic. Though much has been done in the past decades to repair the damage to the nobility of each House and tighten the reins of power once more, they still have a ways to go.*

*The same worked against the Clans to an extent, but they also had to contend not only with the fact that their own armies were savaged in the Jihad, but their own homeworlds were in chaos. Cut off from supply lines to Clan space, with many rebellious worlds in their occupation zones in the Inner Sphere, it became a matter of adapt or be forced to fight again. Rather than fight a losing war to expand or crush their demanding populations, they found a Clan-style compromise; they tightened their warrior criteria, creating more Clan-born civilians and directing more resources to developing infrastructure. Of course, the coupe-de-grace by Devlin in winning over The Clans was a different kind of propaganda blitz that is rarely touched upon by The Republic and even ignored by most of the other Great Houses. Devlin Stone effectively told the Clans they were right. They had built a society where only the crème-de-la-crème were allowed to pilot BattleMechs, and, in effect, Stone told the Clans that not only were they right, but that he’d be following in their footsteps in that respect. Considering what the Clans did to so many worlds, it’s no wonder people try to forget he did that.*

*Finally, all has not been sweet in paradise. Even during the two centuries of the original Star League and its ‘golden age,’ brush fire wars raged. Since the Jihad, House Steiner continues to look at taking additional worlds from the Duchy of Tamarind-Abbey in the former Free Worlds League; House Kurita had a second war with the Ghost Bear Dominion only thirty years ago; a low level war between House Kurita and the Draconis March of House Davion has existed for almost a half century; a similar no-mans land exists between the Lyran Commonwealth and the Jade Falcon Occupation Zone; how often has Liao come for its worlds The Republic stole? Grand scale war may not have occurred in the last several decades, but any Republic citizen who thinks war was completely eliminated is simply blind; why else are we able to so easily slid back to old habits now that Stone isn’t here to watch over his children? —Archangel+++*

Yet now, less than five years after our savior has gone from us, we stand on the edge of war again.

Those of us united under Stone’s vision, living as neighbors for nearly three generations, once more fly banners in the name of foreign realms. Greedy men and women, lusty for power and for glory—the same hubris that brought the Jihad upon us all—have begun to build armies from the tools of honest, hard-working, peace-loving citizens. The plowshares are becoming swords again. AgroMechs mount machine guns, MiningMechs carry missiles, farmers have begun to exchange their pitchforks for semi-automatic rifles, and schools are becoming military command centers. As time goes on, the rare BattleMechs that once marched in great and terrible armies across hundreds of worlds, bringing nothing but terror and death, will rise again in numbers. We have indeed entered a new Dark Age, an age of terrible crisis. The men and women raising these armies are not patriots; their actions do not reflect the political goals of those they presume to speak for. They are tyrants, petty lords who are fueled by hate and fear, and who prey on the peace-loving masses.

*+ ++ALTERATION: Truth in neon, but also a sad fact that we reap what we sow. Our nation was built by guile and bribery. Wealth, power, and greed are a deadly mixture, and unfortunately, The Republic has become a breeding ground for the corrupt. Maybe most of our leaders still believe in the “vision”, but the men building the weapons and slapping guns on IndustrialMechs aren’t about to listen to an impassioned speech. —Archangel+++*

Is this what we wanted? Is this how we show our respect for all we have built together? Is this how we prove to ourselves we are really above the horrors unleashed by the Word of Blake? Four months ago, a concerned citizen of The Republic came to you all, to plead this case, yet we are still on this dangerous path. Like him, I say we can still turn it back. We can say no to these petty would-be tyrants, denying them the support for their personal crusades, denying them our blood and sacrifice for the sake of fool’s errands. We can put a stop to all this madness before the armies of the damned once more roam our worlds.

*+ ++ALTERATION: Alas, dear Anon! At this point, it will take more than just saying “no” to war. Due to the small size of every faction’s military (including the Great Houses and Clans) IndustrialMechs are being pushed into service; everyone is all too eager to live out the glorious stories they heard at their great-grandfather’s knee. I’ve even heard that the Clans are making use of IndustrialMechs in their haste to go to war (though from what I know I’m thinking a Bloodnamed warrior wouldn’t “soil” himself with one). However, the use of jury-rigged ‘Mechs can only last so long. It will take a while to gear up an interstellar wartime economy and infrastructure, especially with a population that is afraid, but still not quite ready to throw away the peace and prosperity they’ve known, not to mention the lag in communications time due to the fact that eighty percent of the HPG net is still down. However, gear up eventually they will and if something isn’t done, I believe BattleMech armies will march once more in the future.*

*All it takes for evil to triumph is that good men (and women) do nothing. The petty armies need to be decisively dealt with, the HPG network restored, and the Republican system needs an overhaul. Like it or not, now it’s time to put up or shut up. — Archangel+++*

This we must do, or it shall be the death of all we hold dear...



—Anon

### **Towne Log**

+ Now, there's the way to do an Op/Ed! Hack into the propaganda itself and insert your own comments! Way to go whoever you are, Archangel!

:- Teknofile

+ "This history lesson and party line brought to you by the Friends of Cicero Foundation." Why does INN let every crackpot spout this kind of drek?

:- Synnik

+ None of this makes you think at all, Synnik? Of course it's propaganda (and would be more so had "Archangel" not stepped up to the plate and hacked it) but it's mostly on the money, too. Stone and Lear and countless others worked hard to make this the best nation the Inner Sphere has ever seen, and the likes of Tormark, Kelswa-Steiner, Sandoval, Bannson, and the rest are just turning it into a free-fire zone. Sure, the history isn't pure, but when is it ever?

:- WetWillie

+ Ye gods! I'm agreeing with Willie! Heck, The Republic even taught the Clans a thing or two about downsizing and the value of keeping their citizens happy. (I guess imitation really is the best form of flattery!) As a result, we got a kinder, gentler Inner Sphere to show for it, not just a Republic we all know and love.

:- Draco041

+ A Republic that demands services in exchange for voting rights? A Republic that forced people from other cultures—many at war with each other since time immemorial—to coexist on nuke-blasted planets? A Republic that makes criminals of the average person who wants to own a weapon? Speak for yourself about knowing and loving it, Draco.

:- XSOkay

+ Like Archangel said; nothing that Nicky Kerensky didn't do when he made the Clans. And we all see how that worked out.

:- Synnik

+ Yeah, great! That's MUCH better, Synnik!

:- XSOkay

## Chen: Capellan Troops Not Massing on Rimward Border

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09/23/3133

GENEVA, TERRA – Mandarin William Chen, special envoy from the Capellan Confederation, today repeated that—contrary to current reports from worlds on the rimward frontier of The Republic—there were no Capellan troops massing in that region. Chen, who made headlines last July by demanding the return of House Liao’s ancestral worlds, fielded questions from news agencies across the Inner Sphere in a special press conference, called only hours after officials on Terra released what he called “alarmist” reports from border worlds in Prefectures V and VI.

“These rumors of Capellan forces encroaching on the border with our Republic neighbors are just that,” said Chen. “Unfounded and alarmist in the extreme, they seek to weaken the sense of goodwill we have tried to engender since the formation of this nation. I can assure you that the Celestial Wisdom has no intention to make war against The Republic, even in light of our current impasse over the rightful stewardship of Capellan worlds [by The Republic]...”

Despite these claims, some officials close to the Exarch told INN that military units loyal to House Liao were indeed moving toward The Republic border. One official, speaking on the condition of anonymity, alleged that certain military intelligence networks had even identified several worlds where Capellan troops were massing.

“We have received convincing reports that clearly place elite elements of the Warrior House Hiritsu and the McCarron’s Armored Cavalry as close to Republic space as Ulan Bat or and Highspire,” said one unidentified source. “Last year at this time, these same worlds merited only a combined-arms battalion of locally-trained militia.”

Claims such as these made by The Republican intelligence networks, according to Chen, only serve to erode all hope for a lasting peace between The Republic and the Confederation.

“Ever since the breakdown of Republic communications, I have seen [The Republic] grow more and more paranoid, jumping to conclusions in the absence of hard facts,” said Chen. “When these rumor-mongers proclaim there are elite regiments on their border, do they provide proof? Are there spycam holos of these supposed troop build-ups? Intercepted transmissions between the ‘evil Liaos come to destroy us’? No! And why? Because the threat does not exist!”

Exarch Damien Redburn himself declined to comment on the reports of military build-up, and told INN only that, “The Republic remains, as ever, committed to the cause of lasting peace.”

### Towne Log

+ Never trust a smiling Capellan. I smell a rat. Hope we’re doing something about it.  
:- RepMan

+ It can’t be as bad as all that. House Liao is just probably trying to sweat the Exarch a little. They know our HPG net is a wreck right now, and they’re rattling their sabers, while at the same time professing their innocence to the rest of us. This is a political play. Nothing more.  
:- Graussler

+ All the same, I’d feel a whole lot better if INN told us that we had our own troops moving into the area as well. Something like scrambling a few Knights and the Hastati Sentinels should tell the Liaosers we’re not going to take any of their silly games. That, and remembering how we busted them up before, ought to do the trick.

: - RepMan

+ Reread your history, RM, not some flag-waving fan link, will you? The Massacre of Liao mean anything to you?  
:- Chungabunga

+ Then, what, Cb? Is this war or what?  
:- GreasL

+ Not enough info, GreasL. All I’m saying is that anyone who buys into the propaganda about the Liaos being an easy victory ought to know better. Hell, we had the Stormhammers pounding through here. It’s a whole new universe now.  
:- Chungabunga

+ Plan for the worst; hope for the best, eh?  
:- Slater012

+ Heh. Whatever works for you. I just hope the Exarch knows what he’s up against here.  
:- Chungabunga

## Touring the Stars with Bertram Habeas

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09/25/3133

*We began on Terra, millions of years ago. Today, mankind stretches out among the stars of the Milky Way, touching thousands of worlds, as far from our home as Clan space, more than 2,000 light-years distant. Yet who are we, really? What have we become in our relentless push outward and onward? I'm Bertram Habeas, and tonight, let's find the answers to these many other fascinating questions together, as we tour the stars!*

### Volume XXI: Collision Course—A Tale of Two Peoples

Fortune and fate are a fickle combination. They can take an ordinary man, raised in a harsh world, and hone him to the edge needed to found a mighty empire, or they can place a virtual terrorist forever in the annals of history as the founder of a legacy of crafty survivors. But for every tale of aspirations rising from a humble background, there are hundreds—if not thousands—where fate and fortune took a very different path.

One need only look into the early days of space travel for an example of these tales, when colonists—eager to escape overcrowding or the excesses of a corrupt Terran Alliance—sought new lives on far-flung, alien worlds. Many of these colonists would die from a host of dangers, some of which even defy the imagination today. Others would find their own paradise, only to have a powerful neighbor come and sweep it away just a short time later. Stranger still, some would form an interstellar alliance that would not rise to its true prominence until after being dominated by a conquering army not once, but twice in its centuries-long history.

If this last example sounds familiar, it very well should. It is the checkered history of the nation today known to all as the Rasalhague Dominion.

[The Rasalhaguian colonists] hailed mostly from Terra's Scandinavian states, which had suffered severe economic hardships as a result of the Second Soviet Civil War [in the early twenty-first century] and its aftermath. By the mid-twenty-third century, things had become so bad that many of these citizens jumped at the chance to begin anew somewhere far, far beyond the grip of the Terran government. And, at the time, the farthest known inhabitable world was a tiny dot called Rasalhague.

What's interesting to note is that Rasalhague and its neighboring systems would quickly unite under nothing so elaborate—and yet nothing so basic—as these people's unifying cultural heritage, and their deep desire for personal and economic freedom. There were no big neighbors to fear at the time, but space was new, and these explorers were among the first wave of colonists to leave the homeworld en masse. Still, the rule of an oppressive government had forced them to leave Mother Earth behind with no few regrets, and they wanted nothing more than to live out a quiet and peaceful life. Only mutual defense against the unknown drove them to form an alliance.

Thus, these virgin worlds were settled and ruled by a very loose governing structure, based on clan-oriented families, with a planetary ruler—or valdherre—elected on an annual basis. Then, an Elected Prince, chosen once a decade, in turn ruled the entire "Principality of Rasalhague" (originally known as the Rasalhague Consortium). The actual authority of this prince, however, was limited solely to maintaining the confederation's overall defense, which was done through an already-established set of mutual defense pacts. Thus, the Principality itself had very little to do, and a recurring phrase in reference to the interstellar government was, "The Principality of Rasalhague was generally conspicuous by its absence."

It was a simple, almost anarchic, state, and the people were content and free. Unfortunately, the "conspicuous absence" of the Principality's central government during the Draconis Combine invasion in 2330—barely a century after the formation of this tiny nation—would lead to centuries of brutal repression.

—Dr. Anne Oskar, *The Fallen Rise: A Tale of Rasalhague*, ComStar Press, 3120

Occupied by Combine forces in 2330, the Principality of Rasalhague would become the Draconis Combine's Rasalhague Military District a full century and a half later. There, its freedom-loving people would find their rulers replaced by warlords styled along the lines of feudal Japan, and would undergo many bloody purges aimed at bending their culture to conform with the Dragon's Will. Through it all, an ongoing resistance, the Tyr Movement, would continue to fight for a free and independent Rasalhague, but victory was centuries away.

And yet, even through the darkness of the Succession Wars, another undeniably powerful force, fated to one day entwine with that of the conquered nation, was growing into its own. . . .

*Drawing strength from each other, they survived; Tseng and Jorgensson emerged from the snow. And forged a Clan in the ghost bear's mold; Unity of purpose and strength of spirit, No task undertaken lightly or left half-done. To these ideals we hold true until we all shall fall.*

—*The Remembrance* (Clan Ghost Bear), Passage 45, 6:13–18

Clan Ghost Bear, formed alongside the other twenty of Nicholas Kerensky's Clans, was the only one to be founded by a married couple—and for that very reason, it almost did not happen. Hans Jorgensson and Sandra Tseng, two of Kerensky's most trusted advisors, actually fled to the frozen wastes of Strana Mechty upon learning they were to be assigned to different Clans. Legend has it that they survived their ordeal only by the grace of a family of native ghost bears, fearsome predators known for their

own sense of family unity, and it was this ordeal that led them to return and forge a Clan in that same family spirit. Nicholas Kerensky relented in his decision to separate these brave warriors, who did indeed mold their Clan along the principles of unity, strength, and compassion for one another.

The Ghost Bear Clan also became known as conservative hunters, cautious in all matters, but adopting a terrible resolve when threatened. This mindset led them to be the last to adapt to the changes in technology and society over the centuries to come, but lent them a very distinct “all or none” philosophy as well. The Bears became a Clan of extremes, be it extreme strength, extreme power, or extreme speed. Indeed, they rarely stood out during the Golden Century, until their frequent clashes with the neighboring Hell’s Horses Clan provoked the start of the greatest feud since the Jade Falcon/Wolf Clan rift formed early in Clan history.

Wait and see. All or none. These two concepts define everything one needs to learn about the Ghost Bear Clan. They were the last to adopt the advanced technologies that became available in the Clan homeworlds once Nicholas Kerensky died, fearing any new development would be a departure from the tried and the true. Valuing personal strength as the basis of all things Clan, they honed their warriors’ combat prowess, devoted substantial energies to mining and production, and generally worked on building themselves to the exclusion of all other concerns. Sure, they clashed from time to time with their neighbors, but it was all in the Way of the Clans.

That is, until they saw the benefits of other ways. Once the powerful infantry phenotype was proven in battle—by their hostile neighbors in Clan Hell’s Horses—they were quick to stage Trials for the breeding protocols and mesh them with the same powerful Elemental armor as their fellow Clans. This, of course, eventually created a massive feud with the Horses when they staged a trial for that Clan’s most advanced BattleMech factory on Tokasha. Once again, like so many times before, the duel became one of epic proportions, as both Clans threw unprecedented numbers of troops into that fight, but it would be the death of a beloved Ghost Bear Khan, Kilbourne Jorgensson, that would spark over a century of bitter rivalry.

But, of course, it was how the Bears addressed the invasion of the Inner Sphere that really proved these twin concepts of caution and overwhelmingly decisive action. Historically moderate, they became hardened Crusaders quickly, before the eve of the invasion’s “go” vote, motivated by the rhetoric of such passionate pro-invasion leaders as Jade Falcon Khan Vandervahn Chistu and Smoke Jaguar Khan Franklin Osis. The rest, as they say, is history.

—Dr. Anne Oskar, *The Fallen Rise: A Tale of Rasalhague*, ComStar Press, 3120

In the Inner Sphere, the Free Rasalhague Republic formed in 3034, with then-Gunji-no-kanrei Theodore Kurita’s official recognition of the rebellious district as an independent realm. The political decision created a buffer zone between the Draconis Combine and the Lyran half of the united FedCom, and realized the dreams of a people who had spent centuries fighting for freedom.

But the Rasalhaguians would have only a generation to enjoy their newfound liberty as the pendulum of fortune swung once more, for in 3050, the Clans came to Rasalhague.

In part two of the Rasalhague Dominion saga, we’ll look deeper into the nature of this first true integration of Clan and Inner Sphere cultures, and the forces that forged them into one. I’m Bertram Habeas.

## Riva Juro's Mercenary Profiles: 21st Centauri Lancers

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09/30/3133

To many, the mercenary life is the promise of freedom and boundless adventure, the dream of venturing forth among the stars, seeking fame and fortune and fighting the noble fight, unfettered by political schemes and the will of petty lords. To others, mercenaries are a scourge, little better than pirates, motivated only by the profit margin, schoolyard bullies who grew up to make a living terrorizing, killing, and destroying whatever and whoever their employers desire. The mercenary lifestyle is at once romanticized and vilified in the media, ever since the profession became a prominent way of life for thousands of people across the Inner Sphere. Yet what is truth, and what is fiction, about the modern soldier-for-hire?

To answer that question, I hooked up with the Seventeenth Armored Recon Company of the famous 21st Centauri Lancers mercenary command during their recent downtime on Galatea, a world known far and wide as the Mercenary's Star. Following the exploits of these men and women, from the barrooms and negotiating tables on Galatea to the battlefields on Uhuru, it soon became apparent that these were more than mere money soldiers, more than stock heroes or villains from the tri-vids....

The Lancers originally formed over a century and a half ago from a House Liao 'Mech battalion that mutinied over unpaid wages. Taking their chances on the mercenary scene, vowing never to be taken advantage of again, they built a reputation for integrity as well as martial excellence. Since then, they have served every Great House in the Inner Sphere except Liao, bringing their own unique style both to contract negotiations and to the battle zone. In their history, they have suffered and triumphed in equal measure. Their missions, chosen very carefully and haggled fervently, may not have grabbed the headlines that flashier mercenary commands, such as the Kell Hounds and the Wolf's Dragoons have, but there were few employers who doubted the strength of these warriors' honesty off the field, and honorable conduct in battle.

"The [Commanding Officers] here look out for their own," my assigned guide, Thos Cardella, told me. A huge, dark-skinned man, whose perpetual sneer belies a remarkably compassionate demeanor, Cardella began our first conversation over a round of imported Timbiqui Dark beers. "See, we left [the Capellan Confederation] in protest over money, and it's always been on the minds of every successive CO that the troops never again find themselves begging on the streets. We'll work for our suppers, like everyone else...but when you're under fire, the last thing you want to hear is that the checks won't clear for all that hard work."

The Lancers' contract negotiators are tough, ripping every contract offer received apart in search of hidden clauses that might entrap the mercenaries or leave them short on support. Even the placement of the command's dependents—spouses, children, and other extended family who travel from baseworld to baseworld—is secured before a major operation is assumed. This last point is an ongoing reminder of when the Lancers themselves were hijacked by the machinations of the Word of Blake, an event that nearly shattered their sterling reputation.

"[The Blakists] captured our dependents in 3058 and basically held them at gunpoint to keep us from a contract with ComStar," Cardella explained. "Their own troops, disguised as Lancers, then took the job on our behalf, to launch an assault on Terra. All we had to do is keep a low profile for a few months. With our people under the gun, we did that, and sure enough the Blakies kept their word, but it was a crisis that never should have happened, and now the security of our people is always part of the bargain."

Cardella also informed me that the Lancers have always been fanatical about employer integrity. Once wronged, the mercenaries have often made it their policy to publicly announce their grievances, as loudly and as often as possible, in order to warn off any other potential employees of the offending employer. This policy, and the eagerness to enforce it, is what Cardella considers to be the unit's ultimate trump card.

"Anyone interested in handling mercs ought to know the right way to handle them," he adds. "Blacklisting can go both ways, after all."

As he explained it to me, I watched firsthand the negotiations for a contract with the Lyran Commonwealth. The mission: a punitive strike (objective raid, according to the paperwork) against the Marik-Stewart Commonwealth world of Uhuru, in retaliation for an unsanctioned raid on the Lyran world of Rahne. A small objective, meant only as a reminder that military action will not be tolerated, the Lyrans nonetheless want to maintain their own security while sending the mercenaries in. Such missions are common enough, says Cardella:

"Typically, it's a matter of government policy not to throw House troops after a minor objective like this. After all, troops waving a state banner can be construed as an invasion force, when the strike is just a 'wake up call' for negotiations that went awry... Nobody wants a full-blown war to come of it, and so the mercs are brought in. Raids and pirate hunting are a mercenary's bread and butter these days."

The contract is signed, and the mission proceeds. In the transit, I was introduced to many of the Seventeenth Armored Recon Company's more colorful personalities, from the strict Nagelring-trained disciplinarian company commander, Richard Teigart, to the company's flamboyant chief technician, Airia Mulvaro. Only one company was deemed necessary for the operation, with Cardella and myself along strictly as observers. The weeks of space travel dragged by with a mixture of apprehension and boredom, until landfall on Uhuru came at last.

The fighting was brief as it was fierce, with the Lancers facing a slightly smaller 'Mech and vehicle force. The Marik-Stewart forces lost four tanks and a pair of 'Mechs in the exchange, with the rest retreating from the field. On several occasions, as I rode in the cramped space behind Cardella in his Sun Cobra, I witnessed Lancer warriors holding back their fire on damaged

defending units, allowing them to leave the field in peace where another commander might have shattered them for maximum effect. Given the mission guidelines, in fact, Cardella admitted that a “clean sweep” would probably make an even stronger statement for the Lancers’ Lyran employers. Still, Captain Teigart honored the withdrawal. The outmatched Marik-Stewart forces fled, leaving the objective open to capture or destruction.

When asked why after the fighting ended (and after some of my bruises healed from being thrown about a stomping BattleMech cockpit in a live combat mission), Cardella explained another aspect of mercenary philosophy, one that, while proclaimed by many other such professional soldiers, is considered gospel by those of the 21st Centauri Lancers.

“We’re not murderers and thieves,” he said simply. “We’re mercenaries, paid to do a job as best we can. Those [Marik-Stewart] warriors were there for the same reason, and faced the same risks we did. If it were you or I who had to retreat, we’d have expected the same courtesy.... Maybe it sounds like an outdated code of chivalry, but at least when they face us, even our enemies can know they’re getting a fair shake. Our business is fighting, not necessarily killing.”

Integrity, survival, and honor—three goals of the modern mercenary, and three pillars of the Centauri Lancers, a mercenary command that stands out not for the battlefield glories won, but for the professionalism they bring to a deadly business. As we enter a new age of uncertainty, perhaps others can learn from their example.

I’m Ravi Juro, INN special correspondent, Galatea.

## Touring the Stars with Bertram Habeas

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10/01/3133

*We began on Terra, millions of years ago. Today, mankind stretches out among the stars of the Milky Way, touching thousands of worlds, as far from our home as Clan space, more than 2,000 light-years distant. Yet who are we, really? What have we become in our relentless push outward and onward? I'm Bertram Habeas, and tonight, let's find the answers to these and many other fascinating questions together, as we tour the stars!*

### Volume XXII: Two Peoples, One Destiny

Asgard, Rasalhague. Like many Inner Sphere capitals, this city boasts one of its realm's largest populations, over three million inhabitants whose roots can be traced either directly to the ancient history of the Principality of Rasalhague or to the former Star League Defense Force that fled to form the Clans. The architecture of this city is a curious blend of classical Scandinavian motifs and spartan—almost bland—Clan utilitarianism.

In the marketplace, uniformed Clan merchants barter with natives dressed in more expressive fashions consistent with the latest trends, exchanging Bear-krona for luxuries that would make civilian castemen in the neighboring Clan Wolf green with envy. At night, these people may even take in the latest holodrama out of the Draconis Combine, or catch the latest arena duels from Solaris VII on locally produced ClearSite X20 Tri-Vids.

The sacred hunting grounds in the northern lands are stocked with a carefully controlled population of ghost bears, transplanted from far-off Strana Mechty. Provided for hardened warriors undertaking the Ghost Bear's Clawing rite, local custom insists that no one venture into these lands armed with any weapon more potent than a simple pistol. A small and incredibly illegal black market exists in which non-Warriors are smuggled onto those lands and attempt Clawing rites of their own—none, so far, have returned.

It is a land of contrasts, where strict order and discipline clash with an expressive, freedom-loving people, and where a traveler's unintended offense is as likely to provoke a Trial of Grievance as a simple rebuke. And yet, nothing less can be expected from the heart of the Rasalhague Dominion—the first true fusion of the Clan Way with the abundance and freedom of the Inner Sphere.

Though plans were underway to make it the new seat of government for the Free Rasalhague Republic, Asgard was a small city in July of 3050, when the blue skies over Rasalhague were darkened by the approach of Clan DropShips bent on conquering this key Inner Sphere capital. Clan Wolf, having won a fierce bidding war against the Ghost Bears for the right to claim Rasalhague, nonetheless chose this city to be its staging area during the assault. Fighting for the heart of the new Republic ranked among the fiercest of the war to date, with three full front-line Clusters of Clan troops facing close to three and a half Inner Sphere regiments plus hordes of supporting troops. The natives sold themselves dearly, fighting even in the streets of the old capital city of Reykjavik, making the Wolves pay for every meter they captured, but in the end they could not stand up to the skill and firepower of the Clan forces.

Bloody as the fighting for Rasalhague was, Clan Wolf's rule in the aftermath was almost benign, at least until the Refusal War of 3058, when the Crusader Wolves inherited full control over the Wolf Clan Occupation Zone. Less devoted to engendering goodwill among the conquered peoples of the Inner Sphere than pressing for a renewed invasion, the Crusader Wolves turned more and more to the harsher tactics of Clan rule. The natives of the Rasalhaguian worlds they had claimed, true to their history, thus turned more and more toward armed resistance.

Yet, even as a simmering war of rebellion played itself out on the Wolf-occupied worlds of the shattered Rasalhague Republic, the worlds claimed by the Ghost Bears actually grew more peaceful. Though they, too, suffered from the sporadic fighting of rebel terrorists and resistance cells, the Bears gradually shifted from their previous Crusader stance, and turned their attention toward stabilizing their newly captured worlds.

Many historians attribute the sudden change of the Bears' attitude from brutal oppressor—one that even needed the brief aid of the Steel Viper Clan to support its rule—to kind partner, as another example of the "all or none" philosophy. Yet, while it certainly does fit into that mode of thought, the Bears' change of heart also stemmed from a very practical reasoning that came to light after Tukayyid.

Simply put, the Bears suddenly realized they were going to be in the Inner Sphere for a very, very long time. As they came to terms with this realization, it also became clear that they would need to win over the hearts and minds of their new citizens, and doing so at gunpoint really would not be conducive to a lasting peace. With that realization came a newfound sense of compassion, an almost religious awakening, and the Bears suddenly concluded they were not among enemies but the very people the SLDF stood for. In the final analysis, they suddenly realized that they'd already come home. The more mystically minded among them even pointed to the fact that one of the Clans' founders, Hans Jorgensson, himself boasted the same Scandinavian origins as this realm as a sign of their inevitable union.

Whether or not it was preordained, however, thus was born the Great Plan, as some have called it. Easily the most ambitious undertaking ever conceived by a Clan, the Great Plan was cautious and methodical, and took years to accomplish in virtual secrecy.

—Dr. Anne Oskar, *The Fallen Rise: A Tale of Rasalhague*, ComStar Press, 3120

Over the years that followed the Battle for Tukayyid, the Ghost Bears began—slowly at first, but then in greater numbers as time and resources became available—to move entire segments of their homeworld populations into the Inner Sphere. With the aid of volunteers from the various castes, and allied Clans such as the Snow Ravens and the Diamond Sharks (now Clan Sea Fox), DropShips, JumpShips, and even specialized ArcShips loaded with civilians and equipment moved to the Ghost Bear Occupation Zone.

At the same time, every effort was made to relax the restrictions of the native populations without compromising Ghost Bear authority. Local Rasalhagians and former citizens of the Draconis Combine gained increasing rights to self-determination, and were able to travel and communicate freely between worlds so long as they did not interfere with the Clan warriors who claimed to rule them. Though rebellion remained a problem, instances of domestic terrorism gradually declined, even as Clan civilians began to appear in droves. Factories and cities were rebuilt, enhanced, and a limited, internalized free trade spurred economic growth almost on par with the freer markets of the Successor States.

But what truly united the Rasalhagian people with the invading Clans? What turned a conquering army of invaders as reviled as those of the despotic House Kurita into the treasured allies of the fallen Free Rasalhague Republic? Ironically, the catalyst for this unlikely union was nothing short of the death of one Clan, and an ill-timed invasion by another.

3060 saw the end of one destructive Path, and the start of another, hopefully more promising, one. Before that year, we—like so many of our brothers—saw the Inner Sphere as a den of corruption, worthy of nothing less than our conquest and rule. But with the fall of the most corrupt and feral among us, our eyes were opened to the reality that perhaps we are not always right. The universe, clearly, does not work in absolutes.

Then, just three short years later, we faced the dual threats of an aggressive Draconis Combine and the foolhardy Hell's Horses. On the field of battle, we learned of the honor of the Spheroids, and the lack of it in those we once knew as "our kind." When we returned home in victory, we thus sought the highest of honors for those once thought of as our isorla, our spoils of war.

With honor in our hearts, and hope for the future, we won back Rasalhague for its people, and gave it to those who deserved that which they called home. May we work together to defend that which we can now both call home.

—Khan Bjorn Jorensson, 3065, excerpted from his personal journals.

The reclamation of Rasalhague after the Combine/Ghost Bear War and the Hell's Horses' First Incursion initiated the final phase of a Clan–Inner Sphere fusion and saw the first Clan-held worlds to be ruled by native-born inhabitants under a Rasalhaguian standard. Though the Clan remained the sole military power, supported by its own citizens and lesser castes, the culture, economy, and even political might of the short-lived Rasalhague Republic were once more on the rise.

Join us for the third of our four-part series on the Rasalhague Dominion, when we explore the first true test of the Ghost Bear–Rasalhaguian unity, in the face of the fires of mankind's darkest hours. I'm Bertram Habeas.



## Touring the Stars with Bertram Habeas

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10/08/3133

*We began on Terra, millions of years ago. Today, mankind stretches out among the stars of the Milky Way, touching thousands of worlds, as far from our home as Clan space, more than 2,000 light-years distant. Yet who are we, really? What have we become in our relentless push outward and onward? I'm Bertram Habeas, and tonight, let's find the answers to these and many other fascinating questions together, as we tour the stars!*

### Volume XXIII: Standing Together

3067: The Year of Darkness. It was the year the FedCom Civil War finally drew to a close. The year the gathered leaders of the new Star League admitted to themselves that their noble experiment had failed. It was the year the Word of Blake, like a jilted lover, unleashed a hell arguably more horrendous than any seen during the days of Stefan Amaris.

History teaches that the Jihad began with simultaneous assaults on Tharkad, Luthien, New Avalon, and Outreach, with other major worlds and capitals falling a short time later. Whether by nuclear strike, orbital bombardment, or under waves of stampeding BattleMechs, the Blakists' so-called holy war doused the worlds of the Inner Sphere with the blood of millions.

For the people of the seven-star alliance that was all that remained of the Free Rasalhague Republic, the Jihad was not truly felt, however, until 3068, when the Word of Blake hit Tukayyid. Though the strike was meant as much to shatter the remaining ComStar forces stationed there as it was to throw off another potential power that could act against the Blakists, the strike drove home the fact that the fanatics were a force that endangered all nations—great and small. Amazingly, among the captured population of the Ghost Bear Dominion, the strike on Rasalhague prompted outrage and a plea to the Clan leadership to somehow safeguard their free brethren.

There is, of course, a lot of speculation these days as to what finally led to the Bears' entering into the Jihad in force, much of it based on the disjointed news of that era, which was still plagued by the mass manipulation of the HPGs initiated by the Blakists soon after their first strikes. Many historians thus point to their move to absorb the remnants of the Free Rasalhague Republic (FRR) by 3070. But that really can't be considered jumping into the greater conflict, as I see it.

The absorption of the Republic's remnants, to the Bears and their own subjects—"conquered people" ceased to apply sometime around 3060, when the Bears and these people became neighbors—seemed a natural next step after reclaiming Rasalhague itself. Of course, it took close to a full year of negotiations for the Republic's remnant worlds to accept their own absorption, though, without Ragnar Magnusson, it's likely such a thing would never have occurred at all. Then it took another year to hash out what was to become of the surviving forces of the Kungsarme under Ghost Bear rule. This, of course, was partially solved by Trials, and partially by the new Dominion government.

But protecting the remaining Free Rasalhaguians from the Word of Blake was a pretext, an incidental fringe benefit, rather than a cause. The Bear leadership, I think, didn't really comprehend the threat of the zealots until the scouring of Tamar. Even then, of course, it took the Bears three years to get moving. . . .

—Dr. Anne Oskar, *The Fallen Rise: A Tale of Rasalhague*, ComStar Press, 3120

Indeed, the Bears and the new civilian population seemed completely uninterested in taking steps against the Word of Blake until later in the war, and with good reason. The absorption of the leftover FRR worlds required delicate political maneuvering, and the question of absorbing an Inner Sphere military force proved a thorny issue to tackle. The FRR armed forces numbered some five BattleMech regiments—four, after Tukayyid—and the proud Rasalhaguian warriors weren't likely to surrender their only source of national pride. Eventually, the Bears relented, after a fashion, by allowing the KungsArmé troops to fight Trials for Position for a place in their warrior class. This at once boosted the Ghost Bear Dominion's armed forces and assured the Clan's continued exclusive control over its entire defense force. By further giving the Rasalhaguians full rights to rule over their own civilian affairs—so long as they acknowledged Ghost Bear supremacy—the absorption created years of political confusion.

The arrival of the Bears' historic enemy, Clan Hell's Horses, created another problem. Despite calls for normalization after the fall of Khan Malavai Fletcher—architect of a brief and foolhardy invasion of Dominion space in the early 3060s—rank-and-file troops on both sides continued to cling to the old grudge. However, when the Horses cut into the Wolf Clan territory instead of the Bears, it became clear that their new Khan, James Cobb, stood by his pledge to end the feud. Though clashes still occurred, the ferocity of the old Bear/Horses clashes was gone; the Clan forces met on the field of battle as equals—if not truly friends.

Then, in the mid-3070s, the Bears emerged from their hibernation. With the rear lines secure, and their new "separate-but-equal" government installed and running, the Clan jumped into the Jihad with both feet, true to their history. Pledging their arms to the defense of the Combine, they secured Hohiro Kurita's permission to jump through Combine space, assisting Combine and coalition forces in the liberation of key worlds, their blood spilling with that of their former enemies to beat back the zealots on Luthien, Pesht, and Dieron.

Wait and see. All or none. Caution before overwhelming action. In the Jihad, as never before, the Bears proved their fierce dedication to the ideals of their Clan by fighting with a fervor never before seen among their kind. With every bombed city they witnessed, every mass grave uncovered, every hospital filled with the dead and dying civilians exposed to nerve agents and nuclear radiation, the Bears seemed to grow only more furious. A Trial of Annihilation was declared on the Word of Blake, and Bear troops bulled their way into every entrenched position the zealots claimed in the Combine, expecting and

giving no quarter. Bear troops took no prisoners and only invoked Clan honor when facing enemy mercenaries—a curious departure from the Clan’s anti-mercenary bent.

The fighting cost them dearly, however. Within the first three years, the Clan WarShip fleet, once again, was devastated, while two whole Galaxies of front-line troops were simply gone. By 3081, half the Clan Touman was dead; a quarter of the remainder was swearing fealty to Devlin Stone. Meanwhile, the strain of maintaining homeland defense and fighting a war of annihilation against a fanatical enemy had caused cracks in the Dominion government, forcing another reform that further integrated civilian and military leadership. . . .

—Dr. Anne Oskar, *The Fallen Rise: A Tale of Rasalhague*, ComStar Press, 3120

What Bears returned home from the final victory returned to a Dominion in distress, their forces battered, and an uncertain future lay ahead. Random suicide bombings using weapons of mass destruction had hit every nation and lent a bittersweet taste to the final peace. Though, in the Dominion, the lines had held, the government was still shaky and the military was a shadow of its former self. Yet, through that crucible, the Rasalhaguian/Ghost Bear relationship was forever changed. Within the Dominion, Spheroid natives and invading Clansmen could look upon valiant heroes like the First Rasalhague Bears and the First Ghost Tyr Clusters with equal pride, recounting the glorious last stand of integrated Battle Clusters that placed trueborn Ghost Bear MechWarriors shoulder to shoulder with warriors raised from the captured Rasalhaguian and Combine planets. Freeborn, trueborn, Spheroid or Clan—all had proven their willingness to combat evil together. War had fused the Dominion together more solidly than any negotiations ever could, infusing civilians and warriors alike with a sense of purpose.

The Ghost Bear Dominion had entered into a new era.

“The road ahead is filled with an evil that can only be cleansed with the fires of Annihilation. The road behind us is littered with the bodies of our fallen, given to that cause. As you fight today, know that each of us who dies this day will have spent our lives in the name of honor, in the name of Kerensky, in the names of Sandra Tseng and Hans Jorgensson! But above all this, know that we shall forever purge these nameless monsters in the name of that which is above what makes us trueborn or freeborn, Clan or Sphere. Follow me—for Rasalhague!”

—saKhan Ragnar Magnusson, to his troops at the Battle of Dieron, 3077

In our next installment, we’ll complete our tour of the Dominion with a look at the people of this dichotomous realm today. Won’t you join us as we continue our tour of the stars? I’m Bertram Habeas.

## The “Hand of Starling”: Irian BattleMech Cover-Up?

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10/13/3133

**SHADOW:** Well met, truthseekers! The “Hand of Starling,” the show The Republic doesn’t want you to see, is back on the air! I’m your host, Shadow. With me as always are my fellow Illuminati, Phantom and Wraith.

**PHANTOM:** Believe nothing!

**WRAITH:** Trust no one!

**SHADOW:** Welcome, gents. Before we begin today’s topic – The Irian Cover-Up – our question of the week comes from a viewer known online as Draco041. He (or she) says: “Starling group, what’s the deal with the alleged investigation into who the Kappa killer really was? Are you guys planning to look into the possible tie-in with the mysterious ‘investigations’ that Kristoff Erbe is doing on Towne?”

**WRAITH:** Good question, guy!

**PHANTOM:** Or girl!

**SHADOW:** Hehehe. Well, Draco, that is an excellent question. Naturally, as with all suspicious activities in The Republic, be they close to home or “out there,” you can be assured that “Hand of Starling” will ever be there, digging up the dirt and bringing you the scoop. Knight-Errent Erbe’s activities here on Towne have not gone unnoticed, and we’ll be sure to break the news to you soon!

**PHANTOM:** Hint, Draco: Think about ghosts.

**WRAITH:** Shush, Phantom. That’s for another time.

**SHADOW:** Right. Now, onto the topic at hand. Irian Technologies, based on one of the secondary plants left over from Irian BattleMechs Unlimited, was rebuilt after the planet Irian was ceded to The Republic under threat of war –

**PHANTOM:** Bogus!

**WRAITH:** Phantom, let him finish.

**SHADOW:** Thanks, Brother Wraith. Anyway, after the rebuild, the manufacturing lines produced only one quick run of ‘Mechs for the local militia, then were retooled in accordance with Devlin Stone’s Military Material Redemption Program [MMRP] to produce nothing more sophisticated than MiningMechs and ConstructionMechs. Though far less profitable, the refurbished Irian plants have since produced their walking plowshares instead of the titans of death that once menaced all of humanity. But is this the truth, or merely what The Republic overlords would like us to believe? People?

**PHANTOM:** It’s a sham, and I’m amazed that Stone got away with it for so long!

**WRAITH:** Complete tripe! Who would believe that any nation would close down something as valuable as a source for new BattleMechs?

**SHADOW:** All right then, brothers. You said it; you explain it!

**PHANTOM:** Happily! The truth is obvious to anyone with eyes in his head and only slightly less so to the legally blind. IrTech had a booming business before the Jihad, churning out ‘Mechs at a rate unprecedented since the fall of the Star League, what with the sheer volume of orders coming in thanks to the Clan War, the FedCom Civil War, and the relocation of the Word of Blake into Free Worlds territory. The League was rolling in the funds from being the Inner Sphere’s arms dealer, and folks like IrTech were at the head of the pack. The profits were high, the Irian plants were expanding, and after centuries of subsistence-level production –

**WRAITH:** Right. And just from that angle alone, a company becomes a financial drug addict. Nearly everything else that IrTech could produce became secondary to military products, so when Stone came along and said, “No more ‘Mechs!” the corporate execs probably soiled their collective trousers. Suddenly, the lion’s share of their profits were going to be flying out the window.

**SHADOW:** Uh huh.

**WRAITH:** Yeah, so what would any businessmen do in such a case? Relocate, right? If they can’t build ‘Mechs in The Republic, then the powers that be will have to do without their services – and the jobs that go along with it. Not a good sign for a new nation to drive away the big money makers –

**PHANTOM:** So then, Stone gives them a deal. He needs more BattleMechs, because many of the folks voluntarily defecting to him are bringing battle-ravaged wrecks. Sure, he can take those that he “decommissions” from the private citizens and mercs, but there’s supposed to be a big show of destroying them, to prove he’s serious about ending the reign of these so-called “kings

of the battlefield.” So, to win over the now-scared-poopless execs at companies like IrTech, he offers a secret deal to produce BattleMechs for The Republic.

**SHADOW:** Which they did. But only for a limited run, right?

**WRAITH:** Come off it, Shadow; you don’t fall for that any more than we do. And we both know that IrTech recently built two more production lines on Irian, despite complaining about sagging profits from the oversaturation of the WorkMech markets. These events obviously don’t add up. Add in the Stone angle, and it all makes perfect sense: IrTech is producing BattleMechs even today. Stone wasn’t so stupid as to get rid of all his gun makers, after all.

**PHANTOM:** Right. So Stone commissions a run of ‘Mechs – unregistered ‘Mechs, perhaps – which he then stockpiles for his own private armies. I mean, if you run through the figures, you’ll see that units like Stone’s Lament, the Triarii Protectors, and even all the assorted planetary militias just can’t be filled by the few BattleMechs that supposedly defected to The Republic after the Jihad. Because most junkyards still seem to be brimming with wrecked ‘Mechs, the question becomes, “Where’d the new ‘Mechs come from?”

**SHADOW:** What about all the technology deals over the past few decades?

**WRAITH:** A drop in the bucket. Besides, what we’re seeing is all new. It’s not like this is without precedent. In the days of the original Star League, the Terran Hegemony refined BattleMech design and production constantly, to ensure that their machines were both more numerous and more sophisticated than anything the other Great Houses had, and to maintain their dominance. Stone, having essentially formed his own version of the Hegemony after the Jihad, knew he couldn’t keep the realm secure on promises of peace. He needed an edge, but because he’d sold folks on a popular pacifist line, he couldn’t well amass an army in public, could he?

**PHANTOM:** Hard lock and fire, Wraith. Thus was born the secret plans to stockpile ‘Mechs. Oh, and Wraith, you forgot about ComStar. They managed to hide an army for centuries while spouting the neutral pacifist’s line. Of course, with a monopoly of HPGs, they didn’t have to reveal their teeth until the Clans showed up.

**WRAITH:** Good point, Brother Phantom.

**SHADOW:** So, then. What we have is IrTech, under threat of lost profits after the MMRP goes into effect, threatening to leave. Stone, looking to keep jobs in The Republic, and needing to arm a secret army, strikes a deal. Flash forward 60 years. Now IrTech, crying poverty because they “only produce WorkMechs,” is nonetheless building more plants? Does it all add up? Why call attention to themselves that way?

**WRAITH:** Well, two things: First, it reinforces a party line and probably brings in support money from the government, thus sustaining the company’s ambitions at lower overall cost to them. Second, like any great conspiracy, the government hopes it can be debunked by making it public. Hiding the scandal in plain view, because any reasonable person would try to hide the crooked things he’s doing, right?

**PHANTOM:** Spot on, Wraith!

**SHADOW:** Aha! The truth revealed?

**WRAITH:** As clear as Zaniahan crystal sheets, Brother Shadow.

**PHANTOM:** The only real question is, “Where have all the ‘Mechs gone now?”

**SHADOW:** A worthy discussion for next time, perhaps, as we’re out of time here. And with that, we vanish into the ether. Come back next week, truth-seekers, as the “Hand of Starling” reaches to pull back the veil of conspiracy to bring enlightenment to all!

## Touring the Stars with Bertram Habeas

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10/15/3133

*We began on Terra, millions of years ago. Today, mankind stretches out among the stars of the Milky Way, touching thousands of worlds, as far from our home as Clan space, more than 2,000 light-years distant. Yet who are we, really? What have we become in our relentless push outward and onward? I'm Bertram Habeas, and tonight, let's find the answers to these and many other fascinating questions together, as we tour the stars!*

### Volume XXIV: Symbiosis—The Rasalhague Dominion Today

**Fact Sheet:** Rasalhague Dominion

**Founding Year:** 3060

**Capital (City, World):** Asgard, Rasalhague

**National Symbol:** A white, roaring bear's head, set against a dark blue triangle

**Location (Terra relative):** Coreward, between the Wolf Clan Occupation Zone and the Draconis Combine

**Total (Inhabited) Systems:** 71

**Estimated Population (3130):** 280,000,000,000

**Government:** Republic (with Clan warrior-caste stylings)

**Ruler:** Prince Hjalmer Miraborg (Khan Dalia Bekker)

**Dominant Language(s):** English and Swedish (official), Swedenese, Japanese, German

**Dominant Religion(s):** Christian (Lutheran, semi-official), Shinto, Atheism, Neo-Norse

**Unit of Currency:** Bear-krona (1 bear-krona = 2.83 C-Bills)

Silverdale, capital city of Alshain, is a metropolis of towering high-rises, apartment flats, commercial centers, and even strip malls that surround the massive Alshain Interstellar Spaceport. By day, a warm, yellow-white sun lights the immaculate streets of this city, muted somewhat by the haze that gives the sky a purple cast. At night, fluorescent bulbs and neon lights enliven the inner city as it grows only slightly less congested than during normal daytime traffic. And yet, for all the hustle and bustle, Silverdale is one of the Rasalhague Dominion's cleanest and quietest cities. Crime is almost unheard of, the monorails run on time, a harmony of order characterizes even the morning rush hours—but, then, can anything less be expected of the administrative capital of the Dominion's Clan population?

The spaceport grounds host a full Cluster of some 150 aerospace fighters, backed up by two Ghost Bear DropShips always in dock for a defense force that can cut down incoming attack forces before they have a chance to land. In addition, a regular patrol of infantry (both Elemental armored and standard foot soldiers), armored vehicles, and even the occasional BattleMech, assures all is peaceful and orderly.

At the heart of this city, a massive hall, adorned with the Rasalhague Dominion standard, identifies the center of government on Alshain, and is home of the Dominion Council, guarded day in and day out by elite armored troopers who assure the safety of the leaders and lawmakers within.

Once the capital for the Rasalhague Dominion, the presence of the Dominion Council Hall harkens back to the days when the Ghost Bear Clan ruled its conquered territory from this world. Beginning with the recapture of Rasalhague and the absorption of the remainder of the Rasalhague Republic worlds in the 3060s, however, the seat of executive power has moved, reflecting the integration of the native people with the new Clan population. But with Alshain's dual significance as the home of many of the Ghost Bear Clan's genetic repositories and as the former regional capital of the Combine's fallen Alshain Military District, equal respect had to be shown to this world as well. Thus, when the final form of the integrated government was established after the Second Combine-Dominion War, few were shocked to see the new Dominion Council open on this world.

The Ghost Bear Dominion formally became the Rasalhague Dominion—an equal blend of Clan and Inner Sphere—with the election of its first Prince, saKhan Ragnar Magnusson, in 3103. The first and only Prince to ever hold the dual titles of Ghost Bear saKhan and supreme ruler of the Dominion, Magnusson relinquished his Clan title to help clarify the chain of command. Khan Aletha Kabrinski, his former commander and leader of the half-integrated Clan Ghost Bear, at once became his subordinate, a second-in-command and commander-in-chief of the Dominion defense forces under the new order. A new Council opened on Alshain that very year, consisting of a mandated equal mix of civilians, trueborn warriors, and freeborn warriors, who together formed a voting bloc and check against both the Khan and the Prince. The compromise government gave the Bears and their Spheroid companions equal voice, solidifying the bond forged between them over forty years. . . .

For the Bears, it was a leap of faith. Though the trueborn warriors and their militarized subcastes maintained the ways of the Clan—including their hallowed breeding program, now maintained by warrior-techs and warrior-scientists, to prevent their loss to the restriction-free civilian sector—they actually bargained away their ultimate authority over the people they once governed. The Clan would rule all military affairs as before, but could no longer handle matters on its own initiative. As a concession to Clan sensibilities, of course, even the elected Prince has to have military experience—possible for civilians, since the Clan added the institution of retirement for its warrior class shortly after the influx of native-born warriors who passed the Trials to become Clan swelled its ranks. This assured that whoever ruled knew both the Ghost Bear way of thinking and represented the needs of the civilian classes.

The Clan's civilians already enjoyed the sweeping freedoms of Inner Sphere life, having been freed over time from their caste restrictions, which is probably one reason the Bears found letting go of their authority somewhat easier. But to assure these civilians had a voice, they also gained seats on the Clan's Council, a stunning move for a Clan long known for its inability to adapt. To assure that the Council would be able to reach consensus, rather than be bogged down in civilian

versus military debates, a third power bloc—the freeborn warriors—was added, and the numbers of all three are balanced by mandate, to assure no one bloc ever gains overwhelming voting clout.

Interestingly enough, though the Clan Council had now become “diluted” with civilians, certain Clan customs were adopted eagerly by both sides of the civilian- and military-rule debate, including the Trial of Refusal. Even the native Rasalhaguians, apparently, discovered that the threat of military action in response to poor policy decisions made for an excellent deterrent to bad politics. With clauses allowing civilian Council voters to choose a champion or risk personal defeat in a “bloodless Trial,” the Clan custom managed to survive its translation under the integrated government.

With their ability to remove a Khan or a Prince, and even to overrule the decisions of either leader, the Dominion Council may well have been a masterstroke for these two peoples, meshing the beliefs of the Rasalhaguians with those of their one-time conquerors, creating a workable political and social structure that continues to prosper even today. Sure, they have their problems from time to time, but the greatest hurdle was finally overcome on that wintry day on Rasalhague in 3103.

All it took was a little faith.

—Dr. Anne Oskar, *The Fallen Rise: A Tale of Rasalhague*, ComStar Press, 3120

And so, unity, the ideal that all Clans promise, the Ghost Bears finally delivered with the birth of the Rasalhague Dominion. Politically ruled by a unique blend of Rasalhaguan democracy and Clan warrior ambition, its people—regardless of heritage—can rest assured that their voices will be heard. Meanwhile, the warriors still train and wage their Trials, honing the edge of the Dominion defense forces. It is a society where there are no castes, save among the trueborns, where reverence for Kerensky’s vision stands alongside that of the devout Lutherans whose practices had been long denied under a nearly forgotten era when the Dragon’s banner waved over all. It’s a bold experiment, but one that seems to have worked so far, and while the culture may seem alien to their Inner Sphere and Clan neighbors alike, there is no denying the strength of the Rasalhague Dominion’s devotion to unity, and to freedom. Twin goals, from two peoples, brought together in a common destiny.

“Friends, comrades, fellow Rasalhaguians, today we have ushered in a new age of peace, trust, and prosperity, for ourselves and those who shall follow us. We stand together, Clan and Sphere, as a testament to two unstoppable spirits, forged into one with the fires of Trials well fought, and bargains well bid.

“Together, let what we have built today stand until we all shall fall. The Rasalhague Dominion is born this day; look upon your neighbor and see conquerors and subjects no more. Today, we are both free.

“Seyla!”

—Prince Ragnar Magnusson, inaugural address to the newly formed Dominion Council, 3103

In our next four-part series, our tour through the history and cultures of the Inner Sphere will take us to the Lyran Commonwealth of House Steiner, the economic and industrial powerhouse of the Inner Sphere. I’m Bertram Habeas.

## Redburn: Republic's Recovery Near

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10/20/3133

GENEVA, TERRA – Speaking from the capital building, Exarch Damien Redburn announced today, during his monthly State of the Republic address, that the “end of the crisis” currently plaguing the nation is near. The declaration follows over a year of uncertainty that began with the breakdown of interstellar communications last August, and was the preamble for a short speech recapping the events of the past few months.

“My fellow Republicans,” said Redburn. “It need not be said that a time of great upheaval has been upon us since the loss of communications throughout our fair realm, but the forecasts of a new dark age have not come to pass. Though many of you have feared, some with good reason, the end of the crisis is near. Enemies, both within and outside our nation, may have tried to bring us down, but I can assure you, with my utmost sincerity, that our recovery is at hand...”

The Exarch did not elaborate much farther on this recovery beyond his opening remarks, except to praise ComStar's continuing efforts to restore the HPGs still silenced throughout The Republic and the Inner Sphere. Also conspicuously absent from his address was any comment on the recent fighting still gripping Prefectures III and IV. However, Redburn did hint the alleged build-up of Capellan troops on the border of Prefectures V and VI, as well as The Republic's response to the same.

“...Chancellor Daoshen Liao's representative has assured us that the reports of military maneuvers near the Capellan border prefectures are not indicative of a military invasion, and for the moment, we might take him at his word,” said Redburn. “After all, it is only a fool who fights when he is half blind, and our neighbor's eyes are just as clouded as ours might be. In such situations, one never knows when there might be a surprise lurking for the unsuspecting invader.”

Critics of the Exarch have claimed that such remarks may be construed as a virtual threat to the Capellan people, but Redburn's spokespersons have assured INN that no such threat was implied or intended.

“The Exarch's meaning was clear enough for any reasonable person to understand,” said spokesperson Domonic Rastarian. “The Republic remains dedicated to peace, but strong enough to repel any invader who tries to take advantage of the current crisis. Fortunately, such reassurances will not be necessary once the current difficulties are resolved.”

### Towne Log

+ My fellow Republicans, have no fear! For I am Redburn, voice of the Great and Powerful Oz!!! Pay no attention to that BattleMech behind the curtain!  
:- Synnik

+ ROFLMAO, Synnik! I can almost hear the old man saying that, too! I can't even believe he managed to deliver a speech like that with a straight face.  
:- Pkilter03

+ Thank you! Thank you! I'll be here all night!  
:- Synnik

+ And the next day, and the next day, and the next.... You know, Synnik, when Redburn doesn't address the crisis in his speeches, you say he's burying his head in the sand. When he lauded the new trade agreement with the Lyrans, you said he was trying to buy votes. Now, he's trying to reassure a rather frightened populace that everything will be okay, and you suggest he's a charlatan. Is there anything the man can do that you won't ascribe to denial or deception?  
:- GRibaldi

+ Hrm. He can bark like a dog and proclaim he's the King of Cheese. Then I'd believe he's being honest about his obvious senility. Now, if he'd-I don't know-maybe dropped some hard facts in his speech, rather than blanket assurances, maybe I'd listen, but that was fluff, not answers, and answers are what people need to hear nowadays.  
:- Synnik

+ There is no denying it, naysayer! The dream of Devlin Stone is alive and strong! No petty tyrants can bring it down! The darkness cannot withstand the light! When he returns, you shall again know the awe and the glory of the righteous, and you shall deny no more!  
:- Hop4Evr

+ Ah, Hop4Evr! How have you been? We haven't had a KZ-inspired rant on this channel in so long!  
:- GreasL

## Touring the Stars with Bertram Habeas

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10/22/3133

*We began on Terra, millions of years ago. Today, mankind stretches out among the stars of the Milky Way, touching thousands of worlds, as far from our home as Clan space, more than 2,000 light-years distant. Yet who are we, really? What have we become in our relentless push outward and onward? I'm Bertram Habeas, and tonight, let's find the answers to these and many other fascinating questions together, as we tour the stars!*

### Volume XXV: Profit and Power—Birth of the Lyran Commonwealth

Almost lost to the ages, an insignia flutters on a flagpole before the Donegal Museum of Antiquities. Gray, with a lyre at its center, three strings of gold cross this flag, crisp and clear, catching the light from Donegal's pale yellow sun. Even native tourists to this place, seeing this banner for the first time, wonder at its meaning, but it is plain to anyone who knows the history of their realm—this flag was once the standard of the Lyran Commonwealth.

Though today the Steiner fist, set against a field of striking blue, is the recognized standard of the Lyran state, the three-stringed Grecian lyre told of a more optimistic time, when the leaders of three mercantile alliances joined forces to create the nation whose name has become synonymous with economic stability. As much for mutual profit as for mutual defense, the three leaders, Thomas McQuiston of the Federation of Skye, Kevin Tamar of the Tamar Pact, and Robert Marsden of the Protectorate of Donegal, met on the Tamar world of Arcturus in 2339 to discuss a political and economic merger.

Like all leaders who forged their realms during the period of darkness after the Terran Alliance turned in on itself, all three recognized the threats of a growing Draconis Combine on one front, a resurgent Terran Hegemony on another, and the might of the Free Worlds League on yet another. More than that, however, all three claimed rulership over wealthy realms, any one of which would be a tempting morsel for its neighbors. By uniting, they could at once forge a greater defense against their neighbors, while lowering restrictions on trade amongst one another, tripling their markets at no cost in resources.

In 2341, after two years of negotiations, the Lyran Commonwealth was born, named for the three-stringed Grecian lyre proposed by Robert Marsden as a symbol of the three realms and their equal standing as partners. It was to be ruled by nine archons—three from each partner-state—with an Archon Basileus to be chosen as its leader. Established with high-minded—even egalitarian—ideals, the three leaders saw a future of hope and profit ahead of them.

However, even the best-laid plans can go astray, and for the newborn Commonwealth, truer words could not be spoken. . . .

The first sign that something had gone terribly wrong should have been, of course, the fact that the Lyran Commonwealth existed only on paper for its first five years. The three founders couldn't even decide who the nine archons would be, or how to effectively combine their economies. Marsden, Tamar, and McQuiston were brilliant businessmen, but their concepts for running an interstellar nation of some 100 billion people were hopelessly flawed. Although they built a lovely capitol building on Arcturus, by the time the first rulers of the Commonwealth had gathered in it the new nation was in the grip of an economic upheaval and teetered on the edge of ruin.

Though unable to lead, the nine archons quickly learned how to profit, and the next decade displayed their avarice in the face of crumbling prosperity among their subjects. Add to this mix the growing threat of an aggressive Draconis Combine, massing troops near the Tamar Pact border, and rumors that Tamar would secede to sign a treaty with the Kuritas if things didn't improve, and it comes as little wonder that people thought the Commonwealth was doomed.

—Kevin Duelli, *A Cynic's Guide to Politics, 3rd Edition*, Dark Skye Press, 3090

Robert Marsden, often regarded by Lyran history books as "the last of the nine archons who gave a damn" was an impatient man, yet he stood by in the shadows of the government building on Arcturus for close to thirty years before finally taking action. Some say this delay was a sign of the same corruption that infected the other archons, others paint a picture of eternal optimism—a hope that everything would turn out right without extreme measures. Still others wonder aloud if he hadn't deliberately stayed his hand to gather his evidence against the others and let the people of the Commonwealth know how truly bad things could get. For whatever reason, Marsden waited until 2375 before finally doing what someone probably should have done a long time before. After touring the realm, winning support among local leaders and gathering evidence on his fellow archons, he announced to the Commonwealth that he was crowning himself Archon Basileus, and publicized the worst excesses of his fellow archons.

Moral outrage and the results of his backroom deals did the rest. Fueled by a quarter century of failing economics and rampant corruption, with promise of a new, stronger government that included only one archon and an elected body of planetary representatives as his council of advisors, the majority of the Lyran people rallied to Marsden's banner. By December of 2375, Robert Marsden was officially recognized as the sole ruler of the Lyran state, and the other eight archons were serving life terms in prison.

Making good on his promises, Archon Marsden submitted to all Lyran member-worlds his Articles of Acceptance, allowing each world to sign off on his new government. Because the laws outlining the rights of individual worlds were so loose, most planetary leaders signed on eagerly, though a few required more urging than others. While a few remaining holdouts—notably Tamar and Skye, whose leaders were among the eight archons sentenced to imprisonment—required military action, Marsden's plan for a strong, unified Lyran Commonwealth was finally realized.



Over the next fifteen years, the Lyran economy not only stabilized, but improved vastly, and Marsden focused his efforts equally on consolidating his authority, stabilizing the financial situation, building and improving trade with neighboring realms and within his own borders, and building the Commonwealth military. The Lyran Commonwealth quickly became known for its mercantilism, and for having one of the best-equipped militaries of all the nations in the Inner Sphere. Even so, events would soon unfold to teach the Lyran people that money wasn't everything. . . .

So, let's see if this sounds familiar: It's a time of crisis. A beloved leader of the realm has died. His successor publicly grieves, but soon announces to the gathered masses that she will lead the state in the name of peace, then sends her closest rival to fight a war, hoping he'll get himself killed. Who would I be talking about?

If you guessed Katherine Steiner-Davion, you're only half right.

No, I'm talking about the founder of the Steiner legacy herself, Katherine Steiner (though she was known as Katherine Marsden to her people at first).

—Mikhail Brein, *Endless Loop: A Steiner History*, Avalon Press, 3059.

The events that led to the foundation of House Steiner actually began with the Commonwealth's one Achilles' heel: the general incompetence of its military forces. A disastrous and unauthorized assault on the Free Worlds League planet of Promised Land demonstrated that simply having the best equipment doesn't win a war, and is alleged to have contributed to Robert Marsden's death from a coronary after public sentiment turned against the aging Archon. In his place came his younger brother, Alistair Marsden.

As the Age of War began with the Capellan-Free Worlds border disputes, and the eventual Combine invasion of the Commonwealth, Alistair Marsden repeatedly found his military commanders ill suited to the task of protecting the realm. The threat was so great, it had forced Marsden to relocate the Lyran capital to Tharkad, lest it fall to the Dragon. In fury and frustration, he eventually dismissed his military commanders, and went off to lead from the front personally.

It was while repelling a Combine assault that Alistair Marsden was killed in action, leaving behind a grieving widow, Katherine Marsden (nee Steiner) and a newborn son, also named Alistair. As a woman whose beauty, intelligence, and eloquence had won over the hearts of the Lyrans even before the death of her husband, Katherine's passionate eulogy of the lost Archon and her obvious grief gained the people's sympathy as well. When, just two months later, the grieving widow proclaimed her name change back to Steiner, and her intention to rule as Archon Basileus, with her son as Archon-Designate, a shocked Commonwealth reacted with whispered rumors, but surprisingly little opposition.

Katherine Steiner's winning charm and keen intellect even helped her win the support of the leaders of Tamar and Skye, rebellious provinces since the days of Robert Marsden. She even made Timothy Marsden, her late husband's uncle and a contender for the throne, her commanding general on the Free Worlds front. When Marsden died in battle against House Marik, the last obstacle to the foundation of House Steiner died with him.

Join us next time, for a closer look at the nature of House Steiner and the rise of a nation known for its wealth and power even today. I'm Bertram Habeas.

## The "Hand of Starling": Ghost Knights: Real or Myth?

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10/27/3133

**SHADOW:** Hey there, Truth-seekers! And welcome again to The Hand of Starling, the show The Republic doesn't want you to see! I'm your host, Shadow. With me as always are my fellow Illuminati, Phantom and Wraith.

**PHANTOM:** Question reality!

**WRAITH:** Watch your backs!

**SHADOW:** Welcome, gents. Before we begin today's topic: "Ghost Knights – Real or Myth?" the question of the week here comes from a viewer using the on-line nick of Kurious. He (or she) says: "Starling Group, I just started watching your series, and I have to say you guys weird me out--"

**WRAITH:** Cool!

**SHADOW:** Heheh. "One thing bugs me, though, why the whole neo-Goth theme? Between the black face make-up, the poorly-lit basement set, and the cliché handles, it's like your 'Illuminati' is nothing more than a group of new-age vampires. How do you expect the folks to take you seriously?"

**PHANTOM:** Burn!

**SHADOW:** Cut him a meter, Phantom. Kurious is obviously new to the audience. Kurious, the answer's simple enough – the black curtains, dim lighting, make up, and monikers are all to protect our identity, and yours. The Hand of Starling is dedicated to truth, whether folks want to hear us or not. Do you really think we could bring you the quality facts as well if we were your basic syndicated, publicly recognized journalist? Hell no! The Powers That Be would be onto us in a second! Our anonymity is thus our shield and our license to dig through the chaff and bring you the real news!

**PHANTOM:** Well said, Brother Shadow!

**WRAITH:** Right. Now, on to the topic.

**SHADOW:** Absolutely. The topic: Ghost Knights, those rumored Knights of the Sphere who supposedly lurk in the shadows, watching us all, and reporting back to the Exarch who's been naughty, and who's been nice. Are they real, or a myth?

**PHANTOM:** Definitely real.

**WRAITH:** No contest. They're among us.

**SHADOW:** So you say, though The Republic government has denied them ever since its formation. So, fellas, prove it!

**PHANTOM:** It's basic governmental logic, Shadow, handed down through the generations since mankind first crawled out of the deserts on Terra. No state can stand for long without a powerful and secret internal security force to back it up. The Combine has its ISF, the Lyrans have their Heimdall and Loki, the FedSuns has MI5, and the CapCon has its Maskirovka.

**WRAITH:** Don't forget ComStar still has its ROM, the Clans have their Watch, and the dozen or so agencies throughout the nation formerly known as the Free Worlds League.

**PHANTOM:** Exactly, Wraith. And just like these nations, The Republic government has its layers of defensive measures in place to ensure not only its military security, but also its own pre-eminence over the people. For military protection, we've got the local police, then the militias, then the regular armed forces—Triarii, Hastati, and so on—and the Knights and Paladins. The Paladins and Knights, of course, are like a political military presence, with all the authority to subvert local leaders and laws for the "good of The Republic". If the Republic would go so far as to create these modern day Lone Rangers, why not a secret version of the same, for those "criminals" who just can't be rooted out by flashing a badge?

**SHADOW:** Well said, Phantom. But where's the evidence? How many of these Ghost Knights are there? And who watches these watchers?

**WRAITH:** In that order, everywhere one looks, far more than there are real knights, and they report only to the Exarch, like his own secret police.

**SHADOW:** Explain.

**WRAITH:** No problem! Take for instance the mess on Basalt, earlier this year. Though the government tried to hush it all up, the little war that erupted between the planetary rulers and some local entrepreneurs—using mercenaries, no less—still managed to get out on the public forums. There are all the hallmarks of something not kosher there, with opposing "terrorist groups", in the employ of both sides, of course, claiming the same attacks, then turning on each other while supposedly opposing the government rule. Certain evidence that crept out suggests that, just prior to the rather convenient arrival of a real Knight on the scene, a "shadowy agent" was playing both sides against the middle, then exposed a ring of mercs that had been

working the same deal on other worlds, like Helen, and elsewhere. Better believe the “shadowy agent” was a Ghost Knight. The outcome was too pat for anything else, unless you want to factor in the Bannson angle.

Want more proof? Let’s look closer to home, then. Remember that “Little Luthien” killer? In the midst of his spree a Knight-Errant gets called in to help local authorities with the “crisis”. Then we find out its some heart-broken ex-military fisherman who killed all those women. We needed a Knight-Errant for that? But he was here in time to take part in an official investigation on the death of a BCA administrator who was taken out by thugs masquerading as the killer, and here to coordinate a defense against the Stormhammers, who we didn’t even know existed till that business in Port Howard. Hmmm. Coincidence? I think not.

**SHADOW:** So, you’re saying these Ghost Knights have the same mandate as their showpiece counterparts? To set up defenses and repel threats both inside and out?

**WRAITH:** Depends on the angle you want to take. From what I’ve learned—and, Phantom, back me up here—the Ghost Knights aren’t all on the same “side” either. I have learned enough on some of the more colorful personalities in the new military factions throughout The Republic to suspect that they may even have Ghost Knights at the core of them, directing their actions.

**PHANTOM:** Sounds about right. What better way to take advantage of the crash than to organize the loose cannons into camps that can be easily controlled. It’s a herding tactic.

**SHADOW:** Ah, so you’re suggesting that the likes of Bannson’s Raiders, Steel Wolves, Dragon’s Fury, and even the Stormhammers, are all patsies of The Republic?

**WRAITH:** You see a better explanation? But it gets better. Not two months after the HPGs go dark, there are no less than six new military factions running around seizing planets. As they do, they eliminate the leadership or recruit those who didn’t like the way the government did things. In the bargain, a lot of folks who’d would otherwise be branded traitors to The Republic actually expose themselves to throw in their lot with these independent groups, thinking they’re getting their chance for freedom and power, when it’s only a matter of time till all of them are rooted out.

**PHANTOM:** Bingo! And once all of the corrupt leaders are thus exposed, theoretically, The Republic’s Knights and armed forces appear on the scene to restore order. A new local government can be established, and viola! The herds have been thinned. With the HPGs down, none of these renegade elements can coordinate, and the government can move more freely to keep on thinning! By the time the HPGs come back on-line, several “questionable” leaders and factions throughout the state are contained. Like swatting a hornet’s nest to flush out the bugs, then torching the thing with a flamer.

**SHADOW:** Ah, so it all makes sense now?

**WRAITH:** Hehe. You’re missing the best part, Shadow. I’m talking the part that really proves the Ghost Knights are among us. Think about this: would we have this little weeding campaign going on without the HPG grid in disarray? The answer is no, but in order to carry out the simultaneous crash of HPGs throughout the realm—and across the Inner Sphere, to make it look like more than a national crisis—you need a lot of secret agents in circulation.

**PHANTOM:** Wow.

**SHADOW:** Wow indeed! So, then, the Ghost Knights brought down the HPG grid?

**WRAITH:** If they didn’t, I’d like you to show me a better candidate.

**SHADOW:** A worthy discussion for next time, perhaps. And on that remark, we’re out of time here. Come back next week, Truth-seekers, and the Hand of Starling reaches out to pull back the veil of conspiracy and brings enlightenment to all!

## Touring the Stars with Bertram Habeas

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10/29/3133

*We began on Terra, millions of years ago. Today, mankind stretches out among the stars of the Milky Way, touching thousands of worlds, as far from our home as Clan space, more than 2,000 light-years distant. Yet who are we, really? What have we become in our relentless push outward and onward? I'm Bertram Habeas, and tonight, let's find the answers to these and many other fascinating questions together, as we tour the stars!*

### Volume XXVI: People, Politics, and Profit—The Steiner Equation

The Triad, Tharkad City, and the neighboring city, Olympia, lie under a thin layer of springtime snow, reflecting sunlight as the world's distant yellow G6-class star peeks out from a rolling gray cloud cover. On the outer limits of the twin metros, construction vehicles continue a decades-long effort to restore the original city limits. Their labors complete a campaign of demolition and reconstruction that began in 3068, when the survivors of the worst fusion plant meltdown in Inner Sphere history—a meltdown that occurred just as hordes of Blakist zealots dropped on Tharkad in a WarShip-supported blitzkrieg the likes of which has never been seen in the history of this proud realm—finally trickled back to their homelands.

On that fateful day, when mankind's darkest time was launched in a fury of nuclear bombs, BattleMech rampages, and WarShip bombardments, the mighty, city-sized fusion plant buried deep beneath the Lyran capital lost containment and spewed enough radiation into the surrounding lands to force the evacuation of every man, woman, and child not killed in the initial blasts for a distance of 150 –kilometers. Even as MechWarriors and foot soldiers fought and died on the streets, lethal radiation spewed from ruptured lines, forming a cloud of death that lingered and drifted over the countryside for years afterward. Though understandably attributed at the time to the Blakists, modern analysis shows that the Tharkad City disaster was actually a simple accident, a horrible fluke of coincidence, compounded by the chaos that accompanied the first volleys of the Jihad.

Today, over sixty years and billions of kroner later, the last scars of the Jihad are only now being obliterated, save for the massive crater dug into the frozen, glassy earth to remove the remains of the ruined reactor. As if memorializing the most heroic phase of the reconstruction, the crater remains a testament to the brave DropShip crews who sacrificed themselves to pull the radioactive material from their beloved capital world and send it hurtling into space.

Nothing in Tharkad City, the new Triad, or Olympia, quite resembles the original capital city of the Lyran Commonwealth, built during the Age of War, when it seemed Kurita troops would overrun the original capital of Arcturus. No expense was spared in that original effort, and thus none was spared for the post-Jihad repair either. Of course, for a realm as wealthy as that ruled today by House Steiner, "no expense spared" takes on new meaning.

Founded by three mercantile alliances, the Lyran Commonwealth, unlike some of its fellow Successor States, has enjoyed the strongest and most stable economy in the Inner Sphere, eclipsed only briefly by the Free Worlds League during the invasion of the Clans and its aftermath. While some have claimed this comes naturally from possessing some of the richest and most industrialized planets in the Inner Sphere, what many people may fail to realize is that the Lyrans' economic might actually stems from a much more basic relationship, an understanding between government and business born even before the leaders of Tamar, Skye, and Donegal joined forces to create the Commonwealth itself.

Free enterprise remains the cornerstone of Lyran identity, a capitalist mindset that has made empires of colonial nations even before man reached out to the stars. This system, made possible even after the Commonwealth discarded its nine-archon system in favor of a dynastic rule—thanks to Robert Marsden's Articles of Acceptance—gave the people the right to pursue their own happiness and fortune. The rights applied not only to world governments, but also to common citizens. In the days before feudalism truly took hold in the Commonwealth, merchants and entrepreneurs had already begun staking their claims to a life of prosperity, unfettered by artificial government restrictions.

Openness and tolerance were encouraged as well, as any Lyran worth his salt knew that even a foreigner could be a customer or a business partner. Regardless of sexual persuasion, ethnic background, or even political views, the Lyran way is to keep an open mind to all people, everywhere. Even on the national level the governments of member-worlds vary wildly, reflecting this tolerance on the interplanetary level. This variety truly is the spice of life for the Commonwealth, allowing its people to sample a myriad of lifestyles, while also providing an endless series of internal markets based on the social, cultural, political, and even practical needs of the various member-worlds.

Interestingly, however, a few constants do permeate the Commonwealth. German and English are the languages of state, though most merchants and diplomats speak a host of others to facilitate trade. A strong work ethic, the offshoot of the free enterprise economics and the lack of restrictions on rising through the social classes, means that most Lyrans one might encounter are hard workers, constantly driven to improve the quality of their lives. The culture and the class structure, like those of all the Great Houses, have their roots in the spirit of the ruling family.

If there is a weakness in how the Steiner family rules, it is that they show too much intelligence and imagination. Let something happen to a Steiner Archon, whether it be an assassination or the most mild but incapacitating illness, and the entire realm comes to a screeching halt. The Steiners might be good at making others feel an important part of the government, but don't be fooled. The Steiners rule with an iron hand.

—Hervsas David, Political Advisor to Hanse Davion, c. 3024

After assuming the title of Archon Basileus and handily bringing all internal opposition under control with deft politics and personal charm, Katherine Steiner (the first) turned her own flair for business and government toward rebuilding the war-ravaged realm and cementing her dynasty. Offering no-interest loans for the reconstruction of damaged industries in exchange for a share of the afflicted company's stocks, she opened the markets and gained access to amazing new sources of wealth at the same time. In addition, she funded planet-scouting programs to locate prime real estate throughout the Commonwealth, either for further colonization efforts or to bestow such lands on particularly loyal subjects.

These efforts not only accomplished the goals of rebuilding a realm ravaged by the Age of War and solidifying Steiner power, but also gave new life to the old institution of noble peerage. Over time, the social structure of an aristocracy would form alongside the common classes and their blue- and white-collar strata. Even more subtle was the gradual impression of the Steiner family's native German heritage and cultural bent on the Commonwealth, a development that grew more from the people's reverence toward Katherine and her successors than from any nationally instituted campaign.

Indeed, by the time of Katherine Steiner's retirement in favor of her son, Alistair Steiner, in 2445, the Commonwealth had been forever changed from a mere alliance of merchants to a viable state with the beginnings of a unifying culture, values, and way of life.

One needs to know very little to get by in the Lyran Commonwealth: who to talk to, who not to talk to, and who to persuade with the appropriate number of C-bills.

—Cyro Tslio, ex-ComStar Precentor of Donegal Station, 3025

Of course, an open mercantile society brings its share of problems and challenges as well. Though the Lyran Commonwealth can trace its prosperity to the industrious nature of its people, the laws of capitalism are not so far removed from the laws of Darwinism. Not without compassion—innumerable charity funds are still sponsored by all manner of corporate and government agencies—the affluence of the Commonwealth is nevertheless most available to those who work for it, or who are on good terms with those who do. And some have amassed such wealth and power that they have become political and social entities in their own right.

Advancing one's fortune or prominence in the social strata is thus vastly improved as much by who one knows as much as it is by how hard one works. Even before the resurgence of the aristocratic and noble classes, the lines of ruling classes began to form among the corporate executives, the statesmen, and the master tradesmen. It's thus little wonder that shrewd negotiation skills, political finesse, or the occasional ethical flexibility in business are cultivated as art forms by even the most common Lyran citizen, who has come to see all deals, prices, and conditions of service as open to haggling.

In our third installment on the Lyran Commonwealth, we'll look at the rise, fall, and resurrection of House Steiner through the Succession Wars, and the subsequent years that changed this realm forever. Please join us as we continue our tour of the stars! I'm Bertram Habeas.

## MechWarrior Families, A Dying Breed?

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11/03/3133

John Chandler hails from a long and distinguished line in the former Free Worlds League. Many among his ancestors were officers and heroes, brave men and women who stood up for their realm and fought the good fight. Peter Chandler, for instance, was the youngest of his clan to serve as an officer in the Regular Hussars, and his heroic defense of civilian lives during the battle for Tellmann IV earned him the Regular ankh over a century ago. Peter's grandson, Morten—John's grandfather—led the resistance forces against the Blakists on Tiber, and would later fight alongside Devlin Stone towards the end of the Jihad. The glorious Chandler tradition extends far back into history, since the first of the family made a name for himself as a war hero on the Canopian front during the Star League's Reunification War.

But today, like his father before him, John is no soldier. Indeed, he has never even seen a day of combat in his life on his peaceful agrarian idyll in the foothills of Skorbell on Skat. His medals, lovingly preserved in display cases lining his wall, are actually those earned by generations before his father. The famous Chandlers of Tiber, one of the Free Worlds League's mighty MechWarrior families, are now history. But they are not alone.

Like thousands of others throughout the Inner Sphere, the Chandlers are the remains of a social class of pseudo-nobility that has been on a steady decline since the middle of the last century. Once, the MechWarrior families were more common, held in a regard that verged on awe as the centuries of the Succession Wars dragged on. MechWarriors, once soldiers in an army, having proven their worth to their lords, earned the personal ownership of their BattleMechs. As 'Mech manufacturing slowed, these machines became heirlooms, and those who upheld the standards of their lords in battle came to earn landholds and patents of nobility themselves, in payment for their dedication, after generations of service.

Thus were born the MechWarrior families of old—a new breed of knights, baronets, and other new nobility, whose power centered on the BattleMechs that were their birthright. Dispossession, the loss of these avatars of war, was their ultimate bane, but many of them could command armies of their own, ruling warriors who served as vassals and squires.

The new technology that suddenly became available in the 3030s began the decline of these families. Improved production made 'Mechs less rare, and more powerful weapons made them easier to kill. The Clan invasion shattered dozens of the ancient MechWarrior families, as did the FedCom Civil War, and the Jihad that soon followed. Increasingly, the MechWarriors who came to the field were soldiers again, piloting a machine that had not been handed down through the generations, but merely assigned by the House that built it. They had no patents of nobility, they were not knights, but part of a rank and file army. But though the cataclysmic wars of the latter 31st century dwindled their numbers, ironically enough, it would be peace that truly sent the MechWarrior families on the path toward extinction.

"My grandfather had enough of war, I suppose," says Chandler, indicating a holograph of Morten Chandler, standing before his prized Trebuchet, a 50-ton 'Mech that survived more than eight generations of Chandler MechWarriors. "He followed Stone, thanks to Duchess [Alys Rousset-]Marik, wanted to become a farmer, and sold off Ol' Mandy [the Trebuchet]."

Devlin Stone's Military Material Redemption Program demilitarized many of the MechWarrior families, as well as mercenaries and other private 'Mech owners by offering something the old title-based system did not: security. Under the older system, MechWarrior families looking to retain their status needed not only to keep their machines, but also to continue on in service to their liege lords. Dispossession thus not only represented the loss of the machine, but of the titles, and the landholds that often came along with it. Conversely, a warrior could also become dispossessed for any act of defiance against the liege lord, resulting in all of the same consequences, in a process often referred to as entailment. Thus, MechWarrior families had to maintain an active warrior in every generation, or be willing to surrender their lands and their futures to someone more worthy.

The MMRP offer, on the other hand, offered full citizenship, wealth, and land—if not a noble title—for those willing to part with their tools of war, all without a corresponding requirement of ongoing military service to a liege lord. The warriors could at last settle down, raise their families, and tend to their own needs.

"Yes, it was a good trade," says Chandler, even after admitting he sometimes wonders what the life of the MechWarrior might have been like. "Sometimes, a man has to know his limitations. What good is all the finery and the status of being a MechWarrior knight, after all, if you're always being asked to risk it all for some politician somewhere?"

Not every MechWarrior family was so willingly dispossessed, however. For a time, organizations of MechWarrior families formed, attempting to hold onto their power, or influence the Great Houses. Many of these even disbanded, however, after the rise of The Republic, as public sentiment turned more and more against the warrior-centric system in the post-Jihad era, and decommissioning programs like the MMRP gained momentum. Today, fewer true MechWarrior families remain than the legions of old. Of those that are left, such as the Great Houses of Steiner, Kurita, Davion, and Liao, or the smaller Houses like the Centrellas, Sandovals, Tormarks, and Campbells, are perhaps the heartiest of this old guard. Yet they are not alone. Though the numbers of families are shrinking, joining their ranks have been such "upstart" families as the Knights of the Sphere. The warriors among the Knights form a new breed of titled MechWarriors in their ownership of their machines (a mark of The Republic's trust), and their extended families may thus benefit from the same stature as such forebears.

But are the MechWarrior families a dying breed, or are there signs of a recovery close at hand? Some experts believe that the recent rise in inter-factional fighting throughout The Republic may yet reverse the decline of the MechWarrior families, should more MechWarriors become knighted to address the crisis, while others struggle to stake their own claims. Though many in the Inner Sphere may still hold to the belief that the MechWarrior family belongs in our more warlike past, the experts claim that extinction of the MechWarrior families is most unlikely.



## Touring the Stars with Bertram Habeas

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11/05/3133

*We began on Terra, millions of years ago. Today, mankind stretches out among the stars of the Milky Way, touching thousands of worlds, as far from our home as Clan space, more than 2,000 light-years distant. Yet who are we, really? What have we become in our relentless push outward and onward? I'm Bertram Habeas, and tonight, let's find the answers to these and many other fascinating questions together, as we tour the stars!*

### Volume XXVII: The Rise, Fall, and Rebirth of the Lyran Commonwealth

Founded by three merchant kings, united under one powerful dynasty, the Lyran Commonwealth rose to economic and industrial prominence in the Inner Sphere, emphasizing trade over military prowess. With the ascendance of House Steiner and the foundation of the Steiner dynasty, the Steiner fist replaced the three-stringed lyre of the Commonwealth. But the promise of prosperity was not enough to safeguard the Lyran people from the threats of hostile neighbors. In the years of the Age of War, the Commonwealth lost more and more territory to its aggressive neighbors as its military—well-equipped, but poorly trained—fell in battle after battle. This run of misfortune would surely have swallowed the realm up had it not been for the capture of BattleMech blueprints from the Terran Hegemony's Hesperus II factory, enabling the Steiner forces to gain the advantage over its enemies with the newly invented tools of war.

The Commonwealth owes its existence to the BattleMech—a funny realization, no doubt, for a nation built to pursue mercantile goals. Even though the “advantage” over houses Marik and Kurita lasted all of five years before spies and commandos captured them in turn from Steiner factories, had it not been for the success of Archon Alistair Steiner's Operation Prometheus to capture 'Mech plans from the Hegemony, the Commonwealth military might have been totally shattered. The combined weight of the Marik and Kurita drives, in the face of Lyran military ineffectiveness, was smashing border defenses with ease, and creating a political crisis at home as the leaders of Tamar and Skye saw their chance to get even with the Commonwealth leadership. These pressures continued to build, leading to the so-called Dark Years after Alistair's assassination, but the early successes of Steiner 'Mech armies over those of its enemies gave the nation breathing room at a critical time.

—Liam Rolf, *From Terra to Tharkad*, Commonwealth Press, 3125

The strain of various social and political pressures created by the ascent of the Steiner line and the near loss of the Commonwealth to its enemies eventually led to the assassination of Alistair Steiner, the second Steiner Archon to sit on the throne. In the four decades that followed, the Commonwealth faced a period of uncertainty. The Duke of Fatima, framed for the crime, was cleared, and a new generation of Steiner leaders took Alistair's place, including the indecisive Archon Steven Steiner, whose mystic wife, Margaret Olson, all but subverted his authority and would then enter into an alliance with the leaders of the Skye and Tamar regions.

When Steven Steiner died in 2501, he left no heir, a wife in the clutches of mystical charlatans, and a realm now more powerfully in the hands of its nobility than the central government. The atmosphere was ripe for civil war, which erupted soon after Robert Steiner, Steven's illegitimate nephew, came to claim the throne, supported by a massive public following. The conflict ultimately resulted in an end to the Tamar and Skye bids for independence—at least for the time being—but when it was over, any advantage House Steiner possessed over its neighbors had been lost.

The last shots [of the Lyran Civil War] had barely been fired in 2505 when Robert Steiner put the realm back on the course of reconstruction and revival. The Age of War, though still fifty plus years from its official end, had begun to wind down for the Lyran quadrant. Increasing trade, promoting business, even paying war reparations to the people of Skye and Tamar from his personal fortune. In the run-up to Tracial Steiner's decision to sign the Tharkad Accords and thus make the Commonwealth part of the unborn Star League, the Lyran economy flourished and grew. Business ethics were refined, with government support for small and large corporations alike, and civil rights were reinforced with the creation of the Supreme Court of the Commonwealth. All the while, the Steiner family restored the integrity of the central authority over the nobility, which had been weakened during the conflict between Robert and Margaret.

In 2558, when Tracial Steiner made history with the stroke of a pen, the Lyran Commonwealth was once more the economic giant of the Inner Sphere, so much so that many Lyran merchants and business leaders questioned why they needed League membership in the first place. . . .

—Kevin Duelli, *A Cynic's Guide to Politics*, 3rd Edition, Dark Skye Press, 3090

Through the Star League era, and even the Succession Wars that came after, the Lyran state continued along its path of financial prosperity, industrial prominence, and—admittedly—military mediocrity, earning a reputation as one of the most static realms in the Sphere. There were internal difficulties, of course, but the worst came during the Star League era, when rumors that the Dukes of Skye and Tamar had taken part in the abduction of her son set Archon Viola Steiner-Dinesen against their forces during her infamous “Day of Rage” during the Reunification Wars. In actuality the work was of the Steering Committee of the Estates General—a fact that led to the brief disbanding of that body—the sheer violence unleashed that day forever marred the relations between the Steiner family and the Kelswas and Lestrades, who ruled Tamar and Skye, respectively. For the Succession Wars themselves, much of the fighting done by House Steiner was defensive in nature, with a few offensives thrown in to reclaim lost territory or secure a vital border world. Indeed, until almost three centuries after the fall of the Star League, the Lyrans never initiated any of the wars that engulfed the Inner Sphere, but attempted time and again to broker peace initiatives to end them.



When, at last, one such effort finally did bear fruit, the course of history changed forever.

No historical account of the Lyran Commonwealth would be complete without some address to the Fourth Succession War and the peace proposal by Archon Katrina Steiner that precipitated it. Hanse Davion's realm, which rarely confronted the Commonwealth, of course made the ideal candidate for alliance, given much of the same views on planetary autonomy, human rights, and even their shared western-European cultural bent. It's ironic to note, of course, that the Lyrans actually bought into the plan even after Hanse further proposed that its final objective would necessitate yet another war.

Yet go with it they did. Gladly. Eagerly. For the first time, Steiner troops began their own war of conquest, pushing deep into the Draconis Combine and along the Free Worlds front to support Davion's war against the Capellans and House Kurita. In two years, the two states claimed more victories than any nation could claim in the three centuries before. But the bloodlust subsided soon afterward. After losing their military gains to the political maneuvers that created the Free Rasalhague Republic, it seems the Steiners lost their stomach for war once again, as evidenced by their dismal showing in 3039.

—Kevin Duelli, *A Cynic's Guide to Politics*, 3rd Edition, Dark Skye Press, 3090

The unification of the Steiner and Davion realms with the Fourth Succession War and the marriage of Archon-Designate Melissa Steiner to First Prince Hanse Davion created a military and economic power bloc that none of the other Successor States could hope to match, but it was one that began to crack almost immediately. The separatist district of Skye attempted to rebel, and the rulers of the Tamar Pact, having seen their hard-fought conquests lost to the newly formed Rasalhague Republic, grumbled about following suit. Both perceived the union with the Federated Suns as one more sign that their mother nation was out of control, but soon Melissa's Steiner strength and firm yet even-handed rule, reassured the people that Steiner leadership was as strong and secure as ever.

Before the Clan invasion, odds strongly favored the eventual conquest of the Inner Sphere by the united Steiner-Davion alliance, with Lyran economic might and flair for diplomacy bolstering the military prowess and efficiency of the Federated Suns. The arrival of Kerensky's descendants, however, dashed these dreams of empire, reawakened the old rivalries, and strained both nations' military and economic bonds to their breaking point. For these and a host of other reasons, the time was right for chaos in 3057, the year the Federated Commonwealth finally crumbled.

Join us next time for our final look at the Lyran Commonwealth of today, as we continue our tour of the stars! I'm Bertram Habeas.

## Touring the Stars with Bertram Habeas

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11/12/3133

*We began on Terra, millions of years ago. Today, mankind stretches out among the stars of the Milky Way, touching thousands of worlds, as far from our home as Clan space, more than 2,000 light-years distant. Yet who are we, really? What have we become in our relentless push outward and onward? I'm Bertram Habeas, and tonight, let's find the answers to these and many other fascinating questions together, as we tour the stars!*

### Volume XXVIII: The Mailed Fist—The Commonwealth Today

**Fact Sheet:** Lyran Commonwealth

**Founding Year:** 2341

**Capital (City, World):** Tharkad City, Tharkad

**National Symbol:** A brown leather-gloved fist set against a rectangular blue field

**Location (Terra relative):** Coreward and Anti-Spinward quadrant

**Total (Inhabited) Systems:** 319

**Estimated Population (3130):** 955,000,000,000

**Government:** Constitutional Monarchy (with German feudal stylings)

**Ruler:** Archon Melissa Steiner

**Dominant Language(s):** English and German (official), Scottish Gaelic, Italian, French

**Dominant Religion(s):** Christian (Protestant), Judaism, Muslim

**Unit of Currency:** Kroner (1 kroner = 2.13 C-Bills)

Lying beneath a pale yellow sun made hazy by the smog of heavy industry, New Marsdenville, the rebuilt capital city of Donegal and home to the Commonwealth Supreme Court, overlooks the northern seas off the coast of the Hinterlands continent. The original Marsdenville, home to the Marsden family that founded the Protectorate of Donegal, lies under tons of natural and man-made rubble some five hundred kilometers inland, another victim of the Word of Blake Jihad. Fortunately, however, the Blakists' strikes on Donegal were only cursory, a smattering of low-yield tactical weapons aimed at the major on-planet industries and administrative centers to sow chaos and fear, but over half a billion Lyran citizens lost their lives on those fateful, dark days.

And yet the people of this world, still known today as the "Trader's World," rallied and rebuilt, burying the dead and pledging their young survivors to the defense of the Lyran state. The businesses that conducted operations here grew back, like the limbs of the native unsterblich oaks that grow mostly on this planet's Lockenar continent. Like Tharkad, no expense was spared in the recovery of this important world. Like Tharkad, here on Donegal the spirit of the Lyran people has again prevailed.

Amazingly enough, Donegal survived the wrath of the Amaris Crisis, all four Succession Wars, and even the FedCom Civil War with little more than the proverbial scratch. Indeed, in the final years of the Civil War, Donegal's contribution was little more than the dispatching of its two 'Mech regiments to Tharkad. The war erupted inevitably, after years of tension between supporters of Victor Steiner-Davion and his sister, Katherine, finally spilled over into open hostilities. Its outcome in 3067 left both the Steiner and Davion realms in tatters, their military might decimated, their economies and industries exhausted, and untold tens of thousands (perhaps millions) dead—civilian and military alike. It ended the experiment begun in 3028 with the unification of the Lyran Commonwealth and the Federated Suns into the Federated Commonwealth, and left a shocked and war-weary people facing an uncertain future.

But the devastation of the Civil War miraculously spared some worlds, like Donegal, thanks in part to its location deep within the Commonwealth, its heavy protection by 'Mech forces, and the shadow cast by nearby Tharkad. Yet the Blakist zealots who launched their Jihad saw in their campaign of terror enough time to devote to an attack here. Even now, the cleanup of the original Marsdenville, Wellington, and Palar continues as tons of radioactive debris are gathered and loaded aboard star-barges for off-world disposal.

Yet even as the old wounds still heal, commerce and industry have returned in force. Donegal is once more a booming center of economic prosperity, a beacon of all that the Lyran Commonwealth (renamed from the Lyran Alliance in 3084) stands for today. The Donegal Stock Exchange is again the most active of the Commonwealth's stock markets, and Lockheed/CBM Aerospace continues to produce aerospace craft for the Lyran navy and commercial interests. It is also one of many core worlds where the Commonwealth's traditional free press gathers and disseminates the latest news from a realm that spans almost four hundred light-years in diameter.

The small town of East Harlow stands in the shadow of Media City, a suburb of one of the few urban sprawls spared the Blakist assault. From this town, Commonwealth Press maintains a satellite printing office, producing hardcopies of everything from fashion magazines to the latest copies of Bryn Charlotte's sci-fi thriller, *The Invincible*. It is here that our author got his start, working in the editorial offices as war tore the Federated Commonwealth apart.

The print editions told of a nation in the grip of fratricidal conflict. Steiner versus Davion. The riots that broke out on Solaris in 3062 paled in comparison to the stories of battle on Kentares, Coventry, Hesperus II, or the Falcon Incursion. The sales figures for the Battle of Tharkad went through the roof in 3067, as another phase in Lyran history came to an end.

And it was here that a young Bertram Habeas felt the very earth shudder as a miniature sun rose on the eastern horizon—marking the death of the city of Chekswa, home of the Chekswa School of Literature, under a five-kiloton atomic blast.

Without a doubt, the Jihad was the worst single event in the history of the Inner Sphere. For the Lyran Alliance, barely coming to grips with the final, terrible costs of the FedCom Civil War, its impact was doubly felt for the sheer volume of economic and industrial devastation it wrought. The loss of Tharkad, the bombing of Donegal, the bombardment of Skye—all these events sent central authority spinning wildly out of control. With the loss of the HPG network, chaos reigned across the realm and the battered remains of the Lyran armed forces, stripped of their command structure, could barely coordinate even the simplest operations in opposition to the fanatics.

Interstellar trade, the backbone of Lyran economy and infrastructure, collapsed completely as fleets of JumpShips were attacked or pressed into military service. This sent whole worlds—even entire sectors—into an economic depression the likes of which had not been seen since the First Succession War or the early days of the nation's formation. Meanwhile, the most industrial worlds of the Skye region, closest to Terra, faced the brunt of the Jihad, and—for the first time in history—Hesperus II actually fell to a foreign power. By the time interstellar communications came back on-line and the people could see what had become of their nation, the Lyran Alliance had been ravaged.

With the chaos of the Jihad raging, it's almost a miracle that the Clans did not simply surge across the border to claim as much of the Lyran Commonwealth as they could, truth be told. Though many historians consider this no more than a stroke of dumb luck, the fact was that the sudden HPG blackout gave the Clans cause to pause, unaware of just what exactly was going on in the Inner Sphere. Adding to that was the arrival of more Clans from the homeworlds, keeping them distracted until a new picture of the situation unfolded.

What's truly a testament to the Lyran people, however, was the Steiner willingness to make a deal. With their military in disarray, it would be Archon Peter Steiner-Davion's role—backed by Devlin Stone's coalition, of course—to request aid from his realm's Clan enemies and truly make it possible to turn the tide on the Lyran front. The real triumph, however, was convincing the historically separatist people of Skye that they needed help.

—Rossel Schendt, *Jihad: A Tale of Survival*, Commonwealth Press, 3111

Ultimately, it took a coalition under the leadership of Devlin Stone to break the Jihad and bring the Steiner realm back from the brink, and it would be in gratitude for its survival that the Archon of the Alliance would grant much of the once-rebellious Skye province to Stone's new Republic. Since that day, the Lyran Commonwealth has struggled hard to regain its place as the industrial and economic powerhouse of the Inner Sphere. With numerous trade deals between the Commonwealth and its neighbors in The Republic and the Draconis Combine, the economy ultimately recovered. Factories smashed during the war benefited from several initiatives launched by the Steiner leaders. JumpShips once more plied the space lanes. As a new age of peace finally took hold, hope—the real wellspring of Lyran prosperity—returned to this battered nation. Though it would take decades to come back fully from the abyss, the hope and the hearts of the Lyran people would one day restore this wonderful nation to prosperity and dignity.

In our next four-part series, our tour through the history and cultures of the Inner Sphere will take us to the gypsy merchants of the Clans. Won't you join us for our next volume, as we look into the fascinating world of Clan Sea Fox? I'm Bertram Habeas.

## Order of the Five Pillars: Friend or Foe?

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11/17/3133

They are an ancient order, cloaked in mystery, at once feared and reviled in their native realm. Often misunderstood by those who lie beyond the borders of the worlds they call home, who view them as some ancient order of mystics and monks, their humble beginnings almost fly in the face of the powerhouse of knowledge, spiritualism, and unity they have become.

They are the Order of the Five Pillars, the often-overlooked eyes and ears of House Kurita.

Not to be confused with the regiment of the same name which now fights under the banner of the recently formed Dragon's Fury faction, the origin of the real Order of the Five Pillars—often shortened to O5P—goes back centuries, to the very first Coordinator of House Kurita's Draconis Combine. Omi Kurita, daughter of the Combine's founder, Shiro Kurita, became the first leader of the Order when she penned the original version of the Combine's Dictum Honorium, a code of conduct for House Kurita that remains the foundation of the Dragon's social, religious, and ideological precepts. According to the legend, Shiro himself commanded Omi to compile these codes after the execution of her older sister, Shada, for soiling the family's honor. The Order of the Five Pillars arose first as a clerical staff to assist Omi, the first "Keeper of the House Honor" in her task.

But over the centuries that followed, the O5P evolved from simply the official agency of Kuritan cultural purity into an apparatus that spanned the stars and took on the abilities of a secondary—often rival—intelligence agency to the Combine's Internal Security Force. Sanyu Kurita, the third Keeper of the House Honor, and a controversial figure for her tendency to cast even the Kurita family in a less than flattering light, began this evolution when she convinced the Coordinator to give her order an exclusive control over the state's ivory trade. This monopoly over a seemingly trivial commodity provided a massive financial backing to the Order as well as a pretext for expanding the Order itself among the stars, using the former ivory trade network as a means of spreading the O5P's word and its increasingly spiritual influence.

It also began to turn the O5P into a true intelligence network, with their agents (Adepts), and officers (Illuminati), forming contacts throughout the Combine's civilian, military, and noble circles. During the reign of the Von Rohrs Coordinators, these contacts would allow the Order to hide and survive the bloody purges that terrorized the people, to return from the shadows only after generations passed, when Siriwan McAllister sat upon the throne. With their re-emergence, the O5P had become a bona-fide secret service, saturating all levels of the populace, gathering intelligence, and providing subtle and spiritual guidance for billions of Combine citizens.

Since then, they continued to evolve, their power arguably matching that of the ISF, but known for far less deadly methods. Today, they remain a mysterious organization, one with two faces. The public face, led by the Keeper of the House Honor, stands for the moral and social stability of the Draconis Combine, the Ivory Pillar of House Kurita's society. The other face remains in the shadows, ever-present, ever-watchful, and rarely seen or felt. Rumors abound about the Order today, with many whispered innuendos suggesting its reach now exceeds that of the ISF, beyond the borders of the Combine and into other realms. But are they merely passive watchers, guardians of knowledge in the way ComStar did throughout the Succession Wars, or is there a more sinister objective, an extension of the ancestral Kurita dream of one day dominating all the worlds of mankind? Could there be a connection between this 'uber' society and the regiment now under the command of Katana Tormark? Is this the proverbial tip of the iceberg of their activities?

These are the questions we must face as we enter a new era of darkness, where it becomes difficult to know an ally from an enemy, a friend from a foe.

## Touring the Stars with Bertram Habeas

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11/19/03

*We began on Terra, millions of years ago. Today, mankind stretches out among the stars of the Milky Way, touching thousands of worlds, as far from our home as Clan space, more than 2,000 light-years distant. Yet who are we, really? What have we become in our relentless push outward and onward? I'm Bertram Habeas, and tonight, let's find the answers to these and many other fascinating questions together, as we tour the stars!*

### Volume XXIX: Profit, Progress, and Honor—Origins of Clan Sea Fox

Hark, children of the Clans, To the wisdom of Kerensky and your forebears. Know what has come before Remember it as you strive toward the future.

—*The Remembrance* (all Clans), Passage 1, 1:1-4, attributed to Karen Nagasawa

First impressions can often be the most lasting.

When Kerensky's descendants first appeared in 3050, they tore into the Inner Sphere with a ferocity and brutal efficiency never seen before. Their armies rolled over those of the Successor States, carving a wedge of worlds deep into the territories once united by the Star League. For a couple of years, myths of monsters and powerful aliens were the only rational explanations for who these invaders could be, though their identity would soon become clear enough.

The misconception of the Clans rose from the power of their military, their use of strange tactics and speech, and the vast superiority of their military technology, more advanced even than the lost weapons of the Star League itself. As the people of the Inner Sphere learned more of the invaders, they discovered a common history, and came to realize that the Clans were as human as those Kerensky's troops left behind. But while those misconceptions died, others remained. One of the most eternal, of course, was the concept that the Clans were born, raised, and died for a single purpose: war.

Like all misconceptions, this belief was born of knowing only the basics about Clan life, and from the very distinct first impression that only a horde of invading armies can bring. It was believed that in Clan society, the warriors dominate, dedicating their lives to perfecting the art of combat, while the civilians serve to make their weapons stronger, faster, better. Today, however, is a different story. Today, we know that the Clans are more than simple killing machines. Each has its own goals, desires, and culture.

And none is so strikingly different from the norm as Clan Sea Fox.

Clan Diamond Shark occupies a unique position among the Clans. Within a rigidly hierarchical blueprint for society, they have come closest to democracy; among people convinced that military strength depends on tight control and reverence for the chain of command, the Diamond Sharks have achieved remarkable battlefield prowess through the kind of flexibility other Clans disdain. Clan Diamond Shark is also the only Clan to have changed its name, a startling shift for a society that values order and stability above virtually all things. In changing its name, Clan Diamond Shark adapted to a unique set of circumstances. Its ability to do so most clearly demonstrates this Clan's unorthodox nature . . .

—Commander Jaime Wolf, WolfNet Classified Report: Invading Clans—Clan Diamond Shark, 3058 (Declassified 1 January, 3068)

The Sea Fox Clan did indeed change its name to Clan Diamond Shark for a time, and it was under this name that the Clan first came to be known to the armies of the Inner Sphere in the early 3050s. Though the name has once more returned to its origins, however, Clan Sea Fox has continued to adapt to new circumstances, evolving well beyond today's preconceptions of what it means to be Clan. But how did they get to be where they are now? How does a Clan that embraces democracy and change evolve?

Formed, like all Clans, around a core of loyal warriors united under the vision of two Khans, Clan Sea Fox developed quickly around the progressive ideals of Karen Nagasawa. An eloquent and philosophical warrior, Nagasawa's words were credited for winning over many converts to Nicholas Kerensky's dream—including the Foxes' first Khan, David Kalasa himself. Nagasawa was also a progressive thinker, challenging the concept of the honor dueling practice known today as zellbrigen, even before it became a matter of Clan martial policy, a factor that put her Clan at odds with most of the others, but fostered a sense of battlefield cooperation. Under Nagasawa's lead (after Khan Kalasa died during the reclamation of the Pentagon worlds), this spirit of cooperation was extended into the lower castes, offering greater respect to them and encouraging them to expand the Clan's material prosperity. The Sea Foxes dove into the effort to expand their Clan, with the merchant and scientist castes enjoying the benefits of their greater freedoms to explore new markets and possibilities.

Thanks to the wider latitude granted them, the Sea Foxes earned distinction for their innovations in science and commerce before and well into the Golden Century. Sea Fox scientists perfected the iron womb technology still used today by the Clans, and Sea Fox merchants—as adept at the game of information as at that of commodities—developed the Chatterweb as an information-exchange network between all Clans.

To be fair, all of the Clans were out to expand their power and influence, just as the Sea Foxes, and all made a fine display of claiming the equal importance of their various castes. But where some—like the [Hell's] Horses with their teamwork ethics, or the [Ghost] Bears' sense of "family"—actually tried to walk the walk, the Foxes did that and more. The merchant

and scientist castes weren't merely allowed to push their limits, they were encouraged to do so. After iIkhan [Nicholas] Kerensky's death, the Sea Foxes aggressively sought new colony options, entered into deals with fellow Clans for information and materials, and kept a quiet ear and eye on all their neighbors through the Chatterweb.

More than that, however —and possibly most critical—was the fact that the Foxes became a “bargain first” Clan, whereas their neighbors believed in the sanctity of the Trial of Possession. Rather than fight for the newer generation of 'Mech designs, the Foxes bartered with Clan Coyote to assist them in developing it. They exchanged partial rights to the vital supplies of HarJel with the Horses to gain access to their super-infantry breeding protocols. And when they did fight, the information gleaned from their Chatterweb made aggressive, preemptive battle challenges possible, guaranteeing some degree of success—as with their challenge to claim Elemental armor from the Wolves.

As a side benefit to this policy, the Sea Fox Clan came through the Golden Century not only wealthy and strong, but also with very few lasting grudges against its fellow Clansmen. This, of course, was deliberate as well—as a general rule, merchants never want to alienate a potential customer.

—Sean Lasko, PhD, Professor of Clan Society and Politics, University of Thorin

Not all was profit and progress, however. What helped the Sea Fox prosper was an affront to more conservative Clans. The merchant caste, its prominence rising beyond dispute, seemed to call the shots when the Foxes did engage in Trials, guiding their Clan to profit while the warriors appeared to do their bidding. This so offended Khan Liam Howell of the Snow Raven Clan that he ordered his scientists to engineer a predator powerful enough to wipe out the Sea Fox Clan's totem on Strana Mechty. This event, once uncovered, led to an extraordinary reaction from the Foxes. Rather than be bound to a totem that was verging on extinction, and rather than engage in a wasteful feud against the Clan whose Khan was responsible, the Sea Fox Clan simply decided to change its name, in a rare election where even the civilian castes were given a vote. In 2985, after fighting and winning a Trial of Refusal against the Grand Council's decision to block the name change, Clan Sea Fox became known by the name of the predator that had all but wiped out their original totem, and Clan Diamond Shark was born.

Ironically, the decades following their greatest step toward democracy and change saw a more unwelcome change in the newly renamed Diamond Sharks. Previously navigating a narrow line through the increasingly divisive Crusader and Warden debate, the Sharks had avoided making enemies. But as the time for a decision neared, this ambivalence won the Sharks fewer friends. It was into this tense political standoff that Ian Hawker became Khan of the Sharks. A reactionary conservative in a liberal Clan, it's still a baffling puzzle as to how he ever got elected to his post. Perhaps it was pressure from the merchants, who saw his Crusader leanings as playing into their hands for a shot at new markets. Or perhaps it was an outside influence. Whatever the cause, the Sharks were firmly in the Crusader camp under Hawker's command.

—Sean Lasko, PhD, Professor of Clan Society and Politics, University of Thorin

Once restored to a position of prominence, the warrior-merchants of Clan Diamond Shark began to push open the waiting markets in earnest. After the Clans' final, collective defeat at the Great Refusal, the Sharks, freed of the Clan-wide view of the Inner Sphere as an enemy to be conquered and ruled, advanced their trade from merely servicing the Clan-held territories to open negotiations with Inner Sphere agencies. Even Clan-designed 'Mechs became available to the eternally hungry Inner Sphere markets. It was the profits from this new venture that began the gradual transformation of the Sharks.

In part two of our examination of this unusual Clan of warrior-merchants, we continue our tour of the stars! I'm Bertram Habeas.

## Solaris VII: Where Legends are Born

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11/24/3133

Glamour, fame, money, and a whole lot of violence! What else can one expect from the worldwide sports arena that is Solaris VII? (Tourists sure don't come here for the weather, after all!) Here, the coliseums of Terra's ancient Rome, where gladiators fought for sport and survival before the cheering, bloodthirsty masses, meets modern technology in an explosive combination.

For the uninitiated, the world of Solaris VII, the legendary Game World, has been a Mecca for MechWarriors and other soldiers of fortune since the time of the Star League. Originally a weapons testing ground, with several local arms manufacturers constantly vying for contracts with the larger Great House governments, it wasn't long before the regular live fire tests that pit new 'Mech designs against one another became a planet-wide sport, complete with its own gambling rings and fighting leagues. Soon after claiming the world, House Steiner made the planetary capital, Solaris City, into an open city, divided up into districts for all nationalities. Warriors from across the Inner Sphere could venture to this world to test their mettle against others in proxy battles where honor, fame, and cash rode on the line, hand-in-hand with the combatants' very lives.

Solaris City is, of course, home to the Big Five, the five Class Six Arenas, one for each Great House. These arenas host battles between BattleMechs of every weight class and configuration, and draw the biggest crowds of all the dozens of legitimate battle arenas on the planet. The features of the arenas vary, with each offering unique venues for MechWarriors to do battle in. Steiner Stadium (the Coliseum), located in Silesia district, for instance, is an open ferrocrete field, within which are rows of walls that can either be locked at various levels or which may rise and fall in "chaos mode". By comparison, the House Kurita arena (Ishiyama, also called Iron Mountain, located in Kobe district) is a twisting series of caverns where the crowd must follow the battle through holovid, and the combatants by sight only, because the iron fouls most sensors. House Davion's Boreal Reach arena, located in Solaris City's Black Hills district, uses holograms, multi-level platforms, and even special heating and cooling systems to simulate terrain of all kind, for spectators and combatants alike. The other arenas, from the Marik-inspired Factory in Montenegro district, to House Liao's beautiful jungle battleground (appropriately called The Jungle, located in Cathay district) offer MechWarriors unique challenges all their own.

Battling in these arenas are MechWarriors of every stripe, though the truly famous are the warriors who belong to the MechWarrior stables, the ones who often grace the covers of magazines and appear on holovid ads and T-shirts across the Inner Sphere. Teams of MechWarriors, owned and managed by corporations or even nobles from a Great House, and trained not just to win, but to do so with flair, form the core of Solaris' stables system. It takes real talent to be a stable MechWarrior, both on and off the field, and any warrior who earns the right is set, so long as he or she keeps winning matches.

But while the year-round bouts, grudge matches, exhibitions, and minor-league team tournaments may be the bread and butter of the Solaris economy, the real meat of the action, the biggest draw by far is the annual Grand Tournament. A series of single-elimination, one-on-one duels, the Grand Tournament ranges from five to seven days of pure, violent spectacle, with over one hundred of Solaris VII's best stable MechWarriors competing against opponents chosen by lot in all of the Class Six Arenas.

Their rankings set with each Grand Tournament, modified over the between-season matches, and verified in pre-Tournament qualifying rounds, these modern-day gladiators slug it out throughout the Tournament, knowing that it only takes one lucky engine hit, one devastating gyro crash, or even one lucky—yet tragic all the same—cockpit breach to make or break their careers. The battles aren't to the death, but with live ammunition and fully charged lasers one never knows what's going to happen.

And though most odds makers may disagree, the Tournament matches are balanced, both for the benefit of the combatants and spectators alike. Opponents are matched by comparative weight classes and weapons loads by the Tournament committees, who also choose the best venues for these warriors and judge on the outcome in event of a tie. Fight fans are encouraged to bet and bet often, but try not to lose your shirt, because even the longest odds can come through with an unexpected turn of events.

At the end of this week-long parade of colorful personalities, 'Mechs, and fights is the grand prize itself: the Solaris VII Championship Cup, catapulting the warrior lucky or skilled enough to reach it to instant immortality, fame, and wealth beyond dreams—at least as long as the champion can hold onto it.

Welcome to Solaris VII, the place where legends are made!

## Touring the Stars with Bertram Habeas

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11/26/3133

*We began on Terra, millions of years ago. Today, mankind stretches out among the stars of the Milky Way, touching thousands of worlds, as far from our home as Clan space, more than 2,000 light-years distant. Yet who are we, really? What have we become in our relentless push outward and onward? I'm Bertram Habeas, and tonight, let's find the answers to these and many other fascinating questions together, as we tour the stars!*

### Volume XXX: The Shark and the Fox, Evolution of a Clan

Baking beneath a large, white-hot star, this world of sand and windstorms was once the capital of the Trelshire Province of the Lyran Commonwealth's Tamar Pact. Today, however, the low, fat buildings of Camora, one of this planet's larger cities, surround a sprawling outdoor marketplace. Here, holographic monitors and computer terminals stand beside low-technology booths where live merchants in homey attire peddle their wares and make a fine art of haggling. In the nearby spaceport, no less than five massive, ovoid skyscrapers stand a silent vigil, constantly loading and offloading cargo, which is taken into massive, subterranean warehouses, and is always under the heavy guard of the finest Clan-made military hardware any currency can buy.

Emblazoned on the 'Mechs, the DropShips, and even the troopers who see that all transactions and businesses run smoothly, is the ever-alert image of the Sea Fox, coiling up from the waves and bowing, at once honoring and pouncing upon its prey.

The gathering of material wealth is supposedly beneath the Clans, who value martial glory over all other pursuits. The only honor comes through victory in a fairly fought Trial, where equally matched opponents put their lives on the line to prove their worth and their way is superior. But what does that say about the mercantile nature of the Sea Fox Clan? Does their relentless pursuit of commodities, information, and wealth make them less of a Clan? Do they demonstrate the same kind of honor in combat? Do they believe in the vision of Kerensky?

Like the Ghost Bear Clan, the Sea Foxes have adapted to life in the Inner Sphere, but theirs was an evolution already underway before they even arrived. Granted freedoms beyond those of other Clan civilians, the Foxes' merchant caste grew to dominate the politics and policies of their Clan. Driven by the guidance of Karen Nagasawa, one of the Clan's founding Khans, the Foxes sought material gain before all other objectives, in hopes of quickly assuring their continued survival in the relatively resource-poor worlds of the Kerensky Cluster. Yet in their quest to expand, the Sea Foxes never truly violated the codes set down by Nicholas Kerensky. Instead, they merely tested the limits of their flexibility, amassing wealth, resources, and power in the bargain. However, the worlds of the Kerensky Cluster were few.

What's perhaps most ironic about the Diamond Shark/Sea Fox Clan is how they came to be in the Inner Sphere to begin with. Preferring the bargain to the Trial, they always sought to avoid long-standing feuds, yet, in time for the go-vote, they were in the Crusader camp. Some theorists suggest that this was due to pressures from within—the merchant caste, smelling new markets the way their totem could smell blood in the water—but the anomaly in that theory is that their leader at the time was a rare warrior caste elitist. Thus, as the merchants were finally gaining access to the untapped riches of the Inner Sphere, they were brutally oppressed, their rights stripped away.

And yet the disastrous results of this leadership would ultimately pave the way for success. Under Khan [Ian] Hawker, the Diamond Sharks would suffer from a bad showing during the invasion—so bad, in fact, that he would be forced to again relinquish control to the stifled merchant caste, in order to rebuild and avoid absorption.

Thus, in effect, the Diamond Sharks' decision to join in the invasion would prove to be both their greatest mistake and their greatest boon. It would simply take many more years before they truly swam their own path . . .

—Sean Lasko, PhD, Professor of Clan Society and Politics, University of Thorin

Indeed, in the wake of the Clan Invasion, the Diamond Sharks' merchants suddenly found their opportunity for the growth their Clan craved. The markets of the Inner Sphere gradually opened to accept Clan-made goods, first on a sort of black-market level, with smaller items in trade for Inner Sphere goods. Because Clan military and engineering technology was forced for so long to rely on fewer resources, practical tools and weapons made using Clan techniques were better than their Inner Sphere counterparts and thus highly prized. But the Clans lacked luxuries and conveniences that the Inner Sphere had long developed for its own use, even in the poorer realms. Trade blossomed, gradually expanding to the point where even BattleMechs were among the commodities exchanged. Though other Clans voiced alarm that the Sharks were trading away their military edge, the Shark merchants noted that Inner Sphere technical parity was inevitable ever since the invasion began, and trading obsolete models of military hardware hardly did anything to upset the balance of power.

At almost the same time, the Sharks bartered their transportation services as well, first to the Ghost Bears, and later to the Hell's Horses, assisting in the relocation of whole colonies aboard their surplus JumpShip fleets. As tensions rose in the Clan homeworlds, these relocations would expand to include many Diamond Shark holdings as well. It would not be until 3067, when Diamond Shark prominence in the Inner Sphere became so great that they could seize and hold their own worlds from among the other Clan Occupation Zones, that their fellow Clansmen realized what was happening. For all intents and purposes, the Sharks were migrating to the open seas, leaving behind the shallow depths of the home worlds.



It was also during this time that the Clan began posting permanent, large-scale forces to its WarShips; a strange, but apparently insignificant change at the time that would eventually demonstrate itself to be a precursor to radical sociopolitical changes for the Clan to come.

The upheaval caused by a new generation of Clans leaving the home worlds apparently proved too much to bear for those left behind. Though even the Sea Foxes today won't part with that kind of information, the rumors and reports of a massive conflict engulfing the home worlds for over a decade have proven too persistent to simply disregard. Whatever occurred there, the result was a hasty, enforced relocation of the remaining Diamond Sharks to the Inner Sphere; a process made easier by the trading alliances built up over the years and by the gradual relocation of much of the Clan's merchant and labor castes to support their recently won trading worlds.

Worlds such as Twycross in the Jade Falcons' Occupation Zone, Trondheim in the then-Ghost Bear Dominion, and Itabiana, among the Nova Cat holdings in the Draconis Combine, all became holdings of the Diamond Sharks. These worlds were transformed into the Clans' clearing houses, bases of operations not for military conquest, but for the perpetuation of trade, the Diamond Sharks' single greatest occupation. Yet inviting off-worlders to come and trade on these few planets would not be enough to sustain an uprooted Clan. Newer markets had to be opened, without making enemies of them. Though each world had been won by the rules of the Trial, the Sharks knew their intended markets—those of the Inner Sphere—would not be receptive to the warrior ways of the Clans. To open new markets, the Clan would have to expand without conquest. Thus began the rise of the aimags, and the Khanates they serve, and thus also did the Sharks reclaim their original name, presenting to their new markets a face no longer sullied by the reputation of a failed invader, but honoring their ties to the noble sea fox.

Night falls on Camora, and the markets are closed for the day. As the last rays of the sun, cast in red by a distant sandstorm, fade off to the west, one begins to realize how cold the desert wind has become. The city itself is not yet asleep. Children still play in the streets, under the glow of lamps, engaging in games that mimic the bargaining techniques of their elders. This is a merchant's city, and even the warriors do not interfere; their BattleMechs stomping off in an endless patrol around the spaceport.

The towering ovoid buildings are fewer now, however, with only one left behind as the last departing drive flare rises into the nighttime sky. With good binoculars, one can make out the waiting vessel, an oblong form, its metal hide gleaming as the last rays of sunlight reflect off it. Though WarShips hovering in close orbit have in the past been a harbinger of invasion, on Twycross few people notice, for the Sea Fox ArcShips are merely a harbinger of business as usual, and on this night, the ArcShip of the Skate Khanate is preparing for its next "fishing expedition," the eternal quest for new markets, perpetuated in the vastness of space itself.

In our next volume, our tour of the Sea Fox will examine how the Jihad made possible the unexpected but no less inevitable rise of this nomadic Clan of warrior merchants. I'm Bertram Habeas.

## 3132 Solaris VII Championships Season Review (Part 1)

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12/03/3133

SOLARIS CITY, SOLARIS VII – Welcome back, fight fans, to INN’s Season Recap of the 3132 Solaris VII Grand Championship. Seven days, one-hundred and twenty-eight MechWarriors, and only one will be champion once it’s over! Today’s Recap brought to you by Vining Engineering and Salvage Teams; “VEST: If we don’t have it, you don’t need it!”

It was the first night of the annual Grand Tournament and what a night! With over sixty-four matches to choose from, fans clogged the streets in downtown Solaris City, frantically racing between stadiums to catch their heroes one climactic battle after another. No filler matches this evening, folks; every shot fired was for keeps, with the coveted championship on the line.

Tonight’s highlights included the always-brutal match of incumbent champion, “Roaring” Ronald Ghost Bear of Zellbrigen Stables, against Tandrek Stables’ eleventh-ranked challenger, “Jumping” Jelayna Mani. Squaring off against Mani’s custom Marauder II in the Factory Arena, Ghost Bear utterly savaged Mani in just under 40 seconds with his infamous, arctic-blue Kodiak “Ursa Rex,” with the same ruthlessness that has made the Clan champion a favorite in the arenas.

In Kobe sector’s Ishiyama Arena, fourth-ranked Omar “Demolition” Durand of the troubled, pro-Free Worlds, Galahad Stables, waged one of the longest games of cat-and-mouse in tournament history with his hit-and-run hunt beneath Iron Mountain for Gemini’s “Iron” Rance Xabat. Weaving through the artificial maze of tunnels and mineshafts, emerging only to unload a hellish burst of laser and missile fire each time, Durand’s Vulture, “Gravewalker,” finally wore down the thicker armor of Xabat’s lethal Black Knight, eventually felling the fourteenth-ranked fighter with a double-leg knock-out, despite his own damaged sensors.

But the ultimate comeback of the night came from Blackstar Stables’ Shayne “Shockwave” Kirkpatrick, in the custom Zeus “Thunderstorm,” after suffering an unholy pounding from the guns of Kyle “Bonegrinder” DePaik’s Atlas, “King Krusher” at the Boreal Reach Arena. With one leg savaged, and her gyros out of synch, sixth-ranked Kirkpatrick managed an impressive last-minute victory with a point-blank alpha strike that tore open the heavier machine’s torso and destroyed its gyros completely at the very moment it seemed DePaik would have landed the killing blow. DePaik, after the match, repeatedly challenged Kirkpatrick to a rematch, and rumor has it that Kirkpatrick will meet the Overlord Stables’ champion in a grudge match later this week.

Across the boards, it seems that the big winners in tonight’s duels have been Blackstar Stables, with five warriors advancing on to tomorrow’s round, Cenotaph Stables and Zellbrigen tied for second place by advancing three warriors each through the rankings, while two warriors each from Bromley Stables, the Wraiths, and DiNapoli Stables have managed to claw their way ever so much closer to the top slots. Pro-Combine stables were the big losers this evening, with both Toranaga and DeLon stables having three warriors each lost to the first round eliminations.

Box scores for tonight’s match and schedules for tomorrow night’s line-up can be found on our link-site, including the latest odds, for those of you in a betting frame of mind. Once again, I’m Dennis Stanzio for Solaris Broadcasting Center, an affiliate of INN, with your Championship Recap, and I am out of here!

### Towne Log

+ Awwww, it’s a rerun!  
:- BlazeFire

+ Still a good distraction from the crap they’ve been showing on INN lately! Documentaries about the Centauri Lancers, MechWarrior families going the way of the dodo, and those oh-so-dry Bertram Habeas articles are informative, but sometimes, you just have to have a little mindless carnage to break up the monotony.  
:- KevvyCone

+ And speaking of, let’s be honest! Who expected the Shockwave to land that hit on Bonegrinder, eh? I mean, he owned the field most of the time, slapping her Zeus silly, and she just nails him with that light show of hers—from prone, no less!  
:- BNCFanatic

+ Argh. Freaking Blackstar fans. Always gotta make us relive these moments, don’t you?  
:- TVBluFist

+ Hell yeah, TV! Your dePaik dropped like a sack of wet laundry!  
:- BNCFanatic

+ Yeah, yeah. Whatever.  
:- TVBluFist

## 3132 Solaris VII Championships Season Review (Part 2)

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12/03/3133

SOLARIS CITY, SOLARIS VII – Welcome back, fight fans, to INN’s Season Recap of the 3132 Solaris VII Grand Championship. Seven days, one-hundred twenty-eight MechWarriors. Only one will be champion when it’s over, and already, half the starting line-up is outta here! Today’s Recap brought to you by Avanti Automotive, makers of the ’32 Windcoaster A7; “Avanti: No smoother glide, on heaven or earth!”

And then there were sixty-four. Second night of the annual Grand Tournament and the fighting has been close! With thirty-two matches compared to twice as many last night, traffic may have been lighter in the city, but the action in the stadiums was no less frantic.

With so many matches, it’s impossible to do them justice in a quick blurb, but tonight’s lineup has seen some of the hottest fighting yet. Here are just a few of the highlights:

Battling it out in the Liao Stadium, appropriately enough, Cenotaph Stable’s seventh-ranked champion, Danai Centrella-Liao stormed through the woods in her modified Centurion, savaged Centrella-Liao’s opponent, “Kaiser” Yulanka Kaiser of the Blue Fists stable, in a brutal series of point-blank range attacks. Kaiser’s Hatchetman, unable to get past the Capellan scion’s heavy shield, never even landed a solid blow on the Cenotaph favorite, who will continue on to tomorrow’s round against second-ranked Reshad “Razor” Michaud of Bromley Stables in the Boreal Reaches arena.

In the Steiner Coliseum, Olivia “Queen Liv” Tyler of the pro-Capellan Zelazni Stables, hammered DiNapoli Stable’s Kamilla “Kamikaze” Killen, using her modified Ghost’s deadly chainsaw to devastating effect against the legs of the lighter Targe. Fight judges, however, served Tyler up a fair warning for poor sportsmanship, when she threatened to use the saw again on the cockpit of Killen’s disabled Mech. An explosion of violence in the post-fight review broke out as well between Tyler and another pro-Republic champion from DiNapoli Stables, “Daring” Davis Strauss. The two warriors, who are set to face each other in the fifth round, exchanged bitter insults and nearly came to blows before security from both stables managed to separate them.

And of course, for the reigning champion, “Roaring” Ronald Ghost Bear of Zelbrigen Stables, he and his Kodiak swiftly dispatched another hopeful in a devastating match against thirtieth-ranked Patrick “Wonderboy” Wahlberg beneath Iron Mountain. Though this time, the match lasted more than a minute, the moment the Clan-bred champion and his ride for this match, a modified Shadow Cat II, attained line of sight to the Toranaga MechWarrior’s Thunderbolt, the fight was over in less than that, with Ghost Bear’s trademark disregard for heat levels and alpha-strike approach easily tearing Wahlberg apart. Wahlberg himself was injured as his machine collapsed on itself in the fierce fusillade, but is expected to make a full recovery.

As always, box scores for tonight’s match and schedules for tomorrow night’s line-up can be found on the SBC link-site, including the latest odds, for all you folks with a gambling problem. I’m Dennis Stanzio for Solaris Broadcasting Center, an affiliate of INN, with your Championship Recap, and I am out of here!

### Towne Log

+ Hoo-woo! Did you see the attached vids on that that one? Man, Ghost Bear’s a menace no matter what machine they put him in! I don’t see how anyone’s managed to knock that guy out of the running, let alone Durand!  
:- GropoM

+ Say, on the box scores, it says that Shockwave’s still in the fight, too! Go Blackstar!  
:- BNCFanatic

+ Knock it off, already, BNCF! We already know Kirkpatrick won the bloody Tournament! You don’t have to go reading the box scores over and over again.  
:- TVBluFist

+ Yeah, BNC, especially considering that you didn’t have the cajones to bet on Shockwave, what are you so gloaty about?  
:- LevEOsa

+ Hey, a little consideration here, guys? Some of us missed the Games first time around! Could you please not spoil the surprise?  
:- GreasL

+ \*gasp!\* Someone who actually missed the Games? What are you, GreasL? A Luddite?  
:- Synnik

## Touring the Stars with Bertram Habeas

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12/03/3133

*We began on Terra, millions of years ago. Today, mankind stretches out among the stars of the Milky Way, touching thousands of worlds, as far from our home as Clan space, more than 2,000 light-years distant. Yet who are we, really? What have we become in our relentless push outward and onward? I'm Bertram Habeas, and tonight, let's find the answers to these and many other fascinating questions together, as we tour the stars!*

### Volume XXXI: Challenging the Void—Clan Sea Fox Ascendant

From its inception among the often-desolate and resource-poor worlds of the Pentagon and the Kerensky Cluster, the Sea Fox Clan has striven to amass material wealth, equating riches and resources with survival. As the Sea Fox Clan, it forged an economic empire, less dependant on Trials than on deals, but the inevitable rivalries forced it to change, to evolve into the Diamond Sharks, a Clan more democratic in nature, yet often guided as much by the passions of war as the lure of opening new markets. With the invasion of the Inner Sphere, the pendulum once more swung slowly back to the nature of the Sea Fox—less bloodthirsty, more honorable, but still a predator to be feared and respected. It was, however, an evolution, as should be expected, that would take several decades to complete.

[Clan Diamond Shark/Sea Fox] was an enigma during the early years of the Clan invasion. To the citizens of the Sphere, they were the invaders who were never seen. To the other invaders, they were more like remoras than sharks themselves, parasites swimming with the real predators of the deep. Yet few among the Clans could say the Sharks had no place in their society. As each Clan functions under the collective efforts of the five castes—warrior, scientist, merchant, technician, and laborer—so the Clans as a whole had their castes—those who led as warriors, and those who served, as the Shark merchants did so well.

But the Sharks were a democracy compared to the martial nature of the other Clans, and in a democracy, even the common folk have a voice in their destiny. So it was for the Sharks. Born, bred, and raised to seek strength through profit and wealth, they brought with them to the invasion that same sense of manifest destiny the more warlike Clans embraced. In their view, however, there were other ways to get there. The Clan's failure at Tukayyid became stark evidence of this, and with the resulting decline of Khan [Ian] Hawker, the Crusader mentality burned itself out in favor of a new Warden philosophy. If the Sharks couldn't beat the Inner Sphere on the field of battle, they would carve their own conquests in the marketplace.

Much like spoiled children, the warrior Clans, of course, protested the Sharks at every turn, but the Sharks won all the right Trials and said all the right things. They sold their services to Clan and Inner Sphere patrons alike. Ironically, however, serving both would lead to the choice of one over another during the dark years of the Jihad.

—Sean Lasko, PhD, Professor of Clan Society and Politics, University of Thorin

The early 3060s saw waves of fighting in both the Clan home worlds and the Inner Sphere. With a Clan destroyed, another Abjured, and still another entirely relocated to the greener pastures of the Inner Sphere, a massive power vacuum was created which all the remaining home Clans tore into each other to fill. The Wars of Possession, as they were known, would take years to burn themselves out, even as the Inner Sphere erupted in the fires of several wars, ranging from the Capellan–St. Ives war to the FedCom Civil War. But even as the initial conflicts ended, new ones began. The Word of Blake Jihad was launched in 3067, turning the war-ravaged Inner Sphere upside down once more, and as the Spheroids fought for their very way of life, the Clans, too, felt the strain.

The match that lit the fuse came from an unexpected source, however. Clan Hell's Horses, an ascendant home Clan, which had recently been forced out of its briefly held Inner Sphere occupation zone, initiated its own plans for an invasion, aimed at the Crusader Wolves. Recognizing the long journey ahead, and having learned from their earlier failures, the Horses recognized the need to relocate at least a healthy portion of their support structure with their armies. To assist in this endeavor, they turned to the Diamond Sharks as their nemesis, Clan Ghost Bear, had done a decade before. Unlike the Bears, however, the Horses' move was not subtle enough to be overlooked, and the apparent wholesale departure of yet another Clan may have ignited the chaos in the Clan home worlds that followed.

The lack of hard details on what some historians have called the Clan Civil War has led to many prevailing theories on what exactly happened in the 3070s and 3080s. The massive upheaval that apparently followed the Horses' relocation, and the brief Ice Hellion incursion, evidently led to the severing of all effective contact between the invading Clans and their brethren back home. However, the exact details are still a secret jealously kept by those Clans in the Inner Sphere. What is known, however, is that one of the many results was the loss of the Diamond Sharks' enclaves back home, forcing a truncated Clan to remake itself once again.

With only three worlds to stage from, and the entire Inner Sphere at war, the Sharks saw a unique opportunity, even in the grip of disaster. Fleets of their JumpShips, arriving in the Inner Sphere with whatever they could carry, became an instant lifeline to other factions in the Inner Sphere; their supplies sold at bargain prices, often in exchange for raw materials and components the Clan itself had lost.

As the Jihad continued, and security issues became paramount, the Foxes included their WarShips—the troops' attachment only a short time before proving almost prescient—leaving the balance of their Touman to guard their market worlds. Military and logistical needs hastened these changes, and crystallized the Aimag-and-Khanate organization used today,

including the creation of additional saKhans to oversee each Khanate fleet, as well as the institution of the formal rank of ovKhan (Aimag leaders).

As the last of the Blakist holdouts fell to the coalition of Inner Sphere forces, Clan Sea Fox began to morph into the four roving Khanates (spacefleets) seen today—Spina, Skate, Tiburon, and Fox—each led by a saKhan, under a fifth (the ilKhanate), that is led by the Clan Khan. Though it would take until the dawn of the thirty-second century for the Sea Fox to fully blossom into their current incarnation, there can be no doubt that the Jihad proved a catalyst which shaved decades off of what would otherwise most likely have been a century-long transformation.

As the new century began, to signify their own new beginning and win over additional Spheroid markets, the Clan leaders voted to change the Clan's name back to Sea Fox in 3100. This event was pulled off with nowhere near the inter-Clan fighting that had erupted before the invasion years, as the Grand Council simply was in no position to refute them.

Though derided by their fellow Clans as mere gypsies, the Sea Fox Khanates proved themselves an effective adaptation to the chaos of the Jihad and its aftermath, and a natural extension of the Foxes' evolution.

We should all learn such lessons, and implement them so well. . . .

—Petiri Nova Cat, *Survival of the Fittest: Clans of the Inner Sphere*, Commonwealth Press, 3127

Reorganized, and revitalized, even as the rest of the Inner Sphere dealt with the horrifying aftermath of the Jihad, the Sea Fox Clan could make its presence felt anywhere in the Sphere that a new market beckoned. The arrival of their modified WarShips (today known as ArcShips and CargoShips) soon became a welcome sight, signifying the presence of a Khanate in one system while its five attendant JumpShip fleets (Aimag) extended their offer of goods and services to other nearby worlds, often supporting worlds left stranded by Blakist attacks. During the final days of the Jihad, and the first decade following, these JumpShip fleets claimed only a small percentage in profit for their services, but the sheer volume of markets opened by these nomadic Khanates created the single greatest boon to the Clan's economy since the creation of its Chatterweb. Thus, the Aimag and Khanates assured their own continued existence with their proof of profitability, bringing the wealth, prominence, and of course glory of the mercantile Clan to Inner Sphere—and even Periphery—markets, wherever they might be found.

In the last part of our look at the ways of Clan Sea Fox today, our tour will take us inside the gypsy ArcShips and CargoShips of the Sea Fox Clan. Come join us as the tour of the stars continues! I'm Bertram Habeas.

## **Blast at Kressly Plant Kills Hundreds, White Hand Claims Responsibility**

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12/06/3133

MADISON, EPSILON ERIDANI – Over 230 people were killed, and another 140 wounded today when a powerful blast tore through Kressly Technologies' newest IndustrialMech production line outside the port city of Dori on Epsilon Eridani. The terrorist group known as the White Hand, previously thought to be local only to Towne and its surrounding worlds, claimed responsibility for the explosions, and threatened further attacks in the near future.

Government and police officials say the attack took place at 1050 hours, less than two hours after the first shift workers arrived at the recently constructed AgroMech assembly facility. Security cameras and witness who survived the attack confirmed that a plain white cargo truck, apparently laden with parts crates, pulled into the facility shortly before then. Plant security evidently cleared the vehicle for entry, though it was not listed on any expected arrival schedules, allowing the driver to enter the receiving area. It is believed that the blast originated with this truck, which officials suggest was loaded with pentaglycerine explosives. The driver of the unidentified vehicle was killed in the initial explosion.

Police officials stopped short of suggesting that the apparent lapse in factory security indicated an inside job, however.

"This particular [Kressly Industries] facility produced civilian 'Mechs, not military-grade machinery or the like, and so was not subject to the same high security standards as a BattleMech manufacturing center," said Captain Jesse Cook, of the Dori Police Department. "Given the irregular schedules of parts deliveries since the loss of the HPG network, apparently off-schedule deliveries had become a routine occurrence here, and the terrorists took advantage of that."

Despite that explanation, however, Cook told INN that the Dori Police and planetary law enforcement agencies would be pursuing "all avenues of investigation". Furthermore, a message had been sent to Terra, requesting the presence of a Knight to assist in the investigation.

"It was unbelievable," said Jennifer Laske, one of the plant's assembly workers, who survived the attack and remained at the scene to help survivors. "I had left the station for just a few minutes. My supervisor, Jack, had just paged me back when explosions hit. People were running everywhere, and there was all this smoke and fire, and I kept wondering where Jack was. I just can't leave now till I know...."

At this hour, recovery still continues at the factory site, where many more of this morning's survivors, like Laske, continue to assist in the search for coworkers still missing after the blast.

### **Towne Log**

+ Cripes! White Hand again? I thought they were just our problem?

:- RepMan

+ Copy cat, maybe? Or the problem's way more widespread than INN would have us believe. I mean, the Gherstwood Mall blast happened at almost the same time, and used pentaglycerine as well. Seems like the same basic MO...

:- PhazeOne

+ Yeah. Looks like these Hand guys are a lot more clever than we all thought...

:- Synnik

+ What about Bannson? His boys recently took that planet, didn't they? What if it was his way of letting the local industrialists know who was in charge?

:- GreasL

+ You know, that one even I might believe, except it does nothing to reinforce his credibility as a protector of the people when his own "security troops" can't prevent a thing like that from happening. Heck, right about now, I gotta wonder if the local authorities aren't begging for Republic troops to come and boot Bannson off-world...

:- RepMan

## 3132 Solaris VII Championships Season Review (Part 3)

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12/09/3133

SOLARIS CITY, SOLARIS VII – Welcome back, fight fans, to INN’s Season Recap of the 3132 Solaris VII Grand Championship, Part Three. One week of battles, one-hundred and twenty-eight MechWarriors to fight them, and only one champion when it’s all over! Today’s Recap brought to you by the folks at Defiance Industries of Hesperus II; “DefHes Knows ‘Mechs!”

Day three of the annual Grand Tournament brought sixteen of the most spectacular tournament duels yet, and a host of exciting grudge matches to boot! Highlights from tonight included another of “Roaring” Ronald Ghost Bear’s savage, all-or-nothing victories. Last year’s champion from Zellbrigen Stables, once more piloting his arctic blue Kodiak “Ursa Rex,” annihilated the modified Atlas driven by twenty-fourth-ranked “Blazing” Augr Steinhammar of Overlord Stables at the Steiner Coliseum in a brutal, three-minute fight.

At the Factory Arena in Montenegro, seventeenth-ranked “Vanquishing” Varick Geralyn of the Breakdown Division Stable, suffered a terrible upset when his custom Legionnaire “Close Cutter” took a hit in the magazine from last-year’s seventy-first-place up and comer, Ian “Boltster” Smythe and his stock Centurion “Mack”. The victory will be sure to rocket the Wraith Stable’s Smythe up through the rankings, if he can hold onto his luck for the next four nights, while Geralyn will have to wait till next year for a shot at the title again.

But for all the excitement in the big matches, it was the tag-team filler duel in the Jungle Arena, between pro-CapCon Zelazni Stables and the DiNappoli Stable team, which drew most of the crowds. Led by tenth-ranked Olivia “Queen Liv” Tyler in her deadly custom Ghost, the Zelazni warriors tore into the DiNappolis’ without mercy. Gerald “T-Mister” Taylor (III) of DiNappoli, piloting his Griffin “Gladiator,” suffered multiple injuries when Tyler ambushed his ‘Mech from behind, demolished his gyros, and emphasized her victory with a chainsaw strike to the head. Though DiNappoli officials decried this demonstration of “excessive force” by the Zelazni champion, judges did not disqualify Tyler or her teammate, Jerry “Heat” Seeger. After the ruling, Tyler and her DiNappoli nemesis, “Daring” David Strauss, verbally sparred at a post-battle interview, with Strauss promising Tyler “a nasty end” in their upcoming fifth-round duel. Strauss refused to elaborate on his threat.

As always, fight fans, box scores for tonight’s matches and schedules for the Round Four line-up can be found on our link-site, including the latest odds, for all you betting junkies. Also as always, I’m Dennis Stanzio for SBC, an affiliate of INN, with your Championship Recap, and I am out of here!

### Towne Log

+ Dude! The attached vidclips showed that tag team match. Wow, that Tyler’s one lethal !  
:- KevvyCone

+ You can say that again, KC! Zelazni’s people had to weasel their way out of fines for her last move, there. I mean, chainsaw to the head of a disabled ‘Mech ordinarily is an instant suspension!  
:- GRibaldi

+ Unless they’re in the Championship, that is. If Tyler’s teammate has done something like that with his Hatchetman, the Solaris Gaming Commission would have booted him right out and gave the purse to DiNappoli’s boys, but Tyler’s in the Tourney, and the bad behavior to disqualify her has to be a lot more severe than “losing control of the saw”. (I \*loved\* that excuse, though!)  
:- BNCFanatic

+ Oh, was that the defense Zelazni used?  
:- TVBluFist

+ Yup. Claimed a hit earlier in the match and the vibration of the saw caused Tyler’s arm to twitch every now and then. Natch, the Commission bought it.  
:- BNCFanatic

+ Blah. That’s just not right...  
:- TVBluFist

## 3132 Solaris VII Championships Season Review (Part 4)

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12/09/3133

SOLARIS CITY, SOLARIS VII – Welcome back, fight fans, to INN’s Season Recap of the 3132 Solaris VII Grand Championship. The most intense week of BattleMech combat ever seen outside of a major war, and it’s all for your entertainment. Today’s Recap brought to you by Descartes Computers Unlimited, makers of the Descartes Mk XXIX PCs; “Descartes Computers: Second Only to the Human Brain.”

For those of you who might have missed it, Day Four of the Grand Tournament may just go on record as one of the most explosive since the riots of 3062, with excitement both on and off the tournament circuit all across Solaris City. Tonight, the sixteen remaining warriors became eight in a spectacular series of clashes charged with tension as the final championship rounds loom on the horizon.

In the arenas, tonight’s bouts saw Cenotaph’s Danai Centrella-Liao tear through her DeLon Stables challenger, eighteenth-ranked “Fantastic” Phoebe Itasha, in an all out brawl under Ishiyama’s Stone Mountain. At the same time, in the simulated desert of Davion Arena, Silver Dragon Stables’ third-ranked champion, “Ravager” Raul Kalso, suffered a horrific defeat at the hands of Blackstar’s Shayne “Shockwave” Kirkpatrick. Furious over his defeat from overheat, Kalso challenged Kirkpatrick to a grudge match almost immediately, and the two are expected to square off again tomorrow afternoon. Kalso may wish to rethink that, because Kirkpatrick, who is slated to face Centrella-Liao tomorrow night, appeared to be on fire, following up her spectacular victory against Kalso with another in her much-anticipated grudge match against Kyle DePaik on the very same battlefield.

In the Factory Arena, the duel between White Hand’s number twenty champion, Byron “The Blaster” Ulmer, and Toranaga Stables’ eighty-second ranked “Magnificent” Mario LeMar became a brutal slugfest after both combatants, piloting light, ballistic BattleMechs, exhausted their ammunition after close to thirty minutes of fierce combat. LeMar finally managed an upset, taking out Ulmer’s overheated Blade, with a rapid series of flamer strikes from his modified Firestarter, to claim his shot at Round Five, where he’s set to face Galahad Stables’ Omar “Demolition” Durand. If defeated tomorrow night, however, at least LeMar can take comfort, because the winner of that bout gets to face the unstoppable force that is “Roaring” Ronald Ghost Bear, who once again annihilated his opponent in a rare match at the Hartford Gardens Arena.

Piloting a Black Hawk for this match, Ghost Bear’s trademark alpha strike finish cored the Shadow Cat II piloted by his opponent, Armis “the Avenger” Hathaway, setting off a dazzling plasma explosion that the Starlight MechWarrior was lucky to walk away from.

But the real show this evening of course, didn’t happen in the arenas! Stay tuned, fight fans, and check out the box scores for tonight’s matches and tomorrow’s schedules at the SBC link-site. When we come back, the rumble in Silesia will be our focus for tonight’s Grand Champion Recap. I’m Dennis Stanzio for Solaris Broadcasting Center, an affiliate of INN, with your Championship Recap, and I... will be right back!

### Towne Log

+ Ooo! I almost forgot about the mini-riot that happened in Round Four! This ought to be good!

:- GropoM

+ A lot of highlight on Shockwave this time. Gosh, in retrospect, do you think SBC knew who was gonna win this season?

:- TVBluFist

+ There’s a shocker! Actually, considering that Shayne took out not one but two opponents within hours of each other in the same field, I guess it qualified as newsworthy this time around. Boy! The egg on DePaik’s face when he got trounced by her AGAIN was priceless, though!

:- LevEOsa

+ Truly one of the greatest moments in sports! LOL!

:- BNCFanatic

+ Next year, BNC. Next year....

:- TVBluFist



## Riva Juro's Mercenary Profiles: The Kell Hounds

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12/10/3133

In 3010, two "spoiled rich kids playing at soldiering" arrived on Galatea and immediately assembled a crack team of technicians as the first step of their master plan to build a fearsome new mercenary regiment. The gambit worked, drawing some of the most experienced warriors of the day to their banner, and before long, from such humble beginnings, the Kell Hounds were born. Known far and wide not only for their elite skills, but also their strong identification with the Lyran state and House Steiner, as well as their role as hosts of Clan Wolf (in-Exile) and their rumored ties to a secret society known simply as Heimdall, the Kell Hounds have been the focus of countless holodramas, newsvid articles, and history books. Anyone who's anyone in the mercenary business has heard of the Kell Hounds, and chances are some even got their start through some association with these elite soldiers of fortune.

The Kell Hounds' early history includes some of the most pivotal battles of the 31st century, from the Battle for Mallory's World, where Prince Ian Davion died, to their role in safeguarding Archon-designate Melissa Steiner during the Fourth Succession War. During the Clan Invasion, they fought the Smoke Jaguars and Nova Cats to a standstill alongside the Wolf's Dragoons and House Kurita's elite forces on Luthien, and took part in the final battles of the Invasion with several actions alongside the troops of the reborn Star League. During the FedCom Civil War, they sided with deposed Archon Prince Victor Steiner-Davion, and helped win back the Lyran capital of Tharkad for Archon Peter Steiner-Davion. Alongside the Exiled Wolves, their allies since the Falcon-Wolf Refusal War, they survived and won countless battles during the Jihad, and once more provided safe haven to their fellow warriors in the Wolf's Dragoons.

When one visits the Kell Hounds' holdings on Arc-Royal, particularly the palace owned by the Kell family, its founders and leaders since Morgan and Partick Kell themselves, one can see everywhere the pride and history of this unit. Like the Wolf's Dragoons and the 21st Centauri Lancers, their reputation is among the purest one can find, with high standards of conduct on and off the battlefield. Also apparent are their links to the Steiner family and the Wolf Clan, demonstrating both their nationalism and brotherly acceptance—two features rarely found in a mercenary command.

In looking closer, to find out just what makes the Kell Hounds tick, I managed to score an interview with the mercenaries' spokesperson, Major Rafael Bradley, who expanded on these and other fascinating points about the Hounds.

"The Kells are related to the Steiners more by marriage than by blood," says Bradley, "but that relationship runs deep just the same, and it goes both ways. The Steiner family, even during the Civil War, always showed the Hounds respect. Half our strength both pre-Jihad and after, was made possible through grants direct from the Archons.

"That's not to say we were simply handed our success, however," Bradley quickly adds, with a smile and a wink. "It just shows the rewards of a job very well done."

It also shows the bonds of family that extend beyond the boundaries of this mercenary command, bonds that tie the inheritors of the Hounds not only to House Steiner, but to the Exiled Wolves who they share their homeworld with. Phelan Kell, first Khan of the so-called Clan Wolf (in-Exile), was actually the son of Kell Hound founder Morgan Kell, when he was captured by the Wolves in the early part of the Invasion. His influence, still seen in the easy camaraderie the mercenaries and Clansmen continue to share, emphasizes this sense of family that has become the heart of Lyran defense against Clan Jade Falcon since the end of the Jihad.

During my visit with the Kell Hounds, I saw no real combat action, but Major Bradley was kind enough to allow me to accompany his reinforced lance into a mock battle exercise against some resident Wolves. There, while observing the low-power, paint-munitions battle between five mercenary 'Mechs and an equal number of Clan machines, the skill and daring of the warriors on both sides was clear. Though waged with more comm chatter than normally seen between sides in a real dust-up, both forces fought hard to take their objectives, and the "battle" could have gone either way at any moment.

In the end, only a clever mine trap won the day when Bradley's Warhammer narrowly averted the field lain by his own lancemates, luring the pursuing Mad Cat of Star Captain Danier into the kill zone. As the simulator computers shut down the 75-ton machine, a whoop of triumph came over the Kell Hound channels, answered by congratulations and laughter by their Wolf counterparts. A friendly game of chess with 'Mechs, resolved between brothers-in-arms.

Like all the greats, the Kell Hounds have risen to fame and fortune as a mercenary command through their elite skills and a distinctive command style, dedicated to honor and compassion. But, more than anything else, family defines the nature of what it is to be a Hound, a sense of unity that goes beyond the battlefield, and extends beyond the boundaries of simple politics. It can be a volatile combination at times, but the Hounds have made it work for more than a century, with no signs of stopping now.

With this look at the Kell Hounds, I'm Ravi Juro, INN special correspondent, Arc-Royal.

## Touring the Stars with Bertram Habeas

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12/10/3133

*We began on Terra, millions of years ago. Today, mankind stretches out among the stars of the Milky Way, touching thousands of worlds, as far from our home as Clan space, more than 2,000 light-years distant. Yet who are we, really? What have we become in our relentless push outward and onward? I'm Bertram Habeas, and tonight, let's find the answers to these and many other fascinating questions together, as we tour the stars!*

### Volume XXXII: Warrior-Merchants—The Sea Fox Clan Today

**Fact Sheet:** Clan Sea Fox

**Founding Year:** 2810 (initial), 3068 (modern)

**Capital (City, World):** ilKhanate ArcShip Poseidon, no home system

**National Symbol:** A silver-blue sea fox, bowing as it rises from the water

**Location (Terra relative):** Various worlds and spaceborne colonies scattered across the Inner Sphere

**Total (Inhabited) Systems:** 3 total control; 14 world enclaves

**Estimated Population (3130):** 428,670,000

**Government:** Clan (Caste-driven, warrior/merchant-dominant hierarchy)

**Ruler:** Khan Mori Hawker

**Dominant Language(s):** English (official)

**Dominant Religion(s):** Atheism

**Unit of Currency:** Fox-Credit (1 fox credit = 1 C-Bill)

Long, slender, looking for all the world like silver pens with four humps like grasping fingers on the haft, hanging in the inky blackness of space from reflective parasols, two *Monolith*-class JumpShips await their complement of DropShips on the world below; the four humps are permanently attached DropShips, heavily modified into collective living quarters for thousands. Emblazoned on the solar sails of each is the rising sea fox insignia, portrayed in its customary bow of respect and honor. On the nose domes of each vessel the insignias repeat, but overlap a large red letter A, under which appears the silhouette of a diamond shark, curved as if swimming around this curious logo. The nose dome insignia at once identifies these vessels as those of Clan Sea Fox's Alpha Aimag, of the Tiburon Khanate, and today these JumpShips bring deals on everything from high-resolution holovids to the news from Tharkad to the isolated Lyran world of Kaumberg.

For over two weeks, Alpha Aimag has lingered in the Kaumberg system, exchanging the goods and services of the Sea Fox Clan with those of one of the Lyran Commonwealth's largest exporters of timber and classic furniture. Three days from now, when all the Aimag's DropShips return from their journey of profit and deal-making, the Aimag's sails will be retracted and both JumpShips will return to nearby Costinbrod, where the *Titanic*, a massively modified *Potemkin*-class ArcShip, awaits a rendezvous with the other Aimags of Tiburon Khanate.

The Sea Fox Clan today is a curious mix of the original Clan society and the modern corporate merchant fleet. The warrior caste still maintains its dominance over all others, with a Khan claiming ultimate authority over the Clan's direction, and saKhans directing where to send their Khanates and Aimags in accordance with that direction. When battle is mandated—either for training purposes or to resolve a dispute between warriors, Aimags, and even against other Clans—the appropriate Trials and rituals are invoked. Bloodnames are still revered, and the honors of the batchall (battle challenge), zellbrigen (dueling rules), safcon and hegira (safe arrival and departure from a combat zone, respectively) are still respected. These are all hallmarks of the Clan system, as set down by Nicholas Kerensky so many centuries ago.

Yet in other ways, the Foxes are vastly different from their more traditional brethren. Their merchant caste, far more numerous than the warriors, has its own conclaves, where they discuss and identify the markets their Khanates should exploit, their voice carrying great weight even if they truly have no authority to dictate terms to their leaders. Indeed, many in the merchant caste hail originally from the ranks of the warriors, having voluntarily stepped down to take up the important duty of seeing to the Clan's profit margins; in several cases, the saKhans themselves, while still active warriors, are almost more of the merchant caste than not. In addition to these dedicated advisors, the Sea Fox warriors know they also have the support and cooperation of other lower-caste councils. The laborers coordinate their manufacturing efforts, making the most efficient use of the facilities on the Clan's few 'clearing-house worlds' scattered throughout the Inner Sphere, as well as those on board each ArcShip and CargoShip, with the technician and scientist councils overseeing the needs of the Clan's equipment and technological needs.

Representatives from each of these caste conclaves reside on every DropShip and JumpShip of the Clan, always coordinating their far-flung fleets, to avoid doubling up on the Clan's needs, while at the same time encouraged to maintain the smooth operations of their own Aimags. Amazingly enough, though few of these Aimags ever truly gather in one place at any one time, the cultural values of these scattered spaceborne sub-Clans remain largely synchronized; how long this can continue without such separations causing divisions is unknown. Profit and the art of the deal still motivate the majority of these warrior-merchants beyond all other glories, but battle, while not sought out, is never, ever shied away from.

It is a common enough mistake to presume that the fragmentation of the Sea Fox indicates a breakdown of cooperation and coordination within the Clan, especially after examples like the fractured Clan Fire Mandrill, which spent centuries warring with itself to the point of its own near collapse. But in the case of the Foxes, the fragmentation did not occur from the usual internal stresses. There was no major difference of opinion that drove the Khanates apart, but the necessities of war and the ongoing search for newer and better markets. This segregation was arrived at through a mutual understanding, offering a level of independence that allowed a greater flexibility within its ranks, yet still bound by the goals of the Clan itself. The Bloodname Houses remained open to all Khanates, and periodic Clanwide Trials kept them united by their common culture

and traditions, even while each Khanate was permitted its own degree of self-determination, with glory defined as much by battlefield conquests as by securing a profitable deal.

But because the Clans themselves were formed in a similar way—with Kerensky assigning a unifying system of values on the whole, then splitting them into twenty groups left to find their own ways through the centuries—it is perhaps only natural that the Clans would be the first to mistake the Sea Fox's Khanate system for a breakdown, a weakness if you will.

In the most striking example, a Wolf Clan attack force attempted to capture the Beta Aimag of the Sea Fox's Swimmer Khanate in 3097. Thinking the mere Cluster of Beta's troops to be an easy mark, especially while escorting their fleet through the Wolf Clan system of Feltre, the Wolves dispatched an aerospace-heavy force to overwhelm the merchant flotilla. Not only did the Wolves fail to secure the two JumpShips and attached DropShips when the Foxes proved most adept at defending themselves and jumping out, but they also received a swift reply from no less than two full Khanates, which assaulted Feltre with a Galaxy of assault troops later that year. Fortunately for the Wolves, the Foxes were uninterested in total conquest, but the loss of two Wolf Clusters in that incident, as well as the sudden 200-percent increase in Sea Fox prices that affected all other Wolf Clan merchant dealings, proved that the Foxes were anything but an uncoordinated band of nomads. . . .

—Sean Lasko, PhD, Professor of Clan Society and Politics, University of Thorin

The Sea Fox Clan has come a long way since its foundations, nearly four centuries ago. United under the principles of the Kerenskys, yet divided into roaming sub-Clans and a handful of clearinghouse enclaves, they swim the deep black seas of space, rarely knowing the luxury of unrefined air or the warmth of natural sunlight for more than a week or two. They hold less than a handful of worlds they might call home, and even those planets dominated by a Sea Fox government merely see to the needs of their own people, while encouraging outsiders—and even native peoples, in many cases—to settle alongside them as a kind of permanent market for the Clan's goods and currency. This has kept the Clan small, yet pure, and free to move about at will. Indeed, millions of Foxes know only the artificial confines of DropShip and JumpShip bulkheads as their true sanctuary. And yet they remain united by common bonds, and the common, never-ending goal to survive, to expand, to evolve, and to always come away with the upper hand in any deal.

Another sure sign of their success are their CargoShips and ArcShips. Not only do they move freely across every House and Clan OZ, but the time and financial stability needed to create these vessels is a testament to the Foxes prosperity. Following the Word of Blake Jihad and the destruction of so many WarShips, the Foxes took note of the writing on the wall and began a massive revamping program that continues to this day. Taking their own WarShips—and salvaging discarded hulks where they can—the Foxes stripped away weapon systems, and armor, expanded the internal bays and quarters to accommodate freight and passengers, for long-term voyages. These dedicated CargoShips became roving, long-term habitats and mobile supply stations that formed the backbone of the new Khanates, while the more heavily-modified, ultra-massive ArcShips became societal points of congress and core governmental structures for the entire Clan. These "harmless" vessels, then, have allowed the Foxes to gain access to almost every world within the Inner Sphere and even the Periphery; a marketing edge that they've used with brutal efficiency.

In the end, the legacy of the Sea Foxes, the Clan of Nagasawa, is its phenomenal ability to adapt to its times, challenging every precept of Clan and Inner Sphere life alike in the name of enhancement. Seeking bargains, not conquest, yet ruled as ever by a warrior caste, they challenge the ideals of the Clan way, yet never the laws handed down from the Father of the Clans. And though they may slowly drift apart as the Aimags and Khanates spread themselves out among the stars, who can say that even this may be just another part of a noble Clan's quest to evolve and adapt to a changing universe?

Join us next time for a special six-part series as our tour of the stars brings us back into the Inner Sphere one more time, for a look at the realm once known as the Free Worlds League. I'm Bertram Habeas.

## 3132 Solaris VII Championships Season Review (Part 5)

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12/15/3133

SOLARIS CITY, SOLARIS VII – Welcome back, fight fans, to INN’s Season Recap of the 3132 Solaris VII Grand Championship, special edition. Tonight’s Recap brought to you by the Meier-Star Travel Agency; “Meier-Star Travel: From A Place to Zwipadze, we’ll get you there!”

Day four of the annual Grand Tournament has come to a close, with tonight’s star bouts showing Zellbrigen’s Ronald Ghost Bear, Cenotaph’s Danai Centrella-Liao, Blackstar’s Shayne Kirkpatrick, Galahad’s Omar Durand, Toranaga’s Mario LeMar, and the Wraiths’ Ian Smythe all in contention for tomorrow’s semi-finals. But the warriors you won’t see in tomorrow night’s line-up are none other than Zelanzi Stables’ Olivia “Queen Liv” Tyler and DiNappoli Stables’ “Daring” David Strauss! That’s right, after the two rival MechWarriors—slated to face each other in the arenas just a scant eighteen hours from now—incited a riot outside Silesia district’s legendary Thor’s Shieldhall, the Solaran Gaming Association has announced that both would-be champions have been officially disqualified from the rest of the Tournament. A shocking blow to fans of both warriors, eager to see these two gladiators settle their score once and for all!

“They should never have let [Tyler] into the [Valhalla] Club, knowing that Strauss was already in there,” said David McIntyre, one of the few patrons of the Shieldhall to escape injury in the melee. “Everyone knew that sparks would fly tonight. Hell, there were crews from five networks on the scene in less than thirty seconds!”

“Queen Liv’ didn’t waste any time picking the fight,” said Jeremiah Daelun, Blackstar stablemaster, who just happened to be at the club tonight without his usual retinue of MechWarriors. “She strode right up to Strauss, grinning from ear to ear about her grudge match victory against [DiNappoli MechWarrior Gerald] Taylor last night. She got about as far as saying Strauss would be next before the punches started to fly.”

The Valhalla Club, the exclusive hot spot for Solaris VII’s elite inside Thor’s Shieldhall, has seen its share of brawls throughout the centuries, but the pandemonium that broke out when Tyler and Strauss crossed paths tonight was the worst seen in decades. Despite the best efforts of club security, the fighting spread into the Shieldhall itself as fans polarized around the two struggling MechWarriors, and from there, spilled into the street. Tyler and Strauss both suffered multiple injuries and were taken in separate ambulances to local hospitals, which later confirmed that over fifty patrons, club staff, and bystanders in all reported injuries related to the riot, which also caused almost eighty thousand C-bills in damages. At this time, in addition to banning the two warriors for the rest of the season, the SGA is also considering appropriate fines for Zelazni and DiNappoli stables.

And that’ll do it for the Grand Championship Recap tonight, fight fans. I’m your host, Dennis Stanzio for SBC, an affiliate of INN, and I am out of here!

### Towne Log

+ Woops! Proof that you can only push the ratings up so far before you break the curve, ey?  
:- GRibaldi

+ You can say that again! I mean, everyone knows the fights aren’t exactly fixed—not with as many fatalities as they have—but they certainly do pour a lot of effort into making everyone’s personal vendettas a bit too dramatic.  
:- Draco041

+ I like the bit about Tyler and Strauss being suspended, though. I mean, come on! The SGA bans them \*after\* they get themselves hospitalized! Like they were gonna make their match anyway!  
:- TVBluFist

+ Hehehe. Good point, that, TV.  
:- LevEOsa

## 3132 Solaris VII Championships Season Review (Part 6)

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12/15/3133

SOLARIS CITY, SOLARIS VII – Welcome back, fight fans, to INN’s Season Recap of the 3132 Solaris VII Grand Championship. Day Five began with only six MechWarriors left of the 128 who began this journey. Now only three remain. Today’s Recap brought to you by Cy’s ‘Mech City in the International Zone; “Cy’s ‘Mech City: quality pre-owned ‘Mechs and parts at a reasonable price for today’s warrior.”

Starting out in the Jungle Arena, it was Blackstar Stables’ Shayne “Shockwave” Kirkpatrick in a modified Phoenix Hawk (and fresh from a grudge-match victory over Raul Kalso) against Cenotaph’s Danai Centrella-Liao and her trademark Centurion. With the thick growth of the Jungle minimizing her range advantage, the Blackstar champion was forced into contact range with her royal opponent several times, close enough even for a few good swipes from the Centurion’s hatchet. But maneuverability soon saved the day as Kirkpatrick’s gift for jumping fire ate away the Centurion’s shield and tore away its right leg. Disabled, Centrella-Liao lit off her surrender flare, ending the match. Kirkpatrick will now pass automatically to the final Round on a bye, thanks to last night’s Strauss-Tyler disqualification.

Meanwhile, the Factory Arena was the scene for an equally fierce duel between Wraith Stable’s Ian “Boltster” Smythe and Galahad’s Omar “Demolition” Durand. Durand, in his element among the twisted and cluttered confines of the Factory, matched his Marauder shot for shot against Smythe’s Thunderbolt in what can only be described as a brutal slugfest—often at point-blank range. Showing his characteristic sense of chivalry, Durand often hesitated when Smythe’s machine stumbled over wreckage on the arena floor, giving his opponent time to recover and defend himself, though it ultimately only prolonged the inevitable. In a spectacular final volley, the Galahad MechWarrior felled Smythe with a critical engine hit that sent the lighter machine into an instant shutdown.

Compared to these dramatic victories, Zellbrigen’s “Roaring” Ronald Ghost Bear’s savage victory against challenger “Magnificent” Mario LeMar seemed almost anticlimactic. The Clan warrior, this time piloting a Thor, tore through LeMar’s Warhammer IIC after only forty-six seconds in the Boreal Reach Arena, proving that even a heavier, more sophisticated opponent, could not match the ferocity of his all-or-nothing style of combat.

And so, fight fans, just two round remain of the 3132 Grand Tournament! Two days left to place your bets and see who comes out on top, and who will have to wait another year for their shot at glory and fame. Check out the box scores for tonight’s matches and tomorrow’s schedules at the SBC link-site. In the meantime, I’m Dennis Stanzio for Solaris Broadcasting Center, an affiliate of INN, with your Championship Recap, and I am outta here!

### Towne Log

+ See the vids on that one? I mean, sheesh! How could anyone stop a guy like Ghost Bear?

:- RepMan

+ The one I couldn’t get over was Shockwave and Danai! I mean, without her jump jets, Kirkpatrick really didn’t have much of a chance against her, especially in the Jungle! I guess Danai just got cocky, eh?

:- BNCFanatic

+ Well, she is the Chancellor’s sister, after all. Hehehe.

:- LevEOsa

+ Oh, muzzle it, Lev! Shockwave just got lucky, is all. I heard Danai left Solaris, like, the day after she got beaten there, bound for the CapCon again. My wager is that something called her home, so she just threw the fight as a way of getting an honorable “out”.

:- XSOkay

+ Sure XSO. You keep telling yourself that...

:- LevEOsa

## **The "Hand of Starling": Knights of the Sphere: The Real Power Behind the Republic?**

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12/15/3133

**SHADOW:** Well met, Truth-seekers! We are the Hand of Starling and we're back on the air with the show the Republic doesn't want you to see! I'm your host, Shadow. With me as always are my fellow Illuminati, Phantom and Wraith.

**PHANTOM:** Beware the shadows!

**WRAITH:** In secrets, reality lies!

**SHADOW:** Welcome, gents. Before we begin today's topic: "Knights of the Sphere: The Real Power Behind the Republic?," our question of the week here comes from a viewer using the on-line nick of Synnik. He (or she) says: "Starling Group, in a previous show, you mentioned the build-up of 'Mechs by The Republic through a supposedly outlawed facility on Irian. Are there others like this, throughout the state?"

**WRAITH:** Alert! Loaded question! Alert! Loaded question!

**PHANTOM:** 'Tis a sign of enlightenment!

**SHADOW:** Indeed it is, gentlemen. Synnik, that is indeed an excellent—albeit loaded—question, and it shows you have indeed been paying attention. Yes, in fact, the Hand of Starling has learned there are many factories throughout The Republic that continue to produce heavy military hardware such as BattleMechs and armored vehicles that have done so since the MMRP first went into effect. Other facilities we know of exist on Epsilon Eridani, Outreach, and (of course) Terra. The powers that be—whoever they are—would like us to forget that the state exists through its military strength, but believe us when we tell you that the army our Republic has on the field is nothing compared to the army it still has tucked away.

**WRAITH:** Well said, Brother Shadow!

**SHADOW:** Right. Now, on to the topic at hand. The Knights of the Sphere, carefully chosen for their stalwart support of The Republic, be it military, political, scientific, or commercial, have been the symbol of hope and strength since Devlin Stone himself founded our great nation--

**PHANTOM:** Laying it on a bit thick, aren't you, Shad?

**SHADOW:** Damn it, Phantom! You're ruining my set-up! Anyway, the question is: Is the Exarch really in charge, or are these elite men and women the true power behind the throne? Brothers, what say you?

**WRAITH:** Could there be any question otherwise?

**PHANTOM:** Oh, definitely the power behind the throne!

**SHADOW:** Back it up, folks.

**WRAITH:** Oh, you got it! Item One: The political structure. Devlin Stone created a system in which citizenship comes through service to the state, rather than merely being born into it. Nice, in a communist sort of way, as it guarantees that your tax base supports only those who work for the good of the empire. It also helps indoctrinate a new series of followers dedicated to perpetuating the state. The better citizens are then chosen as Knights-Errant, who then progress to full Knighthood, and finally the Paladinhood. Laid out in accordance with Stone's wishes, the Knights and Paladins became the pinnacle of leadership, martial prowess, and the de facto political elite of the Republic – even planetary governors and legates have to bow to their will in times of crisis. And from where are the Exarchs nominated? The ranks of the Paladins. By the very system, it's a self-perpetuating structure that keeps The Republic in firm control, and the Exarch, who rises from the ranks of the Knights, remains a part of that societal order.

**PHANTOM:** Spot on, Brother Wraith! And for Item Two: the current Exarch. Not to put too fine a point on it, but come on! The man's a flake! Try as they may, the media could not make him look competent enough to run an interstellar nation after Devlin Stone left, and his utter inability to do more than issue vague reassurances of an imminent recovery have not exactly demonstrated able and strong leadership since the HPG collapse.

**WRAITH:** Unless, of course, he's behind the grid collapse...

**PHANTOM:** Well, again, could he have done it, or the Knights?

**WRAITH:** Ahhhh...

**PHANTOM:** Yes, now you see the whole truth, my enlightened friend. Not only do we have an incompetent at the realm, but a realm out of control, rudderless as it were. And why might that be? Well, it's simple. This being the first time a Paladin has risen to the Exarchship, Redburn may have simply "forgotten" where his true allegiance lies—the Knights. While he's off promoting free trade initiatives with the Lyrans, it seems, would have been the perfect time for a coup, but we can't have those kinds of questions, the Knights figure. Instead, either as a test, or as an object lesson to the man who would make himself king, the

Knights launch an operation aimed at destabilizing the government at large. Who else would have access to almost the entire communications grid and the manpower to take it down in one coordinated strike, after all? Sure, they enlisted help, but the end result is the same. A comm grid smashed, and a mediocre leader suddenly showing just how mediocre he really is!

**SHADOW:** So what are you saying, Phantom? That the Knights not only are the base of the Exarch's power, but also its bane? That they engineered the blackout to humiliate and topple one of their own who got too big for his breeches?

**WRAITH:** It all makes perfect sense, Brother Shadow. But there's even more to it than that. We also know that there exists a legion of Shadow Knights who support the public Knights, a commando force if you will to incite or contain chaos as necessary. These people may never be elected Exarch, but their power is just as considerable, and they'd be in prime positions to execute a plan such as this. In accomplishing the twin tasks of sowing chaos throughout The Republic and demystifying the office of the Exarch, they shift the power more into their court, as the brave warriors that make up the Knights now become seen as the last thin red-and-black line between order and total anarchy—

**PHANTOM:** Right, and when it's over, we'll see a discredited post of Exarch, dominated by the effective executive command of a council of Paladins. Elections will become meaningless, save to pick the next Paladin who will in turn choose all other Knights in support of the order he was raised to serve. As the Knights begin to re-assert control and get the HPGs back on-line, we'll see even more converts from the so-called "Fringe Prefectures"—

**WRAITH:** Those parts of our neighbor states who try to follow a Republican example?

**PHANTOM:** Yeah, them. Sold on seeing us recover quicker than anyone else—since the Ghost Knights will be able to continue to disrupt the other comm nets with impunity—these mini Prefectures will be more easily swayed to join us and viola! Not only are the Knights now firmly in control without any pretense of following an Exarch, but they're in charge of an even bigger Republic that we didn't have to invade to conquer.

**SHADOW:** Diabolical!

**WRAITH:** Indeed! The only question is; how far will they go before the rest of the Inner Sphere takes notice?

**SHADOW:** A worthy discussion for another time, perhaps, as we're about out of time here. Come back next week, Truth-seekers, as the Hand of Starling continues to lift the veil of conspiracy and brings enlightenment to all!

## Touring the Stars with Bertram Habeas

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12/17/3133

*We began on Terra, millions of years ago. Today, mankind stretches out among the stars of the Milky Way, touching thousands of worlds, as far from our home as Clan space, more than 2,000 light-years distant. Yet who are we, really? What have we become in our relentless push outward and onward? I'm Bertram Habeas, and tonight, let's find the answers to these and many other fascinating questions together, as we tour the stars!*

### Volume XXXIII: Hatching Destiny—Birth of the Free Worlds League

United in their love for independence, yet divided against one another. Economically and socially powerful, yet strangled by a nightmarish entanglement of bureaucracy and conflict. These were the descriptions often made of the Free Worlds League, a nation that has ever been a study in contrasts. From its formation to its eventual collapse, and even into the present day, entire volumes have speculated on how this realm could have formed to begin with, with such severe differences among its member states. Scholars have marveled over its continued existence through almost eight centuries—much of that time plagued by near-constant warfare. Even after the League's fall, experts have marveled at the remains of this once proud, yet hopelessly conflicted realm, and how many of its wayward offspring even now appear devoted to one day reclaiming the state they themselves sundered.

As with the other Successor States, the formation of the League began with the slow demise of the Terran Alliance. As more and more colony worlds declared their independence, the power of the Alliance deteriorated further, eventually leading to its inward turn, which all but cut off the young colonies from any support. In the chaos that followed, poorer worlds became victims of piracy and raids that sapped away their strength and destabilized their fledgling governments. To survive, alliances formed, like the Alliance of Galedon that would one day culminate in the creation of the Draconis Combine, or the economic powers of the Federation of Skye, the Tamar Pact, and the Protectorate of Donegal, which formed the Lyran Commonwealth. But before these alliances came those that led to the formation of the Free Worlds League—the Marik Commonwealth, the Principality of Regulus, and the Federation of Oriente.

The Marik Commonwealth, centered on the rich mining world of Marik, began as a single world, ruled by the family of the same name. Charles Marik, its ruler and a man who hailed from a long line of affluent leaders, declared his world's independence from the Terran Alliance in 2238. Under his rule, the rechristened Republic of Marik united under a strong central government, bolstered by its formidable industrial capacity. Marik also raised an army from his Republic, an army that was eventually used in conjunction with his diplomatic acumen to help bring more worlds under his banner. By 2271, the Marik Commonwealth—the Republic's name after it expanded beyond a single world—ruled a total of twenty worlds, sixty light-years from the edge of Terran Alliance space.

At almost the same time, the Principality of Regulus began to form as a consolidation of trading contracts between several rimward Terran colonies. Dominated by the wealthy Selaj family, whose core power base included five of the most developed worlds of the region, the Principality coalesced into a quasi-corporate political union of seventeen worlds by 2270.

The Federation of Oriente, meanwhile, formed around a core of diplomatic networks among the worlds closest to Oriente, which declared its independence from the Alliance under the rule of Tomàs Allison in 2241. A cosmopolitan mixture of ethnicities—in contrast to the mostly Eastern European Marik Commonwealth or the Indian- and Pakistani-dominated Principality of Regulus—the Federation was dedicated to its own freedom as well as the advancement of science and the arts.

Each of these three confederations grew under its own unique structure of government and culture. The Marik Commonwealth was a military-oriented realm with a powerful central government, if not absolutely so. The Principality was an oligarchy of wealthy families. And the Federation was ruled by a parliamentary democracy. But for all their differences, these three alliances soon saw their own rising prominence, as well as the inevitable decline of the Terran Alliance, as potential threats to their own stability. Allison, with a flash of insight, became the first to offer the option of alliance, together with his special envoy, Sir George Humphreys of New Delos.

Given the vast differences in the colonies established during the height of the Terran Alliance, it is rather amazing that more of the Great States did not encounter the problems the Regulans, Orientes, and Mariks did when attempting to forge their Free Worlds League. Language, a core element in any culture, became a focal point for the Treaty of Marik. Mindful of their recently won independence, and of the varied populations they ruled over, the leaders of the Commonwealth, Principality, and Federation argued over language and terminology as much as about the actual substance of their work. Eventually they settled on English, the only language spoken by all three leaders, though the majority of their populations did not normally speak this tongue.

—Shaunna Verizi, *Fractured States: Politics and the (Former) Free Worlds League*, Republic Press, 3099

After years of debate over everything from their new state's official language to the modes of government, the Treaty of Marik was finally—some might say, miraculously—signed in 2271, creating the first of what scholars today call the Successor States, the Free Worlds League. Its guiding principles: the mutual benefit of the Marik Commonwealth's strong military with the economic power of the Selajes' Principality of Regulus and the diplomatic skills of the Federation of Oriente's diverse and independent-minded leadership. The Treaty of Marik granted all three realms internal autonomy, with their leaders established prominently in the parliamentary government. The post of Captain-General was created as an emergency title only, bestowing upon an elected military leader all authority over the League's military during times of crisis. Built into this government was a further incentive to seek economic prosperity as well: the influence of delegations in Parliament was proportionate to the



economic might of a world's tax contributions to the state, rather than its planetary population, a fact which assured—for a time—the dominance of the Marik, Oriente, and Regulan states. True power rested with the Ministers of Parliament (MPs), rather than a central leader, but the voice of power blocs such as these resulted in a fairly cohesive government, most of the time.

Though fractious, and often slow to respond to change, the Free Worlds League did indeed prosper and grow after its formation. Several neighboring worlds and small federations eventually joined with the League for mutual protection, while others were annexed. One such conquest, the Stewart Commonality, a six-world military dictatorship that the Marik Commonwealth regarded as a sufficient threat to win a Parliamentary declaration of war upon, was assaulted in 2293. The crisis was sufficient to elect the League's first Captain-General, Juliano Marik, setting the stage for a fundamental change in the League's destiny that would take centuries to run its course.

That a Marik was chosen to be the League's first Captain-General came naturally from the fact that the Marik family had forged the League's most militarily experienced member realm, but the sweeping powers of the post, I think, delivered the most unexpected and far-reaching results. In its first implementation, for sure, the League swiftly absorbed the Stewart Commonality, a process that took only weeks to accomplish. Just twenty years later, however, the Captain-General would be called upon again, with Juliano Marik once more coming to the League's rescue as the Terran Hegemony emerged on the scene. Rather than fight an unwinnable battle (with the armed forces of the Terran Alliance behind it, reorganized by the militarily astute Admiral James McKenna, the forces of the Hegemony outclassed those of the League), Marik instead used his broad authority as Captain-General to open a dialogue with the Hegemony, paving the way for trading relations that would lead the League to another economic boom. The League PMs did not object to this solution at all, even though it represented a heretofore unheard of combination of military command and state policy. For all intents and purposes, a Captain-General could assume complete authority over the guidance of the state during times of emergency.

Naturally, this very early example paved the way for Resolution 288, and the longest running virtual suspension of the powers of the Free Worlds Parliament. . . .

—Kevin Duelli, *A Cynic's Guide to Politics, 3rd Edition*, Dark Skye Press, 3090

In the next installment of our special six-part look at the Free Worlds League, we'll examine the latter years of the League, with a glimpse of the events that led to its final downfall. Join us as our tour of the stars continues! I'm Bertram Habeas.

## Touring the Stars with Bertram Habeas

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12/24/3133

*We began on Terra, millions of years ago. Today, mankind stretches out among the stars of the Milky Way, touching thousands of worlds, as far from our home as Clan space, more than 2,000 light-years distant. Yet who are we, really? What have we become in our relentless push outward and onward? I'm Bertram Habeas, and tonight, let's find the answers to these and many other fascinating questions together, as we tour the stars!*

### Volume XXXIV: The Eagle's Flight—Rise and Fall of House Marik

In 2398, the world of Andurien was assaulted by forces from the neighboring Capellan Confederation, marking the beginnings of the Age of War. From that time forward, the League—and the rest of the Inner Sphere—would find their borders under almost constant assault, at least until the formation of the Star League. It also marked the end of the Free Worlds League's good years, as the coffers began to run dry from the expense of ongoing fighting. But more than that, it also initiated the longest single term of the Captain-Generalcy to date, and led to a political struggle between the Marik family and the League's Parliament.

Peter Marik, appointed in 2396 to handle the Andurien crisis, not only managed to reclaim the worlds assaulted by House Liao, but also turned the League's formidable strength against the Lyran Commonwealth, riding high on a wave of popularity as a hero to the Free Worlds' peoples. When Parliament, in an effort to rein in their Captain-General, ordered Marik to call an armistice with the Lyrans, he defied them and continued a campaign of conquest, claiming several Commonwealth worlds before ending his campaign in 2418. Parliament struck back with the War Powers Act, establishing government oversight of the Captain-General and vastly limiting his authority, only to find Marik unwilling to return to the post just two years later when war against the Lyrans resumed.

Joseph Stewart, of the Stewart Commonality, became the League's next war leader then, but demonstrated lackluster performance in dealing with the Lyran front, losing five worlds to Steiner advances in the 2420s. Considering Stewart a disastrous failure (the League had grown accustomed to martial success under the Mariks), the Parliament begged Peter Marik's son, Terrence, to assume the Captain-Generalcy, only to find him unwilling to accept as long as the War Powers Act remained in place. The political standoff ended in compliance to Terrence's demands, releasing the new Captain-General from the chains of Parliamentary control.

And so did the Marik family all but cement its dominance over the League's military and politics, a dominance that held with minimal challenges into the Star League era, when the post became the recognized head of the Free Worlds state in the Star League Council.

The deal to enter the Star League was probably one of the Marik clan's biggest coups to date. Not only did they receive the support of the Terran Hegemony in ending the longstanding conflict over the Andurien region—Liao was on its third campaign to seize control over the territory—but they also assured that the post of Captain-General would remain active even when a lack of wars should necessitate that the post be vacated. Of course, while technically it never guaranteed House Marik would always hold the post, the fact that Mariks have always been the best military strategists and leaders in the Free Worlds' history all but assured that Mariks would sit on the military throne of the Free Worlds League as a member of the greater Star League.

—Kevin Duelli, *A Cynic's Guide to Politics, 3rd Edition*, Dark Skye Press, 3090

After the Star League's fall, of course, came the Succession Wars. No longer protected by the recognition of the League's central government, House Marik might have faced the end of its virtual reign over the Free Worlds, had the universe not suddenly erupted in warfare. With the departure of Kerensky's troops into the unknown, Kenyon Marik, the standing Captain-General, persuaded a panicked Parliament to pass the famous—some might say, infamous—Resolution 288, granting the Captain-Generalcy sweeping discretionary powers "for the duration of the crisis." Curiously enough, few Parliamentarians thought to question the definition of "the crisis," and conditioned by centuries of Captain-Generals dictating state policy, the resolution passed, legally granting open-ended control of the Free Worlds League to the office of the Captain-General. It was thus that the Marik clan assured its control, as successive Mariks—chosen by their outgoing forebears and friends of the family—each assumed command from their predecessors, invoking Resolution 288 without fail.

Through the centuries of the Succession Wars, though challenges to the Captain-General rose time and again, the Marik family maintained its grip on the helm of the Free Worlds League. Yet this grip was tenuous at best. By the mid-twenty-ninth and early thirtieth centuries the various minor states of the League—such as the Duchy of Andurien, the Duchy of Orloff, and the Border Protectorate—had managed to pass the Home Defense Act, allowing them to retain up to three-fourths of the troops raised in their provinces regardless of the Captain-General's desires.

This balkanization would eventually lead to the Marik Civil War in 3014. Led by Anton Marik, brother of the sitting Captain-General, Janos, the rebels found support among more than a few regional dukes. While some larger provinces, like Andurien and Regulus, declared their neutrality, the Marik brothers waged a bloody war across the realm that ended almost as quickly as it had begun, but left behind lingering divisions among the League's member states.

Imagine having a bunch of close friends together in one room, when one of the more popular suddenly accuses another of something horrible, something like, say, theft, or rape, or murder. Now, imagine the others taking sides, hurling insults, trading blows, drawing blood. Now imagine that some outsider comes along and shoots the accuser, leaving the others alone to contemplate the shock. The accusation dies with the man, perhaps, but all the bad blood that these friends could

only suspect was there all along—all the secret jealousies and resentments toward their most popular friend—have now had their voice. Now, all the “I’m sorry”s and “Please forgive me”s in the world can’t fix it; those friendships won’t ever be the same again.

As high schoolish as it sounds, such was the state of the Free Worlds League after the Wolf’s Dragoons killed Anton Marik and effectively ended the Civil War. Suddenly, House Marik saw who its real friends and enemies were, and there were damned few of the former and too many of the latter. In fact, were it not for the threat of the united Lyran Commonwealth and Federated Suns, it is quite likely that the League would have gone through another civil war, one much more final than Anton’s revolt.

—Shaunna Verizi, *Fractured States: Politics and the (Former) Free Worlds League*, Republic Press, 3099

Indeed, the League’s fragmentation did begin soon after the Fourth Succession War, when the Duchy of Andurien announced its secession and launched a campaign against the Capellan Confederation with its allies in the Magistracy of Canopus, a nearby Periphery realm. Janos Marik, the aging leader of the League, reacted by moving for the passage of his Emergency Act of 3030, formally curtailing the powers of the League’s provinces “for the duration of the emergency.” An echo of Resolution 288, this law allowed the Captain-General to consolidate his power further to handle the Andurien crisis, but also angered the smaller provinces that were its target. This crisis would culminate in the assassination of Janos during a strategy meeting, and the eventual—apparent—return of his son, Thomas, some months later.

History, of course, knows that the Thomas Marik who claimed the throne was an impostor placed there by ComStar in its darker days, but that impostor proved to be perhaps the most gifted leader in the history of the League. Repealing the Emergency Act in favor of his Addendum to Incorporation, a law that allowed the provinces their autonomy and strength in exchange for the Captain-General’s veto power, he won over those provinces tired of being “Marik doormats.” With near absolute political and military authority, Thomas went on to win the Andurien War, reclaiming the renegade province under a newer, stronger central authority.

In the years that followed, this false Thomas Marik would work not only toward strengthening the central government, but for rebuilding the League’s military and industrial base. Yet it was not until the Clan Invasion in 3048 that the League’s greatest opportunity to seize its destiny would arrive. In a power deal with the other Successor Lords, Thomas Marik made the League the premiere military manufacturer and supplier for the embattled Inner Sphere, and forged a close alliance with the Capellan Confederation to assure its security against the Steiner-Davion alliance. At almost the same time, however, he also played host to the Word of Blake, the breakaway faction of ComStar that would one day consume his realm in fire.

Thus did the Free Worlds League assure its place as one of the Inner Sphere’s most potent and respected powers, while simultaneously sowing the seeds of its own horrific demise.

In part three of this special series on the Free Worlds League, we’ll take a closer look at the alliances that made up the League and how they stand today. Our tour of the stars continues. I’m Bertram Habeas.

## Riva Juro's Mercenary Profiles: The Ronin

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12/28/3133

Of all the major mercenary forces active today, the Ronin are perhaps the grimmest. Originally formed from the shattered remains of the Draconis Combine's Tenth Ghost Legion, these soldiers for hire seem different than most others, and all one needs to see that is a glimpse into the eyes of these stoic warriors.

One of the first things I discovered was their decidedly xenophobic nature. My cameraman, whose ancestry could be traced back to the Combine, was not permitted to accompany me, and in order to walk amongst the members of this unit I had to don identical apparel and travel with a pair of armed guides at all times, minimizing the chance that I might "distract" the other warriors. The Ronin officers assured me that, while I was perfectly safe, they were mercenaries and took no chances with safety; trust of a gaijin like me was not easily won.

"From the day of our birth," explained Ishura Masaki, one of my assigned guards, "we have been betrayed by those around us. We do not risk such things again so lightly."

The Ronin obviously hail from the Draconis Combine originally, a nation rich with feudal Japanese flavor, bound by precepts of the samurai code of honor and unquestionably ruled by the Great House Kurita. The Tenth Ghost Legion, however, was a regiment of criminals from this society when it first formed. Like all of the Combine's Ghost regiments, their numbers were filled with yakuza operatives and other dregs of Combine society, a desperate ploy by then-commander of the Combine armies, Theodore Kurita, to stave off a Federated Commonwealth assault. Vindicated over many years of battle, the Ghost Regiments, by the time of the Jihad, were a legitimate part of the DCMS, the standing military forces of the Draconis Combine, though to say they were exactly honored would be stretching the truth.

In fact, of all the Ghost regiments, the Tenth probably had the worst reputation for internal fighting, being composed entirely of members by two rival yakuza sects who constantly fought for control over the unit.

"In those days, we were not united," admits Chu-i (Lieutenant) Phan Rokoyo, my main guide within the Ronin. "Two yakuza empires—the Jirigawa and the Minitoma—claimed members in our midst. Unfortunately, these empires did not agree, and there were many...unpleasant incidents during our formative years."

In fact, internecine fighting within the Tenth brought the regiment to the brink of destruction until the Combine government inserted a team of ISF agents to settle the matter, disguised as warriors from a third yakuza sect. The deception, though successful in ending the feud, is still counted among the betrayal heaped upon the Tenth, which led to their defection.

"We came to forgive our masters [House Kurita] for the trickery that bound us, at last, as one," Rokoyo says, "but the betrayal that came afterward was too much to bear."

In the fighting of the Jihad, the Tenth Ghost, still weakened from the final rounds of the FedCom Civil War, were tasked with holding the strategic world of Quentin, just two jumps from Terra itself, against a massive Word of Blake assault. Though reinforcements were promised, none ever materialized during the horrific campaign, which all but shattered the regiment, though they eventually prevailed. Rather than thanks for a job well done and much needed relief, however, the DCMS then ordered the Tenth to prepare for an offensive operation against the Blakists—one which stood little chance of success. This second great betrayal led to the unit's desertion, and the creation of the Ronin.

"We had protected the realm, only to be asked to sacrifice ourselves again. It was at that time, we suddenly realized our masters had become too desperate, throwing away good lives after bad. With no master worth honoring, we became Ronin, warriors without masters."

The Ronin withdrew for a time, far from the fighting, to rebuild and recruit others from shattered Combine commands, before making themselves available for hire near the end of the Blakist Holy War. But though their battles there might have exonerated them, House Kurita had already passed sentence: the Ronin were outlaws and deserters, fit only for execution if ever they appeared in Combine space again.

"Since that day," says Rokoyo, "we have endured a life without a home, without a past, but what we make for ourselves. The dragon is always behind us, urging us onward in our hearts and our nightmares alike, yet we fight for our own honor."

Two generations of Ronin have lived and died since the Tenth Ghost's defection, but their descendants still face the "dishonor" of their desertion. Though technically able to one day go home, they have known only the life of the mercenary, eking out a living as soldiers for hire. To the warriors of the Ronin, life is an eternal struggle to find the inner peace and the greater glory lost when they fell from grace, and it is one to which every member of this proud mercenary command is sworn unto death.

"Karma drives us," says Rokoyo. "It also defines us."

I'm Ravi Juro, INN special correspondent, Amity.

## The JumpShip Couriers: Pony Express for the Dark Age

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12/29/3133

Karen Gullickson comes from a long line of spacers. Like the rest of her family, she has spent well over half her life in the weightless, airless void of space, serving aboard JumpShips of various kinds ever since she could walk. The last time she traveled planetside, in fact, was over ten years ago, and though she religiously works out on the grav deck of her *Merchant*-class JumpShip, *Windskipper*, her physique seems almost frail compared to those few visitors from “down below” that she receives from time to time.

In the days when she was growing up, Karen recalls, JumpShips were like an interstellar bus service, ferrying people and cargo between worlds in a monotonous routine of jumps within a pre-defined route for this company or that. It was only during recharge layovers between jumps, or when talking with a passing DropShip crew, that she would learn of events on those strange planets below. Karen likened the entire experience to working as a store clerk or waitress twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.

“You’d get the passing DropShip captain, with news of the day on what was going on back on Pacifica, while shipping his goods to Skye,” Karen says. “And sometimes, you’d catch a whiff of the political scandals, or download the latest hit music. You’d be amazed at how different fashions are between just two worlds, let alone the six or seven we had on our route.”

Nowadays, of course, is another story, a story of the same old thing, but with greater importance. Today, ferrying DropShips has actually become a secondary concern for Karen Gullickson and her *Windskipper*. Karen, like so many other pioneers in the field, is now part of the growing ranks of JumpShip commanders who have come to find a lucrative trade not only in transportation, but in information. The *Windskipper*, her own private JumpShip since incorporating *Windskipper InterStellar Services* just five months ago, is a courier ship.

Last year’s collapse of the hyperpulse generator network throughout the Inner Sphere all but cut off the people of The Republic and its neighbors from one another. Everything, from business, to government, to entertainment, suddenly broke down as the lines of the communication were lost in over eighty percent of the Inner Sphere and near Periphery. Though some states suffered less than others, such as the Clans and certain parts of the Steiner and Davion realms, by and large the vast majority of worlds across known space were plunged into the darkness, prompting panic and chaos.

Trevor “Trey” Bell, president of Towne-based InterStar Unlimited Exchange (ISUE), recently reorganized half his transport JumpShip fleet for similar duties, and says he hopes that others will follow his lead, be they individual JumpShip captains like Karen, or other corporations with more resources to spend.

“In this time of crisis, we’re not talking about this being a big business with loads of competition,” says Bell. “What we need are more ‘Ships to cover more routes, and gather more information. In some cases, where the news is critical, in fact, many vessels may have to be involved to hand-off the information faster, like an interstellar Pony Express. Rather than competing, we will all be partners, each contracting or subcontracting to get the information from where it is to where it needs to go.”

In just over half a year already, this interstellar “Pony Express” has indeed blossomed along the lines Bell describes. Operating often under a primary contract between two or more worlds, JumpShip captains gather all news and outbound electronic mail for interstellar jumps, similar to how ComStar’s HPGs once batched together interstellar communications packets for transmissions. The courier ship then jumps to the next system, relaying information to those worlds where the information is intended to go, the data received many times by planetside receiving centers—many of which are now being built locally or are making use of ComStar’s HPG dishes. The JumpShips then continue along their route, repeating the process, or handing off information to a neighboring courier vessel to reach worlds outside their operating range. For particularly important messages, some couriers even relay the information immediately to another outbound JumpShip, paying a small commission for the transfer in order to get the word out faster than it takes to safely charge their jump drives.

Of course, there are still problems. Though schedules are beginning to form, more often than not, JumpShips arrive when they arrive, dumping info planet side whether they’re ready for it or not. This is not much of a concern, except when multiple JumpShips happen to transmit, causing no end of chaos and at times lost signals and messages. There is also the problem of quality. Not all captains care how much quality they put into their transmission, resulting in signals that range from low quality to simply corrupted beyond all recall; do to the chaos surrounding this forming nature of communications, there simply is no oversight committee (The Republic is far too busy fighting brush fire wars than to try and regulate signal transmission quality). Finally, there are those captains who simply are unscrupulous enough to manipulate the information they’ve taken to better their positions on a given world, usually for profit; usually this involves the withholding of information but in some cases, it has been proven that captains have outright manipulated information into falsehoods.

In general, regardless of such difficulties, the system appears to be working. Communications between most of The Republic (not to mention the rest of the Inner Sphere) may still be blacked out, but thanks to these courier vessels, news, though traveling much slower than before, can still reach most worlds, a vast improvement from the almost complete darkness that first enveloped The Republic last year. For some courier captains, however, it’s a change that still takes some getting used to.

“I used to listen to the stories from the Dropper skippers and watch the local holovids for fun when I was younger,” says Karen Gullickson. “Now, it’s ninety percent of my business to listen and watch it all. So, it would seem my hobby is now a full-blown career. How often does that happen in this day and age?”

## Riva Juro's Mercenary Profiles: Eridani Light Horse

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12/30/3133

Inheritors of martial traditions lost to most people for centuries, the Eridani Light Horse are perhaps the oldest active mercenary force active today. Their proud heritage has seen the glorious days of mankind's Golden Age, survived the crucible of the Amaris Civil War, nearly ended with a mutiny and self-imposed exile, yet rebounded through four Succession Wars to see the Star League rise and fall again. They are the Eridani Light Horse, and through all of humanity's wars since the collapse of the Star League, they have endured, their name legendary among even other great mercenary commands like the Kell Hounds and Wolf's Dragoons. Even today, the epic struggles of their past and the traditions they continue to revere seem deeper than the casual observer would care to go, but they tell a story of hope that cannot be lost against the news of today.

Captain Hector Mitchum looks like a grizzled veteran, but the laugh lines around his eyes and the easy smile he gave me spoke of a man who knows when to lighten up. On Spica, he became my guide through the traveling museum maintained by his unit's dependents, offering a rare glimpse of these mercenaries who still fly the Cameron Star below their ancient battle standard. In brief, he told the tale of the ELH from its foundation as the Third Regimental Combat Team of the Star League Defense Force, back in 2702.

"We were then just a garrison force with a number and a posting in Rasalhague space," he said, "peacekeepers to watch over both the Rim Worlds and to make sure the Dracs didn't kill off their conquered Rasalhaguian populations. They were difficult times even then, politics always being the bane of any soldier's existence..."

Indeed, internal politics between House Kurita and its often-rebellious Rasalhague Military District eventually resulted in the naming of the Light Horse. In 2749, Rasalhagian terrorists, in an effort to discredit the SLDF troopers, assassinated the commander of the Third RCT. In response, the Third began garrisoning ten Rasalhaguian worlds, their 'Mech patrols becoming a common sight. When Combine forces loyal to the Rasalhaguian Prince then attacked the city of Eridani, the Third easily routed them. A local journalist likened the victory to that of "spirited Eridani stallions chasing after fat, clumsy Luthien cows," and the Light Horse got its name.

The Light Horse participated in the Amaris Civil War with several raids on Rim Worlds territory and did what they could to support General Kerensky throughout the campaign to liberate Terra. Afterward, they returned to their original bases to await further orders, only to refuse to leave the Inner Sphere with the rest of his Exodus fleet.

"We were home," says Mitchum. "And our home was in turmoil. It didn't seem right to leave, knowing what was coming, and we vowed to stay behind, and to respect the legacy of the League."

The struggle to maintain Star League traditions after the League's fall, in fact, led to a mutiny and a period of self-imposed Periphery exile when, in 2866, then-commander Colonel William Bronson renegotiated the unit's contract with the Free Worlds League. The deal offered the mercenaries a lot more money, titles, and greater access to the League's supply stores, all designed to win them over as a bona fide House troop. Fearing that the commander was "selling out", a vast majority of the Light Horse mutinied and ran off into the Periphery, leaving Bronson behind with barely enough troops to scrape together a company. Bronson would go on to form his own mercenary command, Bronson's Horde, and the two mercenary forces would continue a feud to this day.

"For a time, we tried to be frontiersmen," Mitchum laughs as he shows me the mementos in the Light Horse's traveling museum, pointing out a weathered AgroMech among the museum's many unexpected centerpieces, "but pirate raiders sacked our world and we had to come back. One can't support one's ideals on an empty stomach, after all."

In the years that followed, the Light Horse would indeed persevere, fighting mostly for Houses Davion and Steiner up through the Clan Invasion, when the Star League would finally be reborn. The League's rebirth was the sign the Light Horse warriors had been trained for since their inception, and Mitchum told me it was validation for their centuries of hardships.

"We signed on immediately," he says proudly. "Nobody had to really convince us when we saw the plans."

As a core part of the new SLDF, the ELH became a regular army force once again, no longer fighting for money, but for the honor of the League they had sworn to defend three hundred years before. Once more, after centuries of waiting, the banner of the Cameron Star flew again over the ELH battle standard, even on the eve of the Word of Blake Jihad, after the second Star League fell. The star became their symbol of hope, until they met Devlin Stone.

"We were lost, mind you," Mitchum admits. "After the second fall of the League, it seemed to some like we had wasted our time, fighting the Blakists with more reflex than heart, but then came Stone, a man with a vision people could believe in. I guess to some he was like a new Cameron, and though we vowed to wait again for a true new Star League, in him there was something we could fight for while we waited."

The ELH did indeed fight beside the coalition to overthrow the Word of Blake's reign of terror, as they have rallied to The Republic's side ever since. A legendary force, even today they maintain the Star League traditions while standing watch for the employers who they feel most closely resemble their ideals. Perhaps one day, as Mitchum says, the Star League will return. Until then, the Light Horse will continue on as its own entity, a mercenary entity, bringing honor to the memory of mankind's Golden Age.

I'm Riva Juro, INN special correspondent, Spica.



## Touring the Stars with Bertram Habeas

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12/31/3133

*We began on Terra, millions of years ago. Today, mankind stretches out among the stars of the Milky Way, touching thousands of worlds, as far from our home as Clan space, more than 2,000 light-years distant. Yet who are we, really? What have we become in our relentless push outward and onward? I'm Bertram Habeas, and tonight, let's find the answers to these and many other fascinating questions together, as we tour the stars!*

### Volume XXXV: Epitaph for a Realm

By the mid 3060s, the Free Worlds League's troubles seemed all but lost to the haze of history. The Marik Civil War was but a memory. Thomas Marik, rightful heir to the realm (or so everyone thought) sat upon his throne on Atreus, secure in the rejuvenated power of the Captain-Generalcy, while a growing splinter faction of ComStar, the Word of Blake, lobbied to make him their Primus in Exile. The alliance with Sun-Tzu Liao, once a crutch to ward off FedCom ambitions, no longer seemed important as the mighty Steiner-Davion alliance had collapsed, and the ever-present threat of the Clans, even with the end of the Invasion, had kept the realms of the Inner Sphere dependent on the League's arms trade. Even the chronic threat of internal strife had become a waning memory, at least on the surface, as all lauded the Captain-General, who—with his vaunted Knights of the Inner Sphere—seemed wholly devoted to the causes of peace across the Inner Sphere and honor when battle was joined.

The casual outside observer even had to envy the League for its remarkable stability in the turbulence of the 3060s. As these years saw the closing shots of the Clan wars, the First Dominion/Combine War, the St. Ives/Capellan conflict, the FedCom Civil War, and all its attendant side-wars, the League saw no major political or military threats in this time. Yet within the very heart of this realm, a time bomb of politics, fanaticism, hatred, and desperation was ticking. Even though some evidence remains today that the Blakists probably did not plan the start of the Jihad as such, they continued to maneuver in secret even among themselves, dark and sinister elements aligning for a moment that should have brought untold glory under the new Star League.

Unfortunately for the Word, their prophesied ascent ended abruptly when the assembled leaders of the Inner Sphere—minus Sun-Tzu Liao, the Capellan Chancellor who'd already declared his intent to withdraw—admitted the new Star League was a sham. Rather than prevent wars, their alliance had actually facilitated some, and with many member realms too battered by waves of recent fighting to fulfill their obligations to the new SLDF, the organization simply served no more useful purpose. Thus did the leaders abandon their attempted revival of the vaunted Star League.

Every Inner Sphere schoolchild knows the rest, of course. . . .

The first strike, they say, was Outreach, but only by a few hours, and then only because the Word truly believed the [Wolf's] Dragoons to be a threat after years of fighting in the [Chaos] March. Before 28 November was out, however, the skies over New Avalon, Tharkad, and Luthien were ablaze with the heat plumes of inbound DropShips covered by a torrent of orbit-to-surface fire from WarShips, which materialized as if from nowhere.

Lots of people liken the Jihad to the Amaris Crisis or the First Succession War, because the Blakists showed no hesitation in using nuclear weapons, biochemical agents, or even compromising vital life-support systems on marginal worlds. However, there is one fundamental difference of note: Unlike the Usurper's troops or the armies of the Great Houses, the goal of the Word was never conquest, but terror and destruction. Outreach was sterilized, not held. Avalon City was pummeled to the point where it simply became a ghost town battlefield. Tharkad was poisoned by a cloud of radiation from its failed reactor. The Word's troops lingered in few of these areas, and then only to tie up forces and sow more chaos.

Atreus may have taken it worse, though, for those who dealt out their destruction were the very troops once regarded as the cream of the Free Worlds League military. Coupled with the Blakist agents who bombed Parliament and the Captain-General's command center—killing most of the Knights of the Inner Sphere—with a lethal nerve agent, over half of the League's navy was on hand to bombard their own capital into dust. The assault came fresh on the heels of the public revelation that "Thomas Marik" was an impostor, placed on the throne by ComStar during the troubled times of the Andurien crisis. Ironically, the attackers' most important target, the false Thomas Marik himself, was spared from the assault, having taken shelter even as the Parliament Ministers continued to debate (among other things) the repeal of Resolution 288.

The sacking of Atreus was only the beginning. . . .

—Shaunna Verizi, *Fractured States: Politics and the (Former) Free Worlds League*, Republic Press, 3099

Word of Blake agents infiltrated all levels of the Free Worlds League, having been permitted to do so by a decade and a half of misplaced trust. They subverted countless League military units and WarShips, adding them to the Blakists' impressive arsenal. Thomas Marik—or rather, the man who all believed to be Thomas Marik—was so appalled by these actions that he attempted to turn on the Blakists, only to bring the wrath of the Jihad upon his own realm. When the zealots and their allies assaulted Atreus in 3068, the attack was their most decisive yet, for it did more than wipe out the governmental heart of the League, along with its most sterling example of a noble military (in the form of the First Knights of the Inner Sphere). It also immediately shattered all faith in House Marik.

What followed next was, to many minds, inevitable. Bereft of solid leadership and disillusioned by the treachery in their own midst, the various substates of the League turned inward, each frantically seeking its own security against the Jihad. The six largest of these centered on the worlds of Regulus, Marik, Oriente, Andurien, Tamarind, and Lesnovo, and while most would



eventually proclaim their rebirth as independent states under historic boundaries, they would all eventually grow to encompass smaller worlds and alliances, creating the six nations still present today. Against the Word, they stood together, but no longer as well unified as before. Indeed, Thomas Marik (Thomas Halas, after 3080) would be forced into a kind of self-imposed exile on Oriente after the war's end, where he would remain under the care of his wife, Sherryl Halas. Through the remainder of the Jihad, his actions would be limited to intelligence support for the splintering League and for Devlin Stone's coalition against the Word, all his political clout and accomplishments as a false Captain-General lost.

Meanwhile, the Word of Blake's predations assured that these separate provinces had more to worry about than coordinating against the Blakist threat. Blakist troops, disguised as Marik forces, assaulted the Lyran Alliance's Skye region, prompting a reprisal that kept the Stewart Commonwealth and Duchy of Tamarind occupied. At the same time, every effort was made to replicate the effect for Oriente and Andurien on the Capellan border. The communications grid—seriously disabled across the shattered League—left most of the fractured leadership completely in the dark. Though the remaining loyal forces, including the Second Knights (whose last stand during the doomed first counterassault on Atreus is legendary), fought valiantly on every front, the Blakists simply had every advantage in the war.

Victory would finally be purchased for most of the League by warriors of Stone's coalition and their own people's willingness to resort to the same level of barbarity as their attackers. Gibson, for instance, once the heart of the Word, was "sanitized" as a world in 3078 by a massed nuclear bombardment launched by free Regular forces. This action, one of the most brutal of the war, effectively shattered the Word in the Free Worlds League, but also hammered the last nail in the nation's coffin. With the immediate crisis past, Parliament destroyed, and all faith in the imposter lost, the League's provinces went their separate ways. Though they would retain some diplomatic ties, mostly to coordinate mutual defense against their less fractured neighbors, they would also compete for the unclaimed worlds and smaller alliances scattered throughout the former League territories.

And so fell the solidarity of House Marik and the unity it once brought to the Free Worlds League. Over the years that followed, miniature wars, against each other and their neighbors—Lyran, Capellan, Periphery, and Republic—would characterize this turbulent region of space where once a mighty economic and political power had stood. Six large powers and around four-score unclaimed worlds now are all that remain, each eking out its own existence day to day.

And yet, within these lost people there is still hope, for not all believe that the Free Worlds League will remain dead. To some, it is only a matter of time before the eagle becomes the phoenix, rising again from its own ashes.

Up next, follow me as we tour the Marik-Stewart Commonwealth and the Regular Fiefs, two successors of the once-great Free Worlds League. I'm Bertram Habeas.

## The Hand of Starling – Devlin Stone Alive and Living on New Earth?

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01/03/3134

**SHADOW:** Well met, Truth-seekers! The Hand of Starling is back once more to guide you toward enlightenment with the show The Republic doesn't want you to see! I'm your host, Shadow, and with me as always are my fellow Illuminati, Phantom and Wraith.

**PHANTOM:** Question reality!

**WRAITH:** Look out below!

**SHADOW:** ... Uh, welcome, gents. Before we begin today's topic: "Devlin Stone: Dead or Alive?" our question of the week here comes from a viewer using the on-line nick of Pkilter03. He (or she) says: "Starling Guys, your show rocks"—spelled in the common 'net style, I see—"But I'm wondering if you have had a chance to (or will have the chance to) investigate the corporate conspiracy in our very midst. Is it true that a certain J.B. has gained access to the secret codes which locked down the HPG grid, and that he has technicians working day and night coding the viruses that keep them down?"

**WRAITH:** Whoa!

**PHANTOM:** I've heard this one before...

**SHADOW:** Ain't that the truth! Kilter, of course the Starling Group is always dedicated to finding the truth, and in our endless quest for same, we fear not going anywhere to ferret out the knowledge we bring to you. That said, rest assured that "J.B.'s" activities have not gone unnoticed, but we've yet to see evidence of a corporate plot against the Inner Sphere. In fact, "J.B." would like us not to know how much the blackout is really costing him, every day, thanks to ruined shipping schedules, lost product shipment, and the general incompetence of his various CEOs in the absence of his direct leadership.

**WRAITH:** But that's a story for another time!

**SHADOW:** Right. So, thanks for your question, Kilter, and on with the show. Today's item: Devlin Stone, the man who forged our wondrous Republic--

**WRAITH:** \*snerk!\*

**SHADOW:** Don't make me come over there, Wraith! Anyway, Stone: Some eyewitness reports have him alive and living on New Earth. Others say he's pushing up daisies in an unmarked grave back on his homeworld of Kittery? Brothers, what say you?

**WRAITH:** New Earth!

**PHANTOM:** I say he's gone to Strana Mechty!

**SHADOW:** Interesting. We have conflict here. Back it up, folks. Wraith first.

**WRAITH:** Bam! Okay, so we established earlier that the Knights of the Sphere, backed up by their shadowy Ghost Knights, are not only the real power behind The Republic, but that the Exarch is just one of their mouthpiece figureheads, and that they brought down the HPGs to keep him in line, right?

**SHADOW:** With you so far...

**WRAITH:** So, bearing that in mind, we have Stone dropping out of the limelight just before it all happens. Very coincidental, don't you think? But before you cut me off there, notice the reports we've seen thanks to our friends in the Inquisitor and its affiliates. Eyewitnesses are saying that since the HPG went down, there have been numerous Stone sightings, including one here on Towne, where he traveled incognito as a mere transient. Anybody notice that this "crazy bum" (as the unenlightened described him) is nowhere to be found now? Then comes the New Earth sighting. Over seventy eyewitness reports in the Wiedergeburt area, on numerous occasions, place Stone there.

**PHANTOM:** Wishful thinking!

**WRAITH:** Is it now, Brother Phantom? Think: Stone drops out of sight, maybe from personal illness, or maybe because he perceives a threat to his power, or \*maybe\* because it's time to move to the next phase of his plan to dominate the Inner Sphere by destabilizing it a bit and making them beg for his brand of order. His Knights handle the rest in his brief absence, and soon folks are remembering his promise to return. The man's setting himself up as a new messiah, but he has to stay hidden for a time, but not too far from Terra, the center of his power. So, he sets up on New Earth! It's all crystal clear!

**PHANTOM:** Fah! I still say he's gone to Strana Mechty! Why work on The Republic and the Sphere when that's already assured by the Knights. Out there in the Clan home worlds; that's where the real threat lies.

**SHADOW:** Alright, Phantom. Back it up.

**PHANTOM:** Right! Now, consider for a moment that Stone's reforms managed to touch not just the Republic, but everybody. Under his economic and political plan, people gained a measure of self-determination in a land of plenty, something that threatened to destabilize the other Great Houses until they adopted similar social plans and diverted funds toward domestic policies, rather than military build-up. Suddenly, everyone's military is weakened while Stone's secretly building more 'Mechs for his hidden armies. What can mess this all up?

**SHADOW:** The Homeworld Clans?

**PHANTOM:** Right, those guys who cut themselves off from the Inner Sphere while the Jihad was still going on. Nobody's sure what they're doing, or what they're planning—you can ignore this 'they had a civil war' and got all beat up crap; its all propaganda to keep their continued technological advances and massing military secret—but they still have access to technology outstripping us, and ranks of genetically bred warriors, techs, and laborers to make it all work. Stone sees the threat, but he knows the score, too. All it will take is to corrupt these Clans as the Spheroid ones have been—by raising a grassroots resistance based on greed, that most basic of human motivations.

**WRAITH:** So, Stone, by his lonesome, goes to incite a revolution in Clan space? Get out!

**PHANTOM:** Come off it, Wraith! It's not like he hasn't allegedly done it before! Besides, I don't see why he wouldn't take his best Ghosts with him as well. He could accomplish his goals in half the time.

**SHADOW:** And what are his goals?

**PHANTOM:** Eliminating the threat of a "rogue entity," either by corruption, or assimilation. To do that, he needs to stir the pot some. What we can expect to see—mark my words—is a second Clan Invasion from the Homeworlds, this time from the rest of the Clans. Stone probably hopes their advance will be blunted by their exiled brothers here in the Sphere, effectively exhausting all of them, and from that weakened state, he can corrupt and destroy all Clan civilization and assure his absolute rule!

**WRAITH:** An excellent plan, Phantom, but... I still don't see why he has to travel out there himself. Even if you're right, he could still be on New Earth, coordinating everything from there.

**PHANTOM:** \*sigh\* There's just no getting through to you, sometimes...

**SHADOW:** Powerful arguments both ways, gentlemen. Excellent work as always, but we're out of time once again. Come back next week, Truth-seekers, as the Hand of Starling continues to lift the veil of conspiracy to bring enlightenment to all!

## Riva Juro's Mercenary Profiles: Wolf's Dragoons

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01/05/3134

Wolf's Dragoons. Their name is legend, even though their career has not been as long as so many others. Their name has brought reactions of fear, dread, revulsion, and hatred from their detractors, while others have given only their respect, admiration, and awe. They came to us cloaked in mystery, served the Great Houses as elite mercenaries, all the while spying for invaders yet to come. Yet when the invasion came, they sided with the Inner Sphere, their disguise becoming their reality, and their purpose irrevocably changed by the passage of time. And though some called them renegades, bandits, and traitors, they survived as one of the best fighting forces in the Inner Sphere—even the horrors of the Jihad could not destroy them utterly.

But what are the Wolf's Dragoons of today, more than six decades after the terrible Siege of Outreach, where over half this legendary force died beneath the onslaught of the Blakist Jihad? To find the answer, I visited Zanderij, current baseworld of the Dragoons, and hooked up with members of the famous Black Cats battalion, as they prepared for operations on the disputed world of Great X. Following the exploits of this elite mercenary command in battle against the Jade Falcons, it quickly became clear that, for all the tragedy of the Jihad, Wolf's Dragoons has lost none of its legendary bite....

"After [the Battle of] Luthien, we just weren't the same," says Major Donatello Lambert, executive officer of the Black Cats and my guide on this excursion. "Sure, the Dragoons took contracts and fought for other governments, but our focus had broadened. We were a guiding light to other mercenaries. Outreach, our home, was drawing in a lot more mercs for hire after Galatea had fallen from grace. To the Inner Sphere folks, now united against the Clans, we were the friendly experts on the enemy. Some folks figured we'd even form our own state one day; maybe quit professional soldiering for good.

"Of course, it didn't quite work out that way...."

In the first volleys of the Jihad, Outreach was assaulted by a massive Word of Blake force. Harlech, the capital city of the mercenary trade, was reduced to ruins. The Dragoons' industrial base, on the continent of Remus, was annihilated. Of the three regiments of gathered forces on Outreach the day the Jihad began, less than one, comprised of several shattered commands, got out. They found sanctuary among the Exiled Wolves on Arc-Royal for a time, coming home in a strange and different way, to rebuild, but the power the Dragoons once had was shattered for a very long time.

Today, the Dragoons are not far from the world that saved them from the abyss, serving under contract to House Steiner's Lyran Commonwealth. From Zanderij, the Dragoons undertake missions against the Falcon forces that continue to claim five border worlds in a no-man's land of conflict that ranges from Great X to Dustball. The fighting here has been bad in recent months, with repeated clashes all but destroying the planetary governments in contest. Every week seems to bring a change in the flags that fly over their capital buildings.

For the Black Cats Battalion, this day sees their first action against the Falcons for this contract. The target: a Falcon command and control center in the planet's northern hinterlands, recently established after the Clan's recent recapture of Great X. Though a straightforward mission, nothing is left to chance; the assault is expected to serve as the vanguard of a Steiner assault. Thus, with practiced professionalism and the efficiency that comes only from decades of experience, the battle plans are drawn up. Secondary objectives identified, troops are armed and outfitted for action. For most mercenary commands, the job might be done in transit, or delay their departure by as much as two weeks, but the Dragoons are prepared in three days. Just eight days later, the Black Cats arrive through a pirate point in the Great X system.

The assault on Great X is an exercise in precision. Dragoons' aerospace, less than three hours ahead of the main strike force, advances and eliminates satellite networks and ground-based radar and comm centers, assuring their comrades a clear landing zone. Once down, the Dragoons DropShips deploy a full company of 'Mechs and twice as many armored units. A section of artillery also masses to guard the makeshift command center formed by a trio of grounded vessels. The Falcons, naturally, move quickly.

The Falcon warriors are fierce, but their support is minimal. Recognizing the opposition, they offer and grant no quarter. There are no rules of engagement, but the Dragoons have their foe at a disadvantage in numbers. Flanked by their armored units, with fast hovercraft making an end run to strike at the rear, the Dragoons' 'Mechs slug it out with their Falcon counterparts on the rolling plains near the objective. Non-combatants were not allowed into the field, and I could only watch the action relayed back to the command center through the massive holotank on the DropShip Jaime Wolf. In less than a minute, the Falcons' reinforced Trinary is broken, forced into retreat with only a Star of 'Mechs still mobile. The fight is costly, nonetheless, with four MechWarriors and five vehicle crews lost in exchange for this quick victory.

Even as the remaining, battle-worthy Dragoons advance to take out the objective itself, their recovery teams scramble to the field, picking over the wreckage to haul back choice salvage. Surviving warriors, from both sides, will receive medical care, and any prisoners taken stand a good chance of being "absorbed" by the Dragoons.

"We still hold to our roots," Lambert says when asked about the absorption process. "In keeping with Clan custom, warriors captured in battle may be taken on board as bondsmen, able to earn a slot in the Dragoons later on, if they're good enough. Mind you, most resist, and so we have to turn them over to our employers for eventual ransoming or repatriation, but a few—mostly Clan, of course—find the option of being a bondsman easier to swallow, since it allows the chance they may see combat again...."

Hard fought, well planned in advance, the battle ends almost anticlimactically, with the last pair of Dragoons 'Mechs arriving back at the base just before local sunset, sporting new scars from the recent fighting. Another mission is now complete, with

enough salvage to make up for the loss in material, if not in men.

Tasked with holding their objective, the Dragoons remain on Great X another week, relieved only after the arrival of fresh Lyran troops, but by that point, the Black Cats can once more claim full readiness, having spent their days repairing their damages and eliminating other pockets of Falcon resistance in the region. For House Steiner, the gains are immeasurable, allowing the reclamation of Great X, if only for a short while, and for the Dragoons, it is further proof that they remain one of the Inner Sphere's most fearsome and effective combat forces.

I'm Riva Juro, INN special correspondent, Zanderij.

## Touring the Stars with Bertram Habeas

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01/07/3134

*We began on Terra, millions of years ago. Today, mankind stretches out among the stars of the Milky Way, touching thousands of worlds, as far from our home as Clan space, more than 2,000 light-years distant. Yet who are we, really? What have we become in our relentless push outward and onward? I'm Bertram Habeas, and tonight, let's find the answers to these and many other fascinating questions together, as we tour the stars!*

### Volume XXXVI: Legacies of the League—Marik-Stewart and Regulus

**Fact Sheet:** The Marik-Stewart Commonwealth  
**Founding Year:** 3082 (2238 as Republic of Marik)  
**Capital (City, World):** Dormuth, Marik  
**National Symbol:** a black eagle and banner before a golden disc and purple rectangle  
**Location (Terra relative):** Rimward-antispinward of Terra, interior  
**Total (Inhabited) Systems:** 31  
**Estimated Population (3130):** 91,200,000,000  
**Government:** Parliamentary Democracy (currently operating under military rule)  
**Ruler:** Captain-General Anson Marik  
**Dominant Language(s):** English (official), Slovak, Czech, Romanian  
**Dominant Religion(s):** Judaism, Islam, Christianity (Orthodox)  
**Unit of Currency:** Eagle (1 eagle = 0.52 C-Bills)

Dormuth, capital of Marik and of the Marik-Stewart Commonwealth, is a remarkable urban sprawl with a skyline of exotically angled towers, domes, and spires that gleam in the orange light of the noontime sun. Orbiting close to that star, Marik is a hot, dry world, but one rich in metals and active in manufacturing. Much of the world has been rebuilt in the decades after the formation of The Republic. Thus, much of what the casual observer sees in the sprawling metropolises astounds those historically astute, who expect a trip back in time on this birth world of the Free Worlds League. And yet, for all the changes, there is much that remains the same here on Marik. The government and military command buildings in Dormuth and Malkent are Spartan in nature, nothing like the grand palaces of other realms. And the biggest tourist draw is the annual races out of the Burlingrad Hoverdrome, which locals proudly say inspired the hover-derby races on Solaris VII.

The largest of the former Free Worlds League member-states, and including the former capital of Atreus, the Marik-Stewart Commonwealth is actually the fusion of the original Marik Commonwealth and the Stewart Commonality, plus several neighboring systems and minor alliances either annexed or brought into the alliance in the years following the Word of Blake Jihad. Once the power base of the Marik family's dominance over Free Worlds politics and the core of the Captain-General's power, today it is one of the most fractious of the former League states, an echo of the fallen League itself, if you will.

Duchess Alys Rousset-Marik of Augustine, who actually called for the repeal of Resolution 288 (and with it, the title of Captain-General), in 3067, ironically was in the running to be this realm's first Captain-General after the League's final collapse in 3078. But when even this state began to erupt in internal conflicts, she instead ceded her world and several others to the nascent Republic of the Sphere. Corrine Marik instead would claim the Captain-Generalcy over the Marik Commonwealth in 3082, and lead the battered nation in a military effort to secure its sovereignty against The Republic, the Capellans, the Lyrans, and even its former fellow League members, such as Oriente and Regulus.

Nominally, the Marik-Stewart Commonwealth claims to be a parliamentary-style democracy, but a Captain-General has sat upon the throne since the state went independent in 3082, citing a state of emergency in an eerie reminder of the old House Marik tradition. This democratic basis has given voice to many of the Commonwealth's subject worlds, many of which chafe under Marik leadership not because it is heavy-handed so much as because it has made minimal effort to reclaim lost ancestral worlds today claimed by House Steiner and The Republic of the Sphere. Other political factions within the Commonwealth also call for military action against Regulus and Oriente, many with an eye toward rebuilding the Free Worlds League as a stronger, more unified realm than ever before. Understandably, these vocal political factions and the ongoing rule by a military hierarchy "for the duration of the crisis" have led to many confrontations and frosty foreign relations, but have also contributed to the strength of the central government and the military that protects it.

The people of the Marik-Stewart Commonwealth, however, are a more cosmopolitan society. Claiming many of the former League's most industrialized worlds and thriving with trade—even to hostile neighbors—the Commonwealth is the wealthiest as well as the largest of the former League states. Having been an interior realm for much of the reign of the Free Worlds League, the Commonwealth suffered little damage during the Succession Wars, allowing it to flourish as an industrial and cultural power. Many of those hailing from the original Marik Commonwealth are among the former League's greatest patrons of the arts, literature, and entertainment. And despite their realm's current political strife, many of the people here are remarkably friendly and trusting, hardly a picture of the warlike state many of their neighbors paint in the mass media.

**Fact Sheet:** The Regular Fiefs  
**Founding Year:** 3086 (2243 as Principality of Regulus)  
**Capital (City, World):** Tunis, Regulus  
**National Symbol:** a blue eagle rising behind the world of Regulus  
**Location (Terra relative):** Rimward-antispinward of Terra, central.  
**Total (Inhabited) Systems:** 27  
**Estimated Population (3130):** 18,000,000,000  
**Government:** Constitutional Monarchy (currently operating under martial law)  
**Ruler:** Captain-General Lester Cameron-Jones  
**Dominant Language(s):** English (official), Hindi, Urdu, Mongolian  
**Dominant Religion(s):** Hindu, Islam, Christianity (Orthodox)  
**Unit of Currency:** Rupee (1 rupee = 0.58 C-Bills)

Regulus, capital of the Regular Fiefs, is a warm world, orbiting a hot yellow-white giant. Made wealthy by centuries as a hub of commerce throughout the Free Worlds League territories, this world, like Marik, is also well developed. Huge agro-complexes and massive cities dot the striking landscapes of the temperate and tropical zones, with the largest by far being the capital and port city of Tunis. Home to over five million Regulars, Tunis is as much a work of art as it is a center for trade and government, and the architecture here is a magnificent blend of classic Eastern Indian, Middle Eastern, and even Asian styles, still reflecting the cultural influences of the planet's founding Selaj dynasty centuries after their departure.

Once the second most powerful of the Free Worlds League's three founding nations, the Principality of Regulus experienced a waning of political strength after the rise of the Marik family. This waning only increased with the disgrace of the founding Selaj family, which fled the League in the 2550s, after several efforts to depose the Captain-General. Though rarely overtly disloyal—even refusing to ally with the Anduriens during their brief bid for independence in the 3030s—the Regular leadership has ever opposed the increasingly centralized rule of the Captain-Generals. Indeed, after Andurien, many historians have tended to regard Regulus as one of the most secessionist of the League's member-states, despite the relative absence of violence.

And yet, ironically enough, for all their centuries'-long political struggle for independence under the League, the Regulars have embraced a monarchic style of government. (Regulus itself is a reformed dictatorship, presently ruled by the Cameron-Jones clan.) Their leader has even gone so far as to assume the title of Captain-General for himself. What does this say about the ambitions of Regulus? Well, like their counterparts in the Oriente Protectorate and Marik-Stewart Commonwealth, the Regulars, too, perhaps dream of one day restoring the fallen League and ushering in the prosperity lost in the fires of the Jihad.

An interior realm, spared much of the fighting throughout the Succession Wars, the Principality of Regulus enjoyed the fruits of its own economic stability for centuries before the Jihad, despite its loss of political clout. The Regular people's hard-working nature, a relentless drive to succeed in all affairs, particularly in business and politics, has created a nation that now bears few scars even from that war, while at the same time raising a powerful enough armed force to challenge its neighbors.

And challenge is certainly a Regular specialty. Soon after the fall of the League, Regulus moved to secure its neighboring provinces, the Regular Free States and the Principality of Gibson, before any of their neighbors. Redecaring themselves the Regular Fiefs in 3086, the realm is now wedged between the Marik-Stewart Commonwealth and the Oriente Protectorate, while virtually covering the entire rimward-antispinward border of the Commonwealth. Their military has clashed with those of Marik-Stewart, Oriente, Andurien, and even the Rim Commonality. Twice since securing these neighboring worlds, the Regulars have even assaulted Atrous, former seat of the League government.

Yet the people of Regulus do not see their nation as warlike, but merely a survivor of the League's legacy, and perhaps even the vessel for its eventual salvation. There is a pride here, a pride that has grown ever since Regular forces obliterated the surface of Gibson and, with it, the stain of the Word of Blake's deadly reign of terror in the League. It's this pride that tells these people that someday, perhaps very soon, they will bring their neighbors back down the path of enlightenment, and rebuild the fallen Free Worlds, stronger and better than ever before.

In our fifth segment on the former Free Worlds League, the legacy of the League brings us to the territories on the Capellan border! Join us, for a look at the Oriente Protectorate and the Duchy of Andurien. I'm Bertram Habeas.

## 3132 Solaris VII Championships Season Review (Part 7)

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01/13/3134

SOLARIS CITY, SOLARIS VII – Welcome back, fight fans, to INN’s Season Recap of the 3132 Solaris VII Grand Championship. Winding down to the semi-finals now, one-hundred and twenty-eight MechWarriors have become three, and only one champion will be left standing after it’s over! Today’s Recap brought to you by ComStar Interstellar News Network; “INN: Always first on the scene”

Just one day remains of the 3132 Grand Tournament, and as we entered the semi-finals tonight, all eyes were on Galahad Stables’ Omar “Demolition” Durand, a man known far and wide for his award-winning combat style and his unwavering sense of sportsmanship. Slated by chance to face “Roaring” Ronald Ghost Bear, the devastating champion from Zellbrigen Stables known for his ferocious combat style and merciless tactics, last year’s fourth-placed MechWarrior could not have found a more intimidating match.

“I have to admit,” said Durand, in his pre-fight interview, when asked if he was concerned about facing the Solaris Champion, “I never planned to face ‘Roaring’ Ronald at all. I mean, sure I was having a very good run here, but there were more than enough close calls that told me this match was out of sight. So, yeah, I guess you could say I’m a bit nervous. I’ve seen his style.”

The scene for their epic clash was none other than the fierce and deadly man-made tunnels of Iron Mountain. With both MechWarriors eager to face their remaining challenger, Shayne Kirkpatrick, tomorrow night in the Factory, at the helm of their most favored machines, both Durand and Ghost Bear entered the arena in command of machines no less lethal. Durand, driving a rare customized Cygnus, faced off against Ghost Bear’s Mad Cat II in the winding tunnels, often delivering devastating hit-and-fade strikes with his paired heavy autocannons that ripped massive slabs of armor away from the Clan-born Champion’s machine. Yet, despite a severe pounding, Ghost Bear gave as good as he got, relentlessly blazing away with a quartet of heavy lasers at every opportunity.

The two gladiators continued this lethal game of cat and mouse for over ten minutes, an endurance record to any warrior who’s ever squared off against “Roaring” Ronald, but in only half that time, it became clear that Durand’s style was beginning to wear down his foe’s patience. Ghost Bear, eager to end the duel with every volley, often overheated his ‘Mech, pushing its sinks to the very point of shutdown several times. Indeed, it was only Durand’s sense of chivalry, according to some, that spared the Champion from a more ignominious defeat.

Durand’s victory clears the way for the final match tomorrow against Shayne “Shockwave” Kirkpatrick of Blackstar Stables. Kirkpatrick managed to proceed to the finals unchallenged this day, thanks to the mutual disqualification of Zelazni Stables’ Olivia “Queen Liv” Tyler and DiNapoli Stables’ “Daring” David Strauss, who incited a minor riot in Silesia two nights ago. The Marik Arena, known to all as the Factory, will be the venue for this final winner-take-all match. Kirkpatrick. Durand. Only one will take home the Championship.

So, stay tuned, fight fans, and visit our link-site for all the box scores, fun facts, and betting odds for the 3132 Grand Championship. As always, I’m Dennis Stanzio for SBC, an affiliate of INN, with your Championship Recap, and I am out of here!

### Towne Log

+ Uh-huh. Figures that the Blackstar favorite doesn’t have to face a real opponent in the semi-finals, eh? No, someone \*else\* had to fight the Clanner Champ!

:- TVBluFist

+ Griping about the unfairness of it all won’t help you, TV. Your boy lost in Round One! You think dePaik stood a chance against “Roaring” Ronald?

:- BNCFanatic

+ Doesn’t change the fact that \*your\* girl got herself a free ride to the top. Durand was the one who took out Ghost Bear, after the Clanner zapped holes through just about everyone else on the way up. Way I see it, the guy who takes down the last year’s champ should be this year’s champ.

:- TVBluFist

+ Man, I still can’t believe Durand pulled it off, no matter what came after! And in a gunboat like the Cyg, no less!

:- GropoM

+ Ack/20s versus a ‘Mech that wastes tonnage on jumpers in a cave system is quite an advantage, especially in tight confines. And running hot didn’t help Ghost Bear either. “Demolition may not have wanted to take him down during a shutdown, but I’m sure he didn’t wait till that monster cooled down completely before going at him again.

:- Chungabunga

+ All true points, but still, the Bear was proving himself in any machine he had. I think stringing him along the way Durand did really won the match. Most Clanners can’t stomach a drawn out duel like that.

:- LevEOsa



## 3132 Solaris VII Championships Season Review (Part 8)

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01/13/3134

SOLARIS CITY, SOLARIS VII – Welcome back once again, fight fans, to INN’s Season Recap of the 3132 Solaris VII Grand Championship. The most intense week of BattleMech combat ever seen outside of a major war, and all for your entertainment! Today’s Recap of the final round is brought to you by Bannson Universal Unlimited; “Bannson Universal, Where People Come First.”

Day Seven. The Finals. The match to end all matches—if only for a year. Yes, folks, tonight saw the hour come that everyone, everywhere, has been waiting for. Blackstar Stables versus Galahad Stables. Davion versus Marik. Kirkpatrick versus Durand, in the twisted, cluttered industrial battleground that is the Marik Arena, the infamous Factory.

Fighting in their trademark ‘Mechs for this final battle, Shayne “Shockwave” Kirkpatrick stormed onto the floor with her 80-ton custom Zeus “Thunderstorm” to square off against Omar “Demolition” Durand and his Vulture, “Gravewalker.” Yet, despite a Championship on the line, the fighting in Solaris City’s Montenegro sector was far more controlled than the brutal slugfests and no-holds-barred grudge fights both MechWarriors faced in their climb to the top.

Despite giving up twenty tons to Kirkpatrick’s black and gold assault ‘Mech, Durand’s purple and gold heavyweight made up the difference with its maneuverability and its sophisticated array of Clan weapons that gave his Blackstar opponent plenty to worry about. “Shockwave” was often forced to pull back as Durand raced across the open fields of the arena, and fought a largely cautious battle, working to pick off the Galahad MechWarrior’s weapon-laden arms first. Though only partially successful (Kirkpatrick sheered off only one arm after a full minute of combat) this tactic succeeded in putting Durand on the defensive.

The winning move came, however, when Durand charged across the bridge connecting the Factory’s two structures. Kirkpatrick, having stayed out of the time-ravaged buildings throughout the fight, suffered under several strikes launched from Durand’s ‘Mech as he raced back and forth along the platform, his ‘Mech and movements vaguely reminding spectators of an old-style carnival shooting game. With each exchange, the two combatants further ravaged one another, until Durand’s fifth pass, when Kirkpatrick unleashed a full alpha strike against his machine. Knocked off balance, the Vulture crashed off the bridge, its gyros destroyed between Shockwave’s weapons fire and the fall.

And so, as the dust settled over the ancient, coolant-stained floor of the Factory, Solaris VII inaugurates a new Champion into the annals of history. But it’s not all over yet, fight fans! Stay with us, as our annual season recap continues with Kirkpatrick’s post-battle interview, and the standings for Solaris VII’s new Top Twenty rankings. I’m Dennis Stanzio for Solaris Broadcasting Center, an affiliate of INN, with your Championship Recap, and I shall return!

### Towne Log

+ You know, Durand just \*had\* to know he was pushing his luck by running along that bridge so many times. What he should’ve done was close in.

:- KevvyCone

+ Did you watch the vid, KC? Durand’s armor was paper thin by the time Shockwave took his left arm off, compared to a few nice rents in the Zeus! Closing in may have let him take advantage of Clan weapon superiority, but all it would’ve taken was one solid hit and he was down!

:- GreasL

+ Yeah, man. They may have had the same punch, and Demolition certainly had the range, mobility, and home turf advantages, but Shockwave wasn’t going to play like Ghost Bear did. She just hung back and sniped, knowing that Durand’s aim was gonna be off from all that running.

:- Chungabunga

+ Still, if he’d been on solid ground, Durand would’ve at least not fallen so far. I mean, oof! Even with those fancy harnesses they wear in the cockpits, there’s not much protection when you fall down like that. Had to be like a nightmare roller coaster from hell. :-KevvyCone

+ Oh yeah. But still, I’ll never get tired of watching that fall. One alpha and that was all she wrote! Woohoo!

:- BNCFanatic

+ \*sigh\* I’m just never gonna hear the end of this. Am I?

:- TVBluFist

## After the Stormhammers: A Look Back

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01/14/3134

PORT HOWARD – In the nearby Prince John Spaceport, a 3,500-ton Union stands at idle, its sensors and weapons relentlessly tracking the sky, while helicopters maintain an irregular, almost unpredictable patrol pattern. Deeper within the city, particularly near the capital building and the planetary HPG compound, armored vehicles bearing the insignia of the Towne militia, backed by the occasional BattleMech sporting the logos of either The Republic of the Sphere or the 21st Centauri Lancers, stand at attention, soldiers within eyeing every passing motorist with suspicion. These are just a few of the less subtle signs that demonstrate how life has changed since the Stormhammers, one of the latest factions to rise out of the chaos since the collapse of interstellar communications grid, raided the capital city of Towne just a few months ago.

In the northern sectors of the city, the signs are more obvious, and also more solemn. Here, construction crews continue to clear away the rubble of fallen buildings, raising the skeletons of new structures in their place, or leaving behind an empty lot. Even as they work to erase the scars of the fighting, however, wreaths, crosses, holographic portraits, and other memorials continue to pile up in the places where friends and loved ones died, casualties in an urban crossfire that erupted during the morning rush hours.

"You can't go anywhere in this town without seeing something that reminds you of it," said Melissa Anderson, a Port Howard resident whose apartment complex stood just three blocks away from the heaviest fighting. "Downtown, the streets are still cracked in some places, and there are militia troopers everywhere."

In the Port Howard hyperpulse generator, residents have found that even getting into the inner lobby transmission booths involves a strict security screening, with local ComStar and militia guardsmen manning weapons detectors and carefully watching anyone who seems even the slightest bit out of place.

"It seems paranoid, and reassuring at the same time," explains Adept Ursula Langdale, an archivist employed at the HPG compound. "I mean, the Stormhammers did not have any overt outside aid, as far as anyone knows, but the fact that the HPG was again threatened by a hostile force has us all a bit on edge, and it's nice to know that there's someone watching out for you in times like that."

But for how long can the scars remain? How long can a city remain on edge, shell-shocked at an unexpected and fierce attack that was so brief, yet touched so many lives? How long till things return to normal, where people can feel safe again? To many of the residents here in Port Howard, the answer is, perhaps they shouldn't.

"We all figured that Towne had nothing worth fighting for, and so it wasn't worth the attack as long as more important world like Ozawa and Ankaa were around," says one unidentified Port Howard motorist. "Now, we know better. We should never let our guard down like that again."

## Touring the Stars with Bertram Habeas

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01/14/3134

*We began on Terra, millions of years ago. Today, mankind stretches out among the stars of the Milky Way, touching thousands of worlds, as far from our home as Clan space, more than 2,000 light-years distant. Yet who are we, really? What have we become in our relentless push outward and onward? I'm Bertram Habeas, and tonight, let's find the answers to these and many other fascinating questions together, as we tour the stars!*

### Volume XXXVII: Legacies of the League II—Oriente and Andurien

**Fact Sheet:** Oriente Protectorate

**Founding Year:** 3086 (2241 as Federation of Oriente)

**Capital (City, World):** Amur, Oriente

**National Symbol:** a silver eagle before a purple-and-black disc

**Location (Terra relative):** Rimward of Terra, antispinward of Capellan Confederation, central.

**Total (Inhabited) Systems:** 29

**Estimated Population (3130):** 85,500,000,000

**Government:** Representative Commonality (currently operating under military rule)

**Ruler:** Captain-General Jessica Marik

**Dominant Language(s):** English and Greek (both official), Chinese

**Dominant Religion(s):** Christianity (Orthodox), Islam

**Unit of Currency:** Drachma (1 drachma = 0.31 C-Bills)

Amur, capital city of Oriente and the Oriente Protectorate, is a city of remarkable beauty that seems to transcend time itself. Virtually carved out of the woods surrounding the base of the Amuraelius mountain chain—and, in some cases, actually crawling up the side of the snow-capped range—the city features some striking examples of modern neo-Classical architecture, styled along the lines of Terra's ancient Greece. Even the city's skyscrapers, whose upper floors reflect and scatter the rays of the planet's giant yellow-white sun, feature majestic columns and other pseudo-Grecian design features closer to street level. Amur is a commercial megalopolis, its population of five million gathered almost exclusively for the business of trade. Traffic rarely slows down on the streets here, with businessmen, tourists, off-world traders, and government leaders alike constantly on the move to their next appointments.

The Oriente Protectorate, initially founded in 2241 as the Federation of Oriente (later known as the Duchy of Oriente for much of its history), is the third of the founding member-states of the Free Worlds League, and the second largest today. Like its fellow founding states, Oriente was a populous and prosperous realm, its founders blessed with a flair for politics and diplomacy. This diplomacy, however, did not often protect them from raiders and invaders from the neighboring Capellan territories. It was an Orientian who first proposed the formation of the Free Worlds League, in fact, seeking a stronger alliance as a check against the resurgence of Terra and the ongoing hostilities on the Capellan front.

With the ascent of House Marik, Oriente became known as the "loyal opposition." Their ever-pragmatic leadership has broadly supported the office of the Captain-General throughout the years, but has also often provided the tempering voice in Parliament, a check against Marik excesses. At the same time, Oriente has been a focal point for commerce and technology. During the relative peace on the Capellan front that followed the formation of the Federated Commonwealth, the people of Oriente knew an age of economic and industrial prosperity, while Oriente merchants exported their products and technical expertise throughout the Inner Sphere.

In the chaos following the League's collapse, the forces of Regulus moved against many of that nation's neighbors, including Oriente, primarily because the Halas family gave refuge to the false Thomas Marik. Forced to fight a defensive war against suddenly hostile neighbors, the Duchy of Oriente united under the joint rule of Thomas Marik's impostor and his wife, Sherryl Halas, after the death of Duke Christopher Halas in 3080. To signify his willingness to surrender a claim to the Free Worlds' throne, the false Thomas dropped his assumed name in favor of his wife's, but the change did not appease the Regulans, who felt the imposter and his host realm deserved severe punishment for decades of deception.

For a time, the Regulans were beaten back, but in 3084 they returned their attention to Oriente when they were unable to overcome the forces of the Marik-Stewart Commonwealth. Fighting like this continued throughout the remainder of the century, and raged until as recently as the 3120s, with all three former League founders vying for dominance and the right to reestablish their fractured realm. During that time, Oriente was forced to annex the Protectorate and unite with the Duchy of Orloff, absorbing the two smaller League republics in an effort to check Regular ambitions and better defend against Capellan aggression.

Politically, Oriente's position remains precarious even today. Jessica Marik, daughter of the false Thomas Marik (Halas), has herself been at the heart of the latest conflicts since assuming the Marik name that most consider to be ill-gotten. Her argument in claiming the name was that she did so to honor the man she claims should have been the true Captain-General of the League, citing that the real Thomas Marik was a madman who deserves no honor under a new League. Yet most see such maneuvering as naked ambition to reestablish a Marik dynasty over all of the fractured League states.

**Fact Sheet:** The Duchy of Andurien

**Founding Year:** 2791

**Capital (City, World):** Jojoken, Andurien

**National Symbol:** a silver eagle, perched atop a purple castle, set against a black field

**Location (Terra relative):** Rimward of Terra, antispinward of Capellan Confederation, exterior.

**Total (Inhabited) Systems:** 25

**Estimated Population (3130):** 71,200,000,000

**Government:** Hereditary Oligarchy

**Ruler:** Duke Ari Humphreys

**Dominant Language(s):** English (official), Italian, Mandarin

**Dominant Religion(s):** Catholicism, Confucianism, Agnostic

**Unit of Currency:** Andurien dollar (1 dollar = 0.47 C-Bills)

Breathtaking with the striking colors of over a thousand exotic species of flora, the botanical gardens of Jojoken are the pride of this capital city, not only of the terrestrial planet of Andurien, but of the entire Duchy of Andurien. The gardens of Jojoken offer visitors a glimpse of beauty and serenity not easily found on the streets of the city itself, which are crowded by monolithic buildings and chronically choked with heavy traffic. Like its counterparts on the former League's founding worlds, the capital of Andurien is a busy metropolis, home to some six million people, who make their home a hub for trade and government. Yet, in stark contrast to the hustle and bustle of the crowded city, on the far side of the gardens rises the palace of the Humphreys, hereditary rulers of Andurien—and, by extension, all of their Duchy.

Andurien has long been a battleground, frequently fought over by the armies of the Free Worlds League and the Capellan Confederation, even before the Duchy was first founded in 2791. For that reason, many Anduriens are understandably wary of foreigners, and are especially contemptuous of those who would seek to dominate them. Throughout their time as members of the League, the people of Andurien chafed under what they considered to be nothing less than an occupation. Their leaders became known as easily the most vocal opponents of the Captains-General outside of the founding nations, and secessionist sentiments always ran deep.

In the 3030s, Dame Catherine Humphreys finally acted on this trend by announcing the secession of the Duchy and allied her realm with the Magistracy of Canopus in a war against House Liao's Capellan Confederation. The Andurien Crisis created the greatest challenge for the Free Worlds League in the thirty-first century after the Marik Civil War, forcing the League to send in troops to reclaim the renegade province. A terrorist's bomb placed in a Marik family planning session, however, opened the door for a sinister plan by the old ComStar regime to replace Thomas Marik, heir to the Captain-Generalcy, with a double. The false Thomas Marik led a successful campaign to reintegrate Andurien after its doomed invasion of the Confederation ended.

Yet, even in defeat, with their military stripped away, the Anduriens never surrendered their desire for independence, and seized upon the opportunity when it came about in the closing years of the Jihad. Unlike many of its fellow League provinces, the Anduriens never sought to reclaim the League; instead striking out on their own, absorbing many neighboring worlds, including the Mosiro Archipelago, one of the League's smaller provinces, in order to secure a buffer against the Capellans and the Oriente Protectorate.

The typical Andurien retains this fiercely independent will to the present day, and most believe that the trinity of the Marik-Stewart Commonwealth, Regular Fiefs, and Oriente Protectorate, must be prevented from ever reforming the Free Worlds League, much as the Capellans and Canopians must ever be opposed. Nothing is to come between these people and their freedom, and from the Duke himself to the lowliest factory worker, all are willing to resort to any means to retain their hard-won independence.

In our final segment, the legacy of the League extends outward from Terra with the Duchy of Tamarind-Abbey and the Rim Collection! Won't you join us as we examine these nations more closely? I'm Bertram Habeas.

## Touring the Stars with Bertram Habeas

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01/21/3134

*Touring the Stars with Bertram Habeas We began on Terra, millions of years ago. Today, mankind stretches out among the stars of the Milky Way, touching thousands of worlds, as far from our home as Clan space, more than 2,000 light-years distant. Yet who are we, really? What have we become in our relentless push outward and onward? I'm Bertram Habeas, and tonight, let's find the answers to these and many other fascinating questions together, as we tour the stars!*

### Volume XXXVIII: Legacies of the League III—Tamarind-Abbey and Rim

**Fact Sheet:** Duchy of Tamarind-Abbey

**Founding Year:** 3078

**Capital (City, World):** Zanzibar, Tamarind

**National Symbol:** An abstract purple eagle, with five-pointed stars in each wing, being clutched at the tail by a human hand, set against a green field. The eagle's claws are each holding cornstalks.

**Location (Terra relative):** Antispinward of Terra, exterior

**Total (Inhabited) Systems:** 26

**Estimated Population (3130):** 75,000,000,000

**Government:** Military Governorship

**Ruler:** Duke Fontaine Marik

**Dominant Language(s):** English (official), Spanish

**Dominant Religion(s):** Christianity (Catholicism), Judaism

**Unit of Currency:** Peso (1 peso = 0.48 C-Bills)

Zanzibar is an oasis of civilization that seems to rise abruptly out of a stretch of badlands that historical records once claim was a lush green forest. Straddling the Zanzibe River, the city looks from a distance almost like an inverted cyclone, with increasingly taller buildings rising the closer one gets to its center. The tallest of these structures, however, is actually a mere antenna, part of the central planetary communications hub, though it is as much a work of sculpture as it is a practical construct. On the streets below, traffic is modest, and the largest gatherings are often found in the open markets scattered throughout. At each marketplace, however, one can be sure to catch a glimpse of Tamarind's militiamen, whose duties include policing this metropolis. Most residents don't pay these men and women another thought, but visitors are often struck by such obvious signs of martial rule on Lesnovo.

The Duchy of Tamarind-Abbey is actually the fusion of the Duchy of Tamarind and the Abbey District, as well as several of the independent worlds that were scattered between them. Though many of its dominant members—including Tamarind itself—are representative democracies, the nation as a whole is a military alliance, rather than a political one, and is currently operating under martial law. This mix of politically free worlds under a military dictatorship has effectively remolded the Duchy into a miniature version of the Free Worlds League itself.

The goals of the Tamarind-Abbey alliance are nothing short of maintaining its own existence in the face of Periphery and, most especially, Lyran threats. In the wake of the League's collapse, Lyran forces surged across the border to "stabilize" a host of former League planets, many of which once flew the Steiner banner, centuries ago. The alliance between Tamarind and Abbey became clearly necessary in response to this threat, lest these once-loyal members of the League be swallowed by the Lyran Commonwealth as well.

Ironically, the military leader of Tamarind-Abbey, Duke Fontaine Marik, may hold one of the strongest claims to the legacy of the Marik family. As a direct descendant of Therese Brett-Marik, second-oldest child of Janos (the oldest was the real Thomas Marik), Duke Fontaine has followed in the tradition of his predecessor, Proton Brett-Marik, in dropping the Brett surname in favor of Marik. The Duke has also repeated his father's claim to the Captain-Generalcy for himself, though few outside this realm—especially those of House Marik—are willing to recognize it; Therese Brett-Marik had been disowned since before Janos Marik's death.

Today, despite the aspirations of its leaders, the Duchy of Tamarind-Abbey remains aloof from the fighting between Regulus, Marik-Stewart, and Oriente. However, this realm has been known to form temporary defensive pacts with Marik-Stewart in an effort to counter Lyran aggressions. Along the Periphery front, the Duchy has also been actively expanding, hoping to counter a threat from the Marian Hegemony, the imperialist Periphery realm that seized three former League worlds in 3092.

The people of the Duchy are a hard-working and productive bunch, most eager to do their share in securing their freedom from invaders. However, a good many also pine for the days of the Free Worlds league as well, and political rallies in favor of the current Duke's claim to restore order among the former League realms have gone from just the few random gatherings of a few years ago, to a full-scale political movement in the Duchy's civilian democracy.

**Fact Sheet:** The Rim Commonality

**Founding Year:** 2681

**Capital (City, World):** Zletovo, Lesnovo

**National Symbol:** a yellow sunburst on a red field, at the heart of which is a silhouette of an eagle

**Location (Terra relative):** Rimward-antispinward of Terra, exterior.

**Total (Inhabited) Systems:** 15

**Estimated Population (3130):** 39,600,000,000

**Government:** Feudal Autocracy (with democratic leanings)

**Ruler:** Prime Minister Michael Cendar

**Dominant Language(s):** English, Greek, Macedonian, Arabic

**Dominant Religion(s):** Christianity (Orthodox), Islam

**Unit of Currency:** Dinar (1 dinar = 0.31 C-Bills)

Zletovo, capital city of Lesnovo, seat of the Rim Commonality government, is easily the largest population center on the planet, with over three million residents calling this sprawl of angular, plain-looking buildings and church steeples home. The DropShips at the southeast spaceport, however, are by far the most impressive structures here, towering over the skyline as the last rays of Lesnovo's orange giant sun fade away for the night. Despite the influx of money drawn in by being a hub of local trade, however, much of the city consists of run-down slums, rarely patrolled even by the local police force. The legacy of centuries of economic hardships and constant raids from the periphery, after all, do not vanish overnight.

Long ago, Lesnovo and the rest of the Rim Commonality were part of the Principality of Regulus, until a referendum in 2681, advanced by House Marik, severed it from the League state as part of a political campaign to break down its opposition. Since that time, the Commonality and the Principality have enjoyed a fruitful trading relationship, although ever since its imposed breakaway, its economy has been only a fragile shell of its Regulan days.

Yet, despite a shared origin and history of defiance to the rule of the Marik family, the Rim Commonality grew into its own during the latter years of the Free Worlds League and the Jihad that brought it down. Suddenly faced with aggressive neighbors on all sides, the Commonality took a cautious approach to ensure its survival, rather than risk everything to military action. The Periphery world of Astrokaszy, long a haven for pirates, was absorbed by this nation not through force of arms, but by political means, along with a host of other realms threatened by the waves of internal strife that followed the collapse of the League government.

Regulus, meanwhile, lost some of its luster as a friend and ally. Once viewed as a lost parent by the Rim, the Regulan leaders' insistence on military action, rather than diplomacy, allowed them to quickly secure the Regulan Free States and the former Principality of Gibson. By the time their eyes turned toward the Rim, however, they faced a people who suddenly saw Regulus as anything but a benevolent force.

In constant battles against Regulus, over the independent worlds between them, and defensive actions against Marian and Canopian raiders, the military might of the Rim has proven itself capable of holding its own, at least for the time being. Meanwhile, their policy of peaceful expansion has continued, providing not only an increase in trade and resources, but also demonstrating that might need not always make right.

The mix of cultures among the Free Worlds League's peripheral regions, and the addition of Astrokaszy, have created a curious culture in the Rim Commonality. Most worlds here are democratic or nearly anarchistic, their economies a blend of barter and free enterprise, and so many subcultures flaunt their differences. They are a melting pot of political and social thought, brought together by a mutually accepted need for defense, and ruled by a feudal autocrat who embraces the trappings, if not the mechanisms, of true democracy. Most of the Rim's citizens, however, are proud of their realm for its ability to survive and prosper without too much aid from bigger neighbors, and without the need for violence.

In our next Tour of the Stars, we return to the Dragon's banner for a unique look at the Clan all but lost to the chaos of war and the struggle for survival. Next stop: the worlds of Clan Nova Cat. Won't you come along? I'm Bertram Habeas.

## Narrow Bloodlines: A Look at the Great Reavings, Then and Now

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01/26/3134

SUDETEN – It is a custom they rarely talk about, once stigmatized for the indication that perhaps their vaunted, generations-old eugenics program is not everything their founders hoped it would be, but necessity has ways of forcing even the proudest men to do what is necessary to survive. Even acknowledging that fact, however, has done nothing to assure the warriors on the receiving end of the procedure, the Reaving, a process by which Bloodhouses shrink, their lesser members removed from the breeding pool.

On Sudeten, the battle lines have been drawn again for a ritual that now is held almost every year among Jade Falcons, a Trial of Refusal against the Reaving of another Bloodname—in this case, the Bloodname of Solomon, one of the Falcons' less noteworthy lines. Squaring off in a circle of equals, one Star of BattleMechs versus another, champions of the Solomon Bloodhouse hope to defend against the Reaving, the reduction in the eligible number of holders of the Solomon surname.

Tradition demands this challenge, even in the face of the obvious decline. In the past year, the Solomon Bloodhouse's best warriors—even those with Bloodnames—have scored lower in the annual combat Trials to retain their warrior status. Over half the House has lost ranks or stagnated in these Trials, a grave sign of decay among the Clans, who pursue the ultimate "up or out" policy on warrior careers. A Reaving was inevitable, and if successful, will reduce the holders of Solomon Bloodnames from its present nine to eight.

The Reaving tradition was born several generations after the Clans' eugenics program, as a regulator—and an ultimate punishment—for poorly performing Bloodnames. To prevent the very real threat of their line's prestige through a dilution of mediocre warriors, Bloodhouses would become the target of a Reaving to reduce the number of holders by one, though whatever Bloodhouse advanced the call for a Reaving would find themselves targeted by one, should the challenged house win its Trial of Refusal against the call. The result of a Reaving effectively raises the standards of a given Bloodname, with competition for fewer names fiercer than ever. In theory, a line that then performs well while Reaved may recover its lost Bloodcount over time in a Trial of Propagation, for the time being, they are reduced not only in number, but in votes on the Clan's Council.

After the Jihad, the Clans which had come into the Inner Sphere found themselves cut off from the homeworlds, where a sizeable portion of their respective genetic repositories and iron wombs had been kept. The few who saw the danger of the cut-off prepared for it by moving their valuable breeding samples into the Inner Sphere with them, but few were entirely successful. Adding insult to injury, all of the Inner Sphere Clans had been savaged by the fighting of the Jihad, most of their militaries reduced to sustenance levels only. An astonishing number of warriors had been lost, but damage to production and infrastructure had left many hard-pressed to replenish their ranks. At almost the same time, Devlin Stone, the man who had led everyone in the crusade against the Blakists, initiated his Military Materiel Redemption Program, reducing the size of his military to win over his new populations and recover resources for reconstruction.

In his policies, Stone harkened back to the Clan example, effectively making the remaining warriors the most elite of his new order. As the Clans themselves had learned at their inception, the reduction in ranks also served to assure that those who remained were those fit to remain. The lesson struck a chord with the Clans, and so began the Great Reaving, a means to sharpen each Clan's talent on a grand scale, revitalizing it within the bounds of tradition, while allowing a palatable means to turn its attentions toward making its occupation zone a homeland.

For some Clans, the Great Reaving also produced an opportunity to introduce new blood in the form of freeborn lines that had performed above and beyond the call of duty—the Rasalhague Dominion's Magnusson line and the Exiled Wolves' Brahes, for instance—while thinning out the less-effective Trueborn lines. Of course, since the creation of a Bloodname prerogative originally centered on the ilKhan, this change could not be accepted without wedding the process to the Clan's traditions of Trials. What eventually emerged was a Trial of Founding. When a Khan feels that a freeborn line has performed above and beyond, he nominates it before the Clan Council. The Khan can only do so once a year and can only ever propose a bloodline for Founding once. The entire Clan council votes, with the ratio of yeas to nays determining the ration of the forces that will fight. The Khan then nominates a warrior from the prospective bloodline, and the Bloodname of the Council bid amongst themselves, down to the ratio of the vote; enough traditionalists exist in even the most moderate of Clans to ensure that the eventual numbers to overcome are fierce, to say the least. The actual combat then determines whether the bloodline becomes a Bloodname. As a final harness on these new Bloodnames, and to make sure they are not—at least initially—on par with those created by the Founder, each Bloodname is only allowed ten Bloodrights (ten who can hold the Bloodname at any one time); a Trial of Propagation must be enacted to expand beyond this number.

For other Clans, this time was an opportunity to redistribute some Bloodlines, as Clan Hell's Horses did by creatively transforming several mediocre MechWarrior and Elemental lines into their new TankWarrior Phenotypes. For the Jade Falcons and the Crusader Wolves, the tradition was merely a way to ensure that only the best would rule the Clans, while assuring that same "best" hailed from the most exalted Bloodlines each could field. These new ultra-elites today are literally the best of the best, and generally could outperform their forebears of just sixty years ago.

The Great Reavings ran through the latter half of the 3090s, reducing almost every Bloodhouse in the Inner Sphere Clans at one point or another. Ever since, they have remained an active part of Clan life, another test to prove who the greatest warriors are in the Clan hierarchy. Today, the Solomon line wins its challenge; tomorrow, the Thastus Bloodhouse will have to defend itself against the counter-Reaving. If both survive, the Clan is served through validation of its warriors' abilities. If one fails, the Clan is still served by assuring only its greatest remain.

## Towne Log

+ You know, I just don't get these Clanners. They breed their soldiers in vats, train them to be the best they can be—using live ammo no less!—make them fight for their right to even pilot a machine, tell them that they can't reproduce except through the breeding program, which means they need a Bloodname to see if their legacies can go on, and then come up with this stupid Reaving tradition to cut down how many Bloodnames they can have! Isn't that like shooting yourself in the foot?

:- KevvyCone

+ Sort of, but sort of not, KC. The Clans pride themselves on having the sharpest warriors there are, but anyone who reads the history of the Clan Wars, the FedCom Civil War, and the Jihad knows that the Inner Sphere was catching up fast, without a breeding program. Sure, a lot of that is just weapons tech, and the loss of the Clans' momentum and surprise factor, but to the Clans, they should have done better. So, this is like another means to sharpen their claws and teeth.

:- Chungabunga

+ But doesn't this also reduce the number of valid candidates for the Bloodname pool?

:- KevvyCone

+ Again, yes and no. Some Clans have used the reduced sizes of their Bloodname Houses to recruit new ones from the locals. Used to be, only an ilKhan could create a Bloodname, but it seems that since the Clan Civil Wars (or whatever they were), the folks in the Inner Sphere have taken a more "creative" look at the practice. Helps to win hearts and minds of the locals—if they're good enough for the job, anyway—and gives them access to millions of new legacies.

:- Chungabunga

+ But, I think what KC is trying to say is that it seems that as the number of each Bloodname goes down, the Clanners are shrinking their own gene pools. Given their warrior bent, don't they want more warriors?

:- GRibaldi

+ \*shrug\* My understanding is that the sibkos formed from a Bloodname remain fairly large, Reaving just assures they don't waste their time on a mediocre sibko. Theoretically, they could still pump out as many warriors with fewer Bloodnames because those warriors are even better than the last—following Clan theory, anyway. I'm sure in practice their troops strengths are still thinner than they were sixty years or so ago.

:- Chungabunga

+ Hey, these Reavings, as I understand it, don't create restrictions on the numbers of warriors in a Clan, only the number of Bloodname warriors. Seems with the shrinking of their Toumans, they want to make sure their 'holy' Bloodnames remain rare. Course, if they 'are' holy, why do you have jump through so many hoops to keep 'em that way? What ever.

:- RyTa



## The Hand of Starling – Where in the Universe is Sun-Tzu Liao?

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01/26/3134

**SHADOW:** Well met, Truth-seekers! Once again, the Hand of Starling is back on the air with the show The Republic doesn't want you to see! I'm your host, Shadow. With me as always are my fellow Illuminati, Phantom and Wraith.

**PHANTOM:** Sic Semper Tyrannus!

**WRAITH:** Carpe diem!

**SHADOW:** I see we're having a Latin moment, gents?

**PHANTOM:** Breaks up the monotony.

**WRAITH:** Yeah.

**SHADOW:** Well, welcome brothers, just the same! Before we begin today's topic: "Sun-Tzu Liao: Alive, Dead, or Just Indifferent?" our question of the week here comes from a viewer using the on-line nick of LevEOsa. He (or she) says: "Starling Gang, I just came upon your show this morning and have to admit that I was fascinated in spite of myself."

**PHANTOM:** Gee. Thanks.

**SHADOW:** Hush, you. "...My question for you is whether or not in your travels you guys have looked into that oft-quoted line that the Games on Solaris VII are all rigged?"

**WRAITH:** Erf! No-brainer!

**SHADOW:** Try and show a little patience, Brother Wraith. Lev is a new viewer, after all. Now, Lev, of course we have heard the rumors before as well, many suggesting that the local mafiosa, yakuza, Tongs, and even government agencies have a complete stranglehold over the Games on Solaris VII, and that each and every match is rigged as part of a grand scheme by the powers that be. The truth, astonishingly enough, is that the Games are totally rigged, but the amusing part is that so many different entities are rigging them, that nobody knows who really is in charge. Of course, the Hand of Starling has learned beyond all doubt that there is a super-powerful conspiracy controlling all these agencies as well, manipulating the manipulators as it were, but we will have to discuss that at a later date.

**WRAITH:** Well said, Brother Shadow!

**SHADOW:** Uh-huh. Now, onto today's topic: Sun-Tzu Liao, the deified ruler of the Capellan Confederation, a visionary leader who helped a war-weary nation survive—and even recover from—its worst wars in history, allegedly vanished during the fateful Massacre of Liao back in 3111. Capellans say the one-time Star Lord ascended into godhood, while Republicans claim he was killed in the chaos of all the fighting. In either event, no body was ever recovered, and though both sides claim a different outcome, they agree on one thing, Sun-Tzu is gone, at least from this plane of existence. But is this really the truth? What say you, Brothers?

**PHANTOM:** False.

**WRAITH:** Absolutely false.

**SHADOW:** Then what are you saying, gents? The Celestial Wisdom is actually alive?

**PHANTOM:** Beyond a shadow of a doubt, Brother—no pun intended, of course.

**SHADOW:** Back it up.

**WRAITH:** My turn! Brothers, it should be obvious to anyone with two brain cells to rub together that Sun-Tzu is alive and well. After all, how does a leader who never travels without the escort of his trusty Death Commandos simply \*vanish\*, especially with no body to recover? The Capellans, known for their pathological hatred of all things Republican (second only to their hatred of all things Davion, of course) would have leapt at hoisting Sunny's bullet-riddled body aloft as justification for an all-out war against the Republic. Yet, at the Massacre of Liao, they never did. Instead, they withdrew and went silent until only recently. Two decades have passed with nothing but words, while a cult has risen about the man, directed by the questionable wisdom of his son, Daoshen Liao. Now, what son takes the throne and doesn't pursue a war against the folks who killed his daddy and still retains control of a realm that reveres him? The answer is nobody, unless the Liao \*never died\*!

**SHADOW:** Then, if that's the truth, why keep the secret?

**PHANTOM:** Well, because of the mystique, the power, and the ulterior agendas, of course!

**WRAITH:** All things the Liao's have raised to high art.

**SHADOW:** Expand.

**PHANTOM:** Gladly. No body means the Liaos can claim Sun-Tzu “ascended” elevate a man already revered as a savior from the Davion Imperium \*and\* the Jihad to godlike standing. This breeds generations of followers as fanatical as any WoBbie you ever dreamed of. It also means nobody sees—and therefore, nobody has access to—the real hand of the state. Assassins and spies will seek out Daoshen, figuring him for the Celestial Wisdom, secure among his fearsome DCs and sitting on that throne on Sian. This leaves Sunny, in an alternate guise, to wander among the various Capellan communities “wrongly” absorbed into Republic and inspire them to unite and rise up against their masters. Two decades of having the messiah in their midst, and by the time the real Cappie troops are ready to strike, entire worlds can fall without a shot. Only a man like Sun-Tzu could cook up such a scheme, and only he could implement it!

**SHADOW:** But what about the rumors that Sun-Tzu never left Liao all this time? And that his body still exists there, kept alive by artificial means, where it dispenses advice and wisdom to the core of a Capellan resistance?

**PHANTOM:** Hey, I never said in what actual form Sunny could have survived in, but staying on Liao? Even in a glass case on wheels, I’m sure they’d keep him mobile to avoid detection. A world gone over with a fine-toothed comb umpteen million times since he vanished there? Come on, Shadow! If Sunny were still there, don’t you think two decades of government searches would have uncovered him by now?

**WRAITH:** Unless they really have found him, and are keeping the secret to forestall a panic...

**PHANTOM:** Unlikely, Brother Wraith, and you know it as well as I, especially since he’s fomenting unrest throughout the rimward prefectures. The smartest thing to do is to keep moving, to touch as many would-be rebels as he can.

**WRAITH:** Point.

**SHADOW:** Then that only leaves the next obvious question: For how much longer can they keep up the deception? Indefinitely?

**WRAITH:** How much longer do they need to? Sun-Tzu \*is\* the Capellan messiah. Once all the lost Capellan worlds are returned, he can come out from hiding, risen—almost literally—from the dead.

**PHANTOM:** Of course, then we might see a power play between Daoshen and Sun-Tzu, but I imagine that it’s more likely the son will yield to the father who’s been pulling his strings for so long. With or without the life-support gear, Sunny will be too powerful to overthrow so simply. Yes, Daoshen will have to yield to the messiah he has been acting in support of all along. I mean, unless Sun-Tzu returns just long enough to give his formal blessing to his son and wanders off to pasture, secure in achieving his lifelong goals at last.

**SHADOW:** All possibilities, and worthy of discussion at another time, perhaps. Meanwhile, it seems we’re about out of time here. Return next week, Truth-seekers, as the Hand of Starling continues to bring enlightenment to all, lifting the veil of secrecy for all to see!

## Touring the Stars with Bertram Habeas

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01/28/3134

*We began on Terra, millions of years ago. Today, mankind stretches out among the stars of the Milky Way, touching thousands of worlds, as far from our home as Clan space, more than 2,000 light-years distant. Yet who are we, really? What have we become in our relentless push outward and onward? I'm Bertram Habeas, and tonight, let's find the answers to these and many other fascinating questions together, as we tour the stars!*

### Volume XXXIX: Visions of Honor—Origins of Clan Nova Cat

They exist among the population of the Draconis Combine. No nation of their own, yet free to claim self-governance and to practice their beliefs. They are a culture unto themselves, which struggled for centuries against their own kind, only to find salvation in the bosom of the Inner Sphere. But what does the rest of the Inner Sphere really understand about the enigma that is Clan Nova Cat? How did they survive three centuries after Nicholas Kerensky forged his utilitarian Clans, guided by visions and faith more than dreams of martial glory?

The Nova Cats' origin is unique among those of Nicholas Kerensky's Clans, but not solely for their mysticism. Indeed, their faith had yet to crystallize when Kerensky forged his new warrior-societies on Strana Mechty. What truly separated the Cats at first was purely political, the fact that their first Khan was, in fact, once counted among the enemies of the Star League. Yes, Phillip Drummond, first Khan of the Nova Cat Clan, once served in the armed forces of Stefan Amaris the Usurper himself. Together with Anna Rosse, a woman who saw the horrors of the Amaris crisis from an entirely different angle as a survivor and resistance fighter on Terra, Drummond would bring about the unique nature of the Cats not by himself, but through his offspring.

Trauma. Shock. Horror. All these factors and more have been attributed to Nicholas Kerensky's desire to mold a new society, where warfare would be controlled, structured, yielding peace and prosperity without politics and pettiness. He'd seen the horrors of Amaris' occupation on Terra, where friends and countrymen died—often in unimaginable ways—on the whims of a bloodthirsty despot. Then again, in the Pentagon, the scene repeated, bloodier than ever, as the old hatreds and loyalties returned. All that psychological damage might have killed another, but Kerensky prevailed.

But what about those who followed him? Surely, they had seen the same horrors of war and greed, hadn't they? Enough to feel the same deep, burning desire to right such wrongs? Certainly! And in no such case was this more evident than in the cases of Phillip Drummond and Anna Rosse. For Drummond, destroying his inner demons meant swearing himself wholeheartedly to the cause of his personal champion, Aleksandr (and later Nicholas) Kerensky.

Rosse was another matter. Orphaned by Amaris' war, rescued, trained, and raised to fight a covert war by spiritual women, only to see the Star League falling again, she fled with Kerensky's exodus, and knew still more trauma when her husband, Peter Karpov, was among those who rebelled first against Kerensky. Even Kerensky's legendary inspiration did not ease her loss at his justice, which involved the execution of her husband, and arrival in the Pentagon Cluster offered only a brief glimpse of normalcy before the eruption of the Pentagon Riots.

The spiritualism she used to heal her old wounds became her crutch, her means of getting through the chaos and the formation of the Clans. Though she would never herself become a warrior, through her beliefs, imparted to her and Drummond's daughter, Sandra, she would show a Clan how to heal and guide itself through the troubled years to come.

Perhaps, as the saying goes, that which does not kill one truly does make one grow stronger, for among the founders of all Clans, the best have always been those who survived the worst traumas, lived through the worst shocks, and overcame the worst horrors imaginable.

—Dr. Lorenzo Torres, Professor of History, University of Thorin.

It was Sandra Rosse, not Phillip Drummond, who would turn the Nova Cats into the spiritual force they have become today. Her father, Phillip, led the Clan to victory in the campaign to retake Circe, while her mother, drawing on her experiences as a logistical wizard in the Terran resistance, would serve as the chief of the Clan's merchant caste. Raised by her mother, yet every bit as much her father's daughter, Sandra came of age fully entrenched in the same strong, mystical faith as her mother, with her father's ability to fight, lead, and inspire. Both of these traits would lead her to become a warrior and, inevitably, the Clan's next Khan, when her father confided in her the nature of the degenerative disease that would strip him of command. After three days of fasting and meditation, it is said, Sandra emerged from her sanctuary, determined to unseat Phillip Drummond and claim the Khanship for herself, which she did in a bloodless Trial. Though challengers quickly emerged, she defeated each one in Trials of Refusal, validating her claim to lead the Clan.

Rosse's first acts as Khan were key to the Clan's evolution. She instituted the office of the Oathmaster, a position that—in the Nova Cat Clan, at least—confers the responsibility for managing the Clan's spiritual needs to a single warrior. She wrote the Ways of Seeing, a collection of her and her mother's mystic experiences, and guide for other Nova Cats to pursue their own spiritualism. Much of Sandra Rosse's guidance can still be felt today, with rituals from the Ways of Seeing still practiced throughout the Clan's holdings. Whether for personal or communal reasons, most Nova Cats continue to seek their destiny or resolve difficult decisions by seeking visions of the future. Though not always accurate or immediately clear, many of the most famous vision quests have had profound impact on the lives of the Nova Cat people.

Ironically, it would be Rosse's own visions that would have a lasting impact in the Nova Cats' destiny, when she found herself enamored with the saKhan of the Smoke Jaguar Clan, Liam Ismiril. Despite the differences in their Clans' philosophies—greatest

of which, perhaps, was a much more lax attitude toward the lesser castes among the Cats, compared to the Jaguars' unquestioned warrior-supremacy—the two allegedly became lovers, until a vision convinced Rosse to break the relationship off. The tale goes that the Jaguar saKhan reacted to the unexpected jilting with hatred. A ranking Nova Cat warrior was soon killed by apparent accident, and a dead nova cat animal was found in one of the Nova Cat Clan's iron wombs. The message was all too clear: thenceforth, the Nova Cats and the Smoke Jaguars would be enemies. Three centuries of simmering hostility and relentless challenges and counterchallenges would follow, and all because of a simple vision.

A fact that few people point out these days is how [Sandra] Rosse's leadership was succeeded by, of all people, her own father. Despite a growing Clan bias against aging warriors, Phillip Drummond's return was undeniable after he passed all his Trials and even made an impassioned speech before the Nova Cat council. That he was cured of his medical condition by Clan science was undoubted, but how he found the strength to return and lead again has been at the core of much debate. Some say that he, too, saw a vision demanding his return, but that merely raises the interesting fact that Drummond was never quite as mystical as his daughter or her mother.

What then, led Drummond to return and strengthen the sense of spirituality his daughter had instilled in his Clan? What possessed him to reclaim the Khanship and remain there until the amazing age of 112? Perhaps we will never know, but to the Nova Cats, it was like the natural closing of a circle of life, a positive omen for the future of the Clan.

—Iridashi Hitomo, *Signs and Portents: A Look at the Nova Cat*, Luthien Press, 3109

Guided by visions, yet driven by Clan pragmatism. Led by the spirit and heart of a strong warrior caste, yet embracing a level of trust in its lower castes almost unheard of. Thus did the Nova Cat Clan grow and prosper during the Golden Century. Together with the Sea Fox Clan, they would colonize several worlds in the Kerensky Cluster, while their warriors would defend the Clan's expanding holdings from Trials, mostly fought against the Smoke Jaguars. The Cats' desire for growth would eventually push the Clan into the Crusader camp when the Great Debate about an invasion of the Inner Sphere began, yet the Cats would wait over half a decade before that vision of glory could be realized.

In part two of this four-part series on Clan Nova Cat, we'll get a glimpse of the ways of the Nova Cats, the visions and the traditions that bind them despite their seven-decade divorce from their fellow children of Kerensky. Join us as we continue our tour of the stars! I'm Bertram Habeas.

## 3132 Solaris VII Championships Season Review (Conclusion)

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02/01/3134

SOLARIS CITY, SOLARIS VII – Welcome back, fight fans, to our special last look at the 3132 Solaris VII Grand Championship. Joining us here in the studio is, of course, the lovely and talented Shayne “Shockwave” Kirkpatrick of Blackstar Stables, this year’s Grand Champion. This segment of the Championship Recap brought to you by Earcandy Entertainment, “Good Times Never Sounded So Good”.

**DS:** Shayne, let me start by thanking you for coming, on behalf of all of us here at SBC.

**SK:** Absolutely, Dennis. It’s great to be here!

**DS:** Alright, now it’s been an exciting ride for you, hasn’t it? Last year, you were Blackstar’s sixth-place rising star, but tonight, you actually managed what every other fighter in the tournament could only dream of. How does that feel?

**SK:** It’s unbelievable, Dennis. I don’t think I would have even dared to think about it all through the matches, because it would be like jinxing it. Every time I went on those arena floors, I just kept telling myself it was just another fight.

**DS:** Did that help take the edge off?

**SK:** Oh, hell, no, but that didn’t stop me from trying! (laughs)

**DS:** (chuckles) So, out there in the factory tonight, you squared off against Omar “Demolition” Durand, the very man who took out last year’s Champion less than twenty-four hours before. He had speed and technology on his side, plus a familiarity of the terrain. What were your thoughts going in there?

**SK:** Well, when you’re out there, Dennis, you know there’s just no accounting for all the variables, and all you have is faith in yourself and your own abilities. Omar was tough opposition, but I had the mass and the armor to hold up while he had the speed and reach. Either way you look at it, it was a tough fight.

**DS:** As tough as your first bout this tournament? Kyle DePaik really had you on the ropes there for a bit.

**SK:** (laughs) Maybe not that tough! It’s hard enough fighting a dedicated fighter on even footing, but fighting gravity on top of it, well. Let’s just say I know exactly what was going through Omar’s mind when he fell off that bridge.

**DS:** Yes, by all accounts, Durand took a heck of a fall there. I understand you contacted him immediately after that.

**SK:** Well, yeah. I mean, he could have easily been killed in that fall, and I didn’t really want to win a championship that way. Heck, I like the guy! He was nothing but cordial, congratulating me for every good shot, even as we chased each other through the Factory. When my last shot knocked him off that bridge in the end, I truly felt sorry about it. So, when he landed and the game buzzer sounded, I had to make sure he was okay. I commed him, and said, “Hey, Durand, you need any help?” He just laughed and said, “Whoops! I forgot to duck!” (laughs) You know, Dennis, you’d have to be pretty rabid and heartless to go headhunting during the Games. There’s a person in each of those machines after all.

**DS:** Perhaps, but not everyone seems to feel that way. DePaik, for example, and of course, there was the rivalry between Tyler and Strauss--

**SK:** Ah, now you see, Dennis, that’s exactly my point. You take Tyler or Strauss, and you see how some folks in the sport just forget that it really is just a sport. If you take the grudge off the field, you basically court disaster. I, for one, would have no problem downing PPCs at Valhalla right alongside Omar Durand and Roland Ghost Bear—politics of stables and championships be damned—but those two couldn’t enter a room together without turning it into a crossfire. It’s that kind of thing that got us all the riots in ‘62, and that kind of rivalry nearly doused the whole planet in flames during the Jihad. Like Omar said about it yesterday, you’d think by now folks would know better.

**DS:** But if they hadn’t caused that riot last night, you would have had to face one of them in the semi-finals. Some folks are suggesting that you really lucked out this year with that turn of events, earning a bye in the semi-finals while Durand had to get past Ghost Bear.

**SK:** Oh, I know what they’re saying, Dennis. Fact is, I would gladly have taken on David or Olivia if they’d only managed to get there. What fighter wouldn’t? And I would’ve beat them, too, I’m quite sure. Of course, now I suppose we’d have to settle that claim in a challenge match someday...

**DS:** (chuckles) Probably right. So, Shayne, I guess the big question for you is, “Now what?” You’ve just won your first Championship at twenty-seven. The purse and the publicity is enough for one to live off of for at least a decade, and the rumors have been flying that your husband and agent, Bernard Kirkpatrick, has plans to start up a stable of your own someday.

**SK:** (laughs) Oh, I’d say you shouldn’t listen to every rumor you hear, Dennis. I’m still Team Blackstar all the way, and I think Bernie and Jerry would both flip if I tried anything like that right now. For the time being, I’m just going to hold onto the title for as long as I can.

**DS:** Well said, and we look forward to seeing you do just that, Shayne. We're about out of time here, but before we go, is there anything you'd like to say for the viewers at home?

**SK:** Oh, yeah! I'd just like to say, for all my fans, that I didn't win this Championship just for myself and my husband. I won it for my team, the Blackstar Stables, for my stablemaster, Mr. Jeremiah Daelun, and for my brother, Dominic Hasseldorf—I love you bud! But even more than all these guys, I have to dedicate this victory to the one and only Kai Allard-Liao, my hero and idol since I was about ten! I know it sounds corny, but the galaxy just ain't the same without him!

Thanks for joining us, fight fans, for Solaris Broadcasting's Recap of the Grand Tournament for 3132. As always, I'm Dennis Stanzio, with my lovely and talented guest, Shayne Kirkpatrick, and until next time, we are out of here!

### Towne Log

+ Awwww! She's married!?! How does a major piece of information like THAT go unmentioned until now??  
:- BNCFanatic

+ ROFLMAO!!!! You didn't know!? What, you had some fantasies about her? Look out everyone! BNC's in L-O-V-E!!!! With a MARRIED woman, no less! Oh, God! I think I laughed so hard my ribs are hurting....  
:- TVBluFist

+ Ah, shoot! I shoulda known better anyway; no way someone that hot is single, even on Solaris...  
:- BNCFanatic

+ Don't feel so bad, Fanatic. You know how it is with celebs. Sure, they've been married for six years now, but that only increases the odds they'll split up in a few months or so...  
:- LevEOsa

+ He's her agent! Actually, isn't that brother of hers a mercenary? It's not like she's married for the money...  
:- GropoM

+ Nah, I think he's nobility. But, anyway, who wants to lay odds that she'll hold onto the title again next year, eh? Or that she really does make a break with Blackstar and strikes out on her own. Wouldn't be the first champion to go on and start up a new stable, after all.  
:- KevvyCone

## Memorial to "Little Luthien" Victims Dedicated

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02/03/3134

KORDAVA – In a solemn ceremony marked by a sounding of bells, the lowering of nine white flags, and the reading of nine names now permanently engraved in a simple marble column, residents of Kordava Bay's "Little Luthien" community paid their final respects to the victims of the so-called "Kappa", a serial killer whose reign of terror began back in February. Knight-Errant Kristoff Erbe and the Towne Bureau of Investigations' Inspector Frances Becca joined Kordava police chief Geoffrey Flecher, mayor Stewart Harmand, and community leader Yoshiro Kalawaska in the two-hour dedication service just inside the marina where eight women were found slain, allegedly by Shu Imashinigi, a local fisherman who some believe was driven mad by the loss of his wife and daughter.

"They were our children, our friends, our family," said Kalawaska, the Kordava businessman who donated the memorial now rising just inside the marina gates, where hundreds of visitors to the maritime community pass through every day. "May their spirits remind us all what it means to be a community, even as we carry on without them."

Allegedly taking the name of the "Kappa", a mythical Japanese water demon often likened to vampires of European myth, officials believe that the so-called "Little Luthien" killer claimed the lives of eight women ranging in age from 21 to 31, in a series of ritualistic slaying, leaving their bodies, nude and mutilated, in the waters of Kordava's harbor while taunting authorities and setting off a wave of superstitious panic among the city's community of Draconis Combine descendants.

Today, the names of all nine victims of the killer—eight women and one police officer—now appear etched and enameled into the surface of the simple white marble pillar, in the order in which they were slain. Alicia Lang, the first and youngest of the victims, appears near the top of the two meter column, followed by Takira Ikashi, Carmen Luego, Silva Agano, Shari Nakohama, Reiko Urikashi, Nariko Chantrea, and Mari Ingersoll. William Mousa, the Kordava officer who was mortally wounded in the final shootout to bring the alleged killer, Shu Imashinigi, to justice, appears beneath the names of all eight women.

Kaori Atariya, the nineteen year old retail worker who authorities say escaped from Imashinigi before he could make her his ninth victim, was also present at the dedication, and broke down in tears as the names of all victims was recited by Sir Erbe at the close of the ceremonies.

### Towne Log

+ I love how the media always says "allegedly" in cases like this! They saw the man shoot a cop, they chased him down, cuffed him, and searched his boat to find body parts everywhere, but he may JUST be innocent after all!  
:- WetWillie

+ Last I checked, it was still "innocent until proven guilty", WW  
:- Vesuvius

+ He SHOT a COP! His boat was filled with BODY PARTS! They don't "prove" any guiltier than that!  
:- WetWillie

+ I'm just glad Kalawaska didn't grandstand too much this time. They way he's bashed the local authorities and police, you'd think we was a front man for the Dragon's Fury or something.  
:- Lkool

+ You know, just because he was looking out for the Combine community when nobody else was, doesn't make Mr. Kalawaska an insurgent, LK. I'd have expected a remark like that from WW.  
:- Draco041

## Oscar: More Mercenaries for Towne

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02/04/3134

PORT HOWARD – In light of the Stormhammers’ attack months ago, and in response to requests for greater planet-wide security, Governor Renee Oscar announced today that her administration would expand the size of the current mercenary defense forces already working here under contract. The announcement comes only days after a spokesman for the governor’s office vehemently denied plans to call upon additional professional soldiers for planetary defense, citing the presence of elements from both the elite 21st Centauri Lancers and The Republic’s Triarii Protectors—both under the nominal authority of Towne native Knight-Errant Kristoff Erbe—more than complemented the sizeable conventional militia already on hand to protect vital population centers and industrial positions across the world.

“I have discussed this matter of planetary security with my staff, with Sir Erbe, and with Captain [Chak] Rasbid of the Centauri Lancers already on-world,” Oscar told a select group of reporter during an afternoon press conference at the capital building. “They and I have concurred that the requisitioning of additional supporting military assets would indeed be the most prudent course of action for ensuring the stability and neutrality of Towne during the current crisis.”

Asked if the decision to expand mercenary forces on Towne hinted at impending or suspected military action in the near future, Oscar said only that there was “no immediate cause for alarm” with regard to the planet’s safety. Residents in the capital city of Port Howard today remain shaken by a recent raid launched against the local hyperpulse generator compound by elements of the pro-Steiner Stormhammers faction, who managed to briefly overrun elements of the Triarii Protectors, the Centauri Lancers, and Towne militia units that were called up for city defense.

Since then, units from all three commands have remained on station in and around the capital around the clock, leaving many other vital industrial sites and population centers virtually unprotected. In recent days, many planetary senators—mostly from the semi-isolationist Towne-First party that swept last year’s elections—have criticized Oscar’s administration for what they have termed a “gross imbalance” of security forces planet-wide.

### Towne Log

+ Funny. Oscar’s was in super political-ese form today, wasn’t she? “requisitioning”? “supporting military assets”? “most prudent course of action”? Why doesn’t she just admit the government fears another attack and we need more mercs?

:- WetWillie

+ Probably to prevent a panic, perhaps? By all accounts, between the Stormhammer’s attack and over a month or so of steady rain, the mood in Port Howard really sucks. I hear some statisticians have even found a shocking increase in the suicide rates over the last four weeks alone in the region. A panic because another attack force is coming in is all they need right now.

:- Chungabunga

+ What I heard is that the Triarii Protectors are being called elsewhere, possibly even the Liao border. According to some scattered reports, Cappie troops have already crossed over in Prefecture V. If true, a mere raid or two on an interior world on a fairly unthreatened front like ours just doesn’t rate against keeping back the evil green menace.

:- Synnik

+ When in doubt, blame the Capellans, is that it, Synnik? Ever stop and wonder if it may just be the FedRats who are responsible for the universe going to hell in a handbasket now? Fragging bigot!

:- XSOkay

+ Keep it civil guys, will you? I heard the same rumors myself, Syn, but I guess we’ll have to just wait and see if the Protectors will be moving out any time soon to be sure...

:- KevvyCone



## Touring the Stars with Bertram Habeas

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02/05/3134

*We began on Terra, millions of years ago. Today, mankind stretches out among the stars of the Milky Way, touching thousands of worlds, as far from our home as Clan space, more than 2,000 light-years distant. Yet who are we, really? What have we become in our relentless push outward and onward? I'm Bertram Habeas, and tonight, let's find the answers to these and many other fascinating questions together, as we tour the stars!*

### Volume XXXX: Faith, Tradition, and Fate—the Ways of the Nova Cat

And in her vision the wolf howled,  
 But the nova cat paced steadily on,  
 Undisturbed by the petty battles  
 Others fought, trying to cage it within the bars of  
 Thoughtless sameness. The nova cat gazed  
 Straight ahead, its heart and mind devoted to  
 The Ways of Seeing, devoted to a more perfect life.

—*The Remembrance* (Clan Nova Cat), Passage 50, 5:26-32

The innovations first enacted by Khan Sandra Rosse founded what today is widely known as Nova Cat mysticism. Lacking a god—unless one is presumptuous enough to attach divinity to the whims of fate—this system of beliefs has become a religion, of a sense, that bears no true name, yet seems to borrow from the faiths of more ancient cultures on Terra. The cornerstone to this belief comes from the Ways of Seeing, a collected journal of Anna and Sandra Rosse's mystical experiences, as well as a guide to performing both personal and communal rituals. Over the decades following the Clan's foundation, belief in these rituals has grown to the point where an overwhelming majority of the Nova Cats' warrior caste, and even the civilian classes, profess their unswerving devotion to the Ways.

Yet, to presume this Clan favors the path of mysticism to the Way of the Clans, even after their Abjuration in 3060, would be a grave error. The Nova Cats still invoke the familiar practices of the various Clan Trials to resolve disputes and political debates. They still raise their best and brightest in the iron wombs, and the Bloodname represents one of the ultimate achievements for the warrior class.

The Ways of Seeing, however, add a deeper sense of culture to their militaristic lifestyle, particularly among the warrior caste. It was for the warriors originally, after all, that the Rite of the Vision was developed, and for the warriors only that the Oathmaster Grand Melee, the Chronicle of Battles, and the Ritual of Battle, are intended.

The Rite of the Vision, a core practice of the Nova Cat faith, is the ceremony in which the individual Nova Cat may glimpse a vision of the future that will help guide the Clan to glory. Initially regarded as a warriors-only rite, in the aftermath of the Abjuration, the conflicts that followed, and the dark years of the Jihad itself there was a profound expansion of the Rite to include the lower castes. Today, merchants have been known to seek visions to guide them in business dealings, scientists consult the flames for a glimpse of new possibilities and inspiration, and even the members of the technician and labor castes occasionally undertake the Rite in an effort to guide their path and better help their Clan.

The ritual itself is simple in approach. After a period of fasting, lasting anywhere from three days to a week, the body is brought to its limits of physical endurance. At the end of this time, the Nova Cat will sit before a bonfire with his accumulated vineers—trophies or other small mementos of a past battle or other career-defining moment.

As the Nova Cat stares into the flames, considering his past and his future, he feeds the flame with his vineers, most typically under the guidance of the Oathmaster (or, in the case of lesser castes, an approved lower-caste deputy of the Oathmaster). The goal of this exercise is, of course, to see a vision of the future in the flames, a vision that is then interpreted by the presiding Oathmaster.

The sacredness of the rite is so great that there has never been a known, documented case of any Nova Cat lying about the results, if any. No shame is typically attached to failing to receive a vision, in part because the sacrifice of vineers bestows glory to the Nova Cat willing to do so. At the same time, no Nova Cat is barred from attempting to seek multiple visions (though the practice of sacrificing vineers, which are collected during many career-defining events throughout one's life, does put a practical limit on such attempts). It is said, in fact, that Santin West, the Khan who would lead his Clan to its defection and sanctuary in the Draconis Combine during the Clan Wars, sought as many as five visions in his lifetime, the most ever attempted under the guidance of an Oathmaster. His visions, according to the Nova Cat Remembrance, led to the Clan's change in allegiance and inevitable relocation to the Inner Sphere.

Other forms of the Rite of the Vision do exist, however, on a more personal level. Used by warriors or lesser castemen who lack the vineers or cannot obtain the services of a recognized Oathmaster, these more private rites follow much the same routine, but the visions they yield often produce much more cryptic results—if any come at all—and are open to the interpretations of the vision seeker alone.

The Oathmaster Grand Melee, another vital part of Nova Cat mysticism, is the Clan's yearly Trial to decide who will hold the title of the Clan's Oathmaster. Held on the longest day of the year in the capital city of New Barcella, on Irece, the Oathmaster Grand Melee begins like a Grand Melee fought during a Trial of Bloodright. It is open to everyone in the Clan, regardless of caste, and is

held in a massive Circle of Equals, where participants fight unaugmented (without weapons). The winner from this Circle of Equals then must prove his or her knowledge of Clan law, the Nova Cat Remembrance, and the traditions of the Clan, in the Forum of Law. If the winner of the Circle of Equals fails the test in the Forum of Law, then the last opponent he or she defeated in the Circle receives a chance in the Forum. If this second individual fails in the Forum, however, the standing Oathmaster retains the post for another year.

The Chronicle of Battles and the Ritual of Battle are variants on the same theme, and remain exclusively linked to the warrior caste. In both cases, warriors of a given unit (for the Ritual, a unit about to see combat) meet at a designated location at local midnight, outdoors if possible. There, before a roaring bonfire, and to the twenty beats of a ceremonial drum (one beat for each Clan founded by Nicholas Kerensky), the warriors, clad in ceremonial leathers, recount tales of past battles and victories of the Nova Cat Clan. The tales are told in ritualistic fashion, in the same oral tradition as the Remembrance, and their telling is intended to inspire and unite the gathered warriors.

The Ritual of Battle differs from this standard by including elements of the Rite of the Vision, with warriors fasting for days beforehand in the hopes of seeing a vision in the flames. In addition, the Ritual of Battle also incorporates an elaborate dance around the bonfire, on a loud bandstand that acts as a counterpoint to the rhythm of the twenty drumbeats, and even the presence of a live nova cat, which is seen as a focus of bonding for the gathered warriors. In rare instances, the ring of warriors undertaking the Ritual of Battle is further surrounded by a ring of BattleMechs, which provide a striking, larger-than-life backdrop for the ceremony.

Ironically, despite their formal exile from their fellow Clans, the Nova Cats remain as deeply devoted to the ways of the Clan as they are to their Ways of Seeing. Indeed, they even seem to celebrate the various Clanwide holidays, such as Liberation Day (26 May, commemorating the day the last of the Pentagon worlds fell to the Clans), and Founding Day (24 August, commemorating when the Exodus fleet first reached the Pentagon worlds in 2786), more fervently than their former brethren do. In addition, the Nova Cats also recognize Homecoming Day (1 May), commemorating their final return to the Inner Sphere as a people, rather than an invader. A period of solemn reflection and thanksgiving, Homecoming Day perhaps embodies the greatest nobility of this Clan, as well as its devotion to the ongoing cause of living beside the peoples of the Inner Sphere in peace.

In part three, our tour of the Nova Cat Clan will look at the Abjuration of this noble Clan, and its survival through some of the darkest years since Stefan Amaris. I'm Bertram Habeas.

## Official: FedSuns Derailing Aid Negotiations

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02/10/3134

GENEVA, TERRA – Negotiators on both sides of the bargaining table, representing House Davion’s Federated Suns and The Republic of the Sphere walked away once more with no formal aid treaty in the ongoing economic and social crises spawned by the loss of hyperpulse communications. Republican officials close to the talks claim the breakdown of talks today are the most serious to date, hinting that the successful conclusion of the Geneva conference is now more unlikely than ever, and saying that the FedSuns is attempting to use the current crisis as a pretext for annexing worlds originally ceded to the Republic over six decades ago.

“[The Davion negotiators] have made increasingly impossible demands of The Republic over the past few days, including the concession of military garrisons within two jumps of Federated Suns interests to Davion ‘peacekeepers,’” said one Republican official, speaking to INN on the condition of anonymity. “Clearly, demands such as these amount to blackmail, and is an unacceptable way to approach discussions aimed at formulating balanced and mutually beneficial aid throughout the current [HPG] crisis.”

None of the diplomats from the FedSuns side of the table could be reached for comment today, and calls to the Davion embassy in London went unanswered. The breakdown casts a pall over Geneva, however, where talks were opened as part of Exarch Damien Redburn’s widening diplomatic policy, aimed at securing aid and official guarantees of non-aggression from the various nations of the Inner Sphere while the communications crisis continues. The loss of most of the HPG network in August of last year has all but crippled the flow of information and devastated economies throughout the Inner Sphere, and has prompted the formation of renegade military and political factions in at least four Republican prefectures and a host of neighboring territories.

Just last week, when talks began, Lord Kieran Rand-Davion, leader of the FedSuns delegation, had promised that the Suns’ position during the talks would be “to ensure the most profitable and sustainable aid package for both our peoples”, but today, a much more bleak outlook on the proposed aid program has given way to the practical realities of cross-border security and trade arrangements. Indeed, one of the first obstacles to the package emerged soon after Redburn signed the non-aggression pact with Clan Sea Fox last week, which also included a clause permitting the mercantile Clan free travel and “most-favored” trading status with The Republic, an agreement that also drew harsh criticism from the Lyran consulate in Bonn.

“We don’t believe that negotiations have ended, of course,” assures one Republican official. “However, the likelihood of resolving these critical issues does appear remote at this time.”

### Towne Log

+ It’s a sad day when a Clan negotiator can make a bargain better than some Davvie warmongers, eh?  
:- Synnik

+ Oh, tell me about it! Then again, should we really be surprised? The Feddies know The Republic’s basically stuck with its proverbial pants down. They’re trying to secure this “buffer zone” (a fun buzz word, if ever there was one for a sanctioned occupation!) to keep the peace, alright—a Davion peace!  
:- Draco041

+ Hey, wow, Draco! That had to be the most rational anti-Davionist statement I’ve seen you make in ... ever!  
:- GreasL

+ Ah, malf off, will you, GreasL? Everyone here knows how I feel about the FedSinners, and here they can see these guy’s true colors! I hardly need to underscore the fact that Davion just wants to get through some hard negotiations what the CapCon seeks to gain through force.  
:- Draco041

+ There’s a difference here, you know, guys. Sun-Tzu was coerced into giving up the worlds we now call Prefectures VI and V. The Davions willingly ceded those that these FedScum want to take back in the name of “peacekeeping”. Who’re the real hypocrites here?  
:- XSOkay

## Touring the Stars with Bertram Habeas

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02/12/3134

*We began on Terra, millions of years ago. Today, mankind stretches out among the stars of the Milky Way, touching thousands of worlds, as far from our home as Clan space, more than 2,000 light-years distant. Yet who are we, really? What have we become in our relentless push outward and onward? I'm Bertram Habeas, and tonight, let's find the answers to these and many other fascinating questions together, as we tour the stars!*

### Volume XLI: Destiny Before Honor—The Nova Cats' Darkest Years

Destiny. Fate. If they exist, is it theoretically possible to know the path laid out before you? But then, if your future is already written, what good would knowing such information beforehand do? These are the kinds of questions philosophers have argued about since the dawning of human consciousness. However, in the case of the Clans—and indeed, many Inner Sphere peoples—the answer is simple: destiny is not written in stone; humankind has the ability to forge its own fate. Even the Nova Cats are not immune to this simple vanity, though their belief in visions might suggest otherwise. In fact, their belief in the Ways of Seeing treads an interesting line between accepting fate and the belief that destiny can be altered. For the Nova Cats, the Rite of Seeing presents but one possible future—the most likely at the time, perhaps. It is then up to the seer to act on their visions, either to change them, or to realize them.

Even in the time of Khan Sandra Rosse, it is said that the future invasion of the Inner Sphere was foretold. Rosse allegedly saw “the cat and the jaguar sharing a kill, under the watchful eye of the wolf,” a reference that later generations ascribed to the invasion itself, when Clans Nova Cat and Smoke Jaguar would share a corridor under the command of ilKhan Ulric Kerensky of Clan Wolf.

Centuries later, when the Clans grew divided along the Warden/Crusader issue, the Nova Cats initially balked at taking up the Crusader side, believing that only a Nova Cat ilKhan could lead such an effort. But, like so many other Clans, the “evidence” of a danger presented when a ComStar JumpShip suddenly appeared in Clan space proved compelling enough to change their minds. Interestingly enough, the Cats' Oathmaster at the time, Biccon Winters, predicted a disaster even then. In her vision, the wolf, the cat, the falcon, and the bear sliced easily through the Inner Sphere, trailing mists of white that eventually transformed into a roiling cloud that consumed Kerensky's children. Instead of heeding the warnings, however, the Nova Cat Khans read into the vision what they wished to read: the swift conquest of the Spheroids by Nova Cat forces, and disregarded the ambiguous outcome. Even during the Invasion, when Winters, on a chance meeting with ComStar's Precentor-Martial Anastasius Focht, went into a frenzy and declared him the “white mist come to destroy” her Clan, the Cat war leaders ignored the signs. In the hindsight of the mid 3050s, after the Clans' defeat at Tukayyid, many of the Nova Cats considered Biccon Winters' vision a foretelling of their defeat in that battle. Today, however, this ominous portent has been reinterpreted.

In many ways, Oathmaster [Biccon] Winters' vision runs analogous to the initial Inner Sphere invasion, of course. The “white mist,” obviously, could have represented ComStar, which at first aided the Clans by administering Clan-conquered worlds, only to turn on the Clans and the Inner Sphere during Operation Scorpion. But the Tukayyid truce did not destroy the Clans, per se, and Operation Scorpion came nowhere near destroying Kerensky's children.

Could it have been a portent, then, of the Nova Cats' abjuration, when the Inner Sphere reunited the Star League and targeted their nemesis, Clan Smoke Jaguars, for annihilation? This has been proposed, but hardly fits, as ComStar was but a small part of the Inner Sphere coalition there, and again the “destruction” is mitigated by the fact that the Cats and other Clans survived the chaos fairly well in the aftermath.

What, then, was the “white mist,” and how did it consume the Clans? Well, now it seems the event foretold in Winters' vision may have actually been the Jihad. Word of Blake, still clinging to the white colors of pre-reformed ComStar, swirled around the entire Inner Sphere, even in the Clan occupation zones, their war one of terror and chaos. In the midst of this total war, the homeworlds suffered some unimaginable upheaval that actually sundered all connection between them and the invading and encroaching Clans, leaving them marooned within the Inner Sphere.

—Dr. Lorenzo Torres, Professor of History, University of Thorin.

The total eradication of the invading Clans still has not happened, but the severing of ties to the homelands has effectively transformed the invaders left among us into states of the Inner Sphere. From the Nova Cats' point of view, some Clans have transformed even further, in fact. The Diamond Sharks, for instance, have become the Sea Foxes again, a gypsy Clan roving the Sphere for profit. The Ghost Bears have fused their Clan ways with those of the Spheroid populations, even going so far as to accept an often-subservient position in the Rasalhague Dominion. For the Cats, their own Clan has become bereft of worlds to call its own, limited instead to a “reservation” within the heart of the Dragon. Could this have been the vision of death Winters actually saw so long ago? Perhaps. Then again, perhaps not. Perhaps this vision instead refers to an as-yet-unseen calamity, a greater threat still to come. Perhaps it was a disaster already averted somehow. Or perhaps—just perhaps—it is simply the product of an overactive imagination.

In truth, the Nova Cats' fortunes both rose and fell with the invasion of the Inner Sphere. Though they were defeated at Tukayyid, forced for years to fend off the Smoke Jaguars, eternal enemies who shared an occupation zone with them, they would play a vital role in the Inner Sphere's effort to end the Clan Wars. From there, (once more guided by visions) they would join with the Inner Sphere forces and their new Star League, to help smash the Jaguars and end the Invasion for all time. Yet rather than earn glory among their brethren, they would be Abjured, their people slaughtered in the homeworlds as the Clans fell upon one another in the name of greed and power. Their strength decimated, their lower castes nearly wiped out, the Cats

would withdraw to their sanctuary, under the wing of the Dragon, there encouraged to live their mystical way of life not in the pursuit of war, but in the hope of peace. Though war would continue to dog them even there, with the brief Ghost Bear–Combine War of the early 3060s, the Nova Cats had at last found some kind of home, and a future of promised prosperity. Their way of life had survived the trials of the past intact, even though they continued to struggle for reconciliation. To many Nova Cats, there was no way to go but up; a spirit of hope—or at least hopeful determination—had begun to glow anew.

And then came the Jihad.

Touched off, ironically enough, by the shattering of their own vision, the Word of Blake, ComStar’s reactionary splinter faction, engulfed the Inner Sphere in a holy war of nuclear weapons, neutron bombs, biochemical weapons, orbital strikes, and fanatical, rampaging armies of BattleMechs. Their assault spared no one, not even those who saw their own visions of peace and prosperity shattered with the death of the new Star League. The Nova Cats, every bit as stunned by the breakdown of the League they had sacrificed so much to join and preserve, were all but lost when Blakist assault forces struck at their enclaves on Itabiana. The strike attempted to fan the flames of the nascent Ghost Bear–Nova Cat feud, but the revelation of the truth came in time to avert a disaster.

In fact, Clan Nova Cat would be the first of Kerensky’s children to see the Jihad for the threat it was, and Nova Cat troops were quickly mobilized to assist the Inner Sphere in the struggle against the zealots. The war would take a heavy toll on the Cats, however; all but shattering the remains of their military forces, while Blakist counterstrikes nearly laid waste to the Combine worlds they called home. Yet, through it all, the Cats fought on. Fulfilling their own destiny, seeking their own honor on the battlegrounds of a hundred worlds, they defended peoples they once viewed as mortal enemies through the darkest years they ever knew.

Next week: The Nova Cats today, closer than ever to the Inner Sphere, yet still undeniably bound to their history and the traditions of the Clans. Come join us as the tour of the stars continues! I’m Bertram Habeas.

## The Hand of Starling – Anastasius Focht Still Alive, Jihad Architect?

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02/17/3134

**SHADOW:** Well met, Truth-seekers! Once again, the Hand of Starling returns to the airwaves with the show the Republic doesn't want you to see! I'm your host, Shadow. With me as always are my faithful sidekicks and fellow illuminati, Phantom and Wraith.

**PHANTOM:** Sidekicks?!

**WRAITH:** That's just wrong!

**SHADOW:** Hahah! Welcome, gents. No offenses intended. Before we begin today's topic: "Anastasius Focht: Dead Hero or Living Villain?" our question of the week here comes from a viewer using the on-line nick of Vesuvius. She (or he) says: "Shadow, I totally love your Hand of Starling show--" Why, thanks, Vesuvius!

**WRAITH:** Hey! Why're they only talking to you?

**PHANTOM:** Yeah! We do most of the talking on this bloody show!

**SHADOW:** Because I'm the host. Now be quiet, guys; it goes on. "However, I can't believe you haven't yet delved into the really big question on everyone's mind: Are the governments of the Inner Sphere in general (and the Federated Suns in particular) hiding evidence of intelligent aliens from the public? Are these aliens behind the HPG crisis, a prelude to some kind of alien invasion of the Inner Sphere that our leaders knew was coming all along?"

**WRAITH:** Ambitious guy, ain't he?

**SHADOW:** Yeah. Well, Vesuvius, this, of course, was one of the first and biggest stories that we ever broke here on Hand of Starling, but apparently the archives were lost in a mysterious file deletion along the way, which we are still investigating. The conclusion of our initial report was that there are, in fact, intelligent aliens, and they are among us already. Some of them are large, with superhuman strength, while others are small and quick, with superior eyesight, still others are both physically stronger and faster than the average human, as a compromise between their larger and smaller kin. Their culture is so bizarre that it has no direct analog to any other in history. Of course, these folks are known as... ALL: The Clans!

**SHADOW:** Right. Now, come on, Vesuvius! Get a life! All of this is kid stuff. Everyone knows the aliens are battling the remnants of the Wolverine Clan even as we speak, over control of the lost world of Atlantis, only known source of the mystical crystals of power!

**PHANTOM:** Hahaha! I love teasing the newbies!

**SHADOW:** Me too! Now! Onto the topic at hand: Anastasius Focht. According to history books, he was the valiant leader of ComStar's fearsome and elite—and today, allegedly quite extinct—Com Guards which battled the Clans on Strana Mechty and helped forge a new Star League to end the Clan threat for all time. Not enough nice things could be said about the guy with a record like that, but is it the truth? Or is the real story much, much more dark and twisted? In fact, today we question not only if Focht was or was not a saint, but we also find ourselves asking: Is he even dead? Gentlemen? Anastasius Focht, dead hero or living villain?

**PHANTOM:** Living villain! Definitely!

**WRAITH:** Villain? Yes. Living? I don't know; he'd be well over 170 by now, if he's who some are claiming him to be. I vote "dead villain".

**SHADOW:** Back it up, folks.

**PHANTOM:** Me first! Gents, I submit to you item one, the fact that Anastasius Focht was, in fact, not born under that name. In fact, until he showed up in ComStar's ranks, literally bursting on the scene as head of the then-supposedly-pacifist Order's massive Star League-vintage military, nobody even had a record of this man's existence. Even some declassified records from the Clan invasion era hinted that the Clanners didn't believe him to be who he claimed, and enough folks since have dug through the records to tell us his real identity was most likely that of Frederick Steiner, a failed would-be Archon who was sent off to get himself killed in the Fourth War.

**WRAITH:** Ah, tabiranth spit, Phantom! He was Anton Marik! Same song, different state.

**PHANTOM:** What?

**SHADOW:** Wraith, you get the floor next. Let Phantom speak.

**WRAITH:** Very well. This should be good...

**PHANTOM:** Hrmph! Moving along, the case is simple. Frederick Steiner is captured by Combine forces, who then make a deal with ComStar for Star League tech before the FedCom war machine can try to finish them off in 3039. ComStar, always the meddling force, sees an opportunity to take over the biggest of the Inner Sphere powers, and—recognizing Steiner’s military brilliance and his ambitions—they arm him to the teeth for the job. Of course, this eventually exposes the Com Guard to everyone, but Steiner has by now assumed the identity of Anastasius Focht—a name that roughly translates as “the warrior who will rise again”. Now, flash forward to the Clan invasion. ComStar pulls out an elite army to defeat the Clans, an army they intended to use against the FedCom when the time was right. But even in battle, ComStar and Focht realize that the time has come to bring the Inner Sphere to its knees....

**WRAITH:** I see where you’re going here, Phantom, and it meshes with my own theory on all but the identity of the man. Focht, by now, is a major partner in ComStar’s plans, which also allow for the possibility of failure. Operation Scorpion, the communications interdiction of the entire Inner Sphere, is carried out in hopes that chaos will shatter everyone, but when it doesn’t, Focht initiates a fall-back plan to keep ComStar in the Sphere’s good graces while preserving the integrity of the Order, choosing half its number to play the bad guys and establish a secondary power base elsewhere...

**SHADOW:** Word of Blake?

**WRAITH:** Exactly...

**PHANTOM:** Right. With the Word serving as an obvious scapegoat for a failed Scorpion, and his ComStar now seeming to be the heroes for defeating the Clans, Focht spends the next several years building alliances in the Inner Sphere. He’s not looking to conquer, any more, but to subvert nations to his will. Eventually, he brokers the formation of the Star League, with the Com Guards as the core of its de facto military force. Instantly, ComStar is at the heart of the new League, where it can do what it does best: control the Inner Sphere from within.

**WRAITH:** Meanwhile, plans are gradually underway to reintegrate the “splinter group” known as Word of Blake, by making them a member of the new Star League, even while maintaining the image of hostilities between them. These plans are set to reach fruition at the 3067 Whiting Conference, when--

**PHANTOM:** Bam!

**SHADOW:** So, the Jihad is actually the doing of Anastasius Focht?

**WRAITH:** Yes. Focht and his ComStar cronies made a critical mistake here. They trusted the Inner Sphere leaders to maintain the Star League they had fought for centuries to reclaim, using the ever-present Clan threat as an incentive from without and the Word of Blake as an incentive from within. The leaders of the Inner Sphere had too much free reign in the matter of choosing the next Star Lord and debating Star League policies, based on the assumption that they would never give it up again. When they voted to disband instead—

**PHANTOM:** It basically shattered decades of carefully laid plans. Once more denied his moment of victory, and feeling his advanced age—remember that he’s already well into his nineties by now—Focht needs to bring it all crashing down. He calls on his faithful minions in the Word of Blake, slipped into key systems with ComStar support, to strike at everyone even while his own operatives stage a much more successful variant of Operation Scorpion, practice having made perfect.

**SHADOW:** But why did the Word and ComStar battle it out—often to the death—throughout the Jihad, if it was all staged?

**PHANTOM:** Ah, because who was calling the shots for the Com Guard by then? Victor Steiner-Davion, a cult of personality if ever there was one, and just the kind of man to bring out the good and noble in everyone—or so the story goes. Victor’s leadership basically weeds out the Com Guards who’d never have bought into Focht’s plans anyway, and they wage a war of terror against each other. Those Com Guards loyal to Focht still, and their “Blakist” partners in crime, appear to destroy one another in nice, public battles, while the rest of their armies simply go to ground.

**WRAITH:** Once more, after it’s all over, ComStar emerges, lily white for having played the martyred heroes against their evil brethren, and the Inner Sphere is turned upside down. Enter Devlin Stone, a new variable to the equation, but one perhaps allowed to do what he does as a unifying influence with a long-range vision that can be incorporated into the great plan.

**SHADOW:** The great plan?

**PHANTOM:** The forced weakening of all Inner Sphere factions to a size manageable by the surviving forces of Focht’s army. Focht goes into seclusion, faking his death from old age, even though he now has access to Clan rejuvenetic treatments, and has quietly rebuilt his army ever since—remember those unfound secret ComStar bases? Can you say Ross 248, Luyten and others!—skimming from the profits of the supposedly pacified ComStar, even as the Inner Sphere powers watch over their HPGs. Immortal now, he can bide his time, waiting for the day when mankind is lulled into a sense of false security, then strike again...

**WRAITH:** At this point, we diverge, I think, Brother Shadow. I still hold that Focht was Anton Marik, who faked his death when the Wolf’s Dragoons came for him in 3016. I also think he’s quite dead, and that Stone could have stumbled upon this plan. That would explain the tie-in with the Knights of the Sphere...

**SHADOW:** Aha! Still, you're both suggesting, in either event, that the fall of the communications grid now are part of the overall plan initiated by Anastasius Focht, who actually led the Jihad?

**PHANTOM:** Well, yeah. Essentially that, Brother Shadow. Steiner or Focht, the motivation for universal conquest is there, as is the support base and the deviousness to carry it out. The Knights we talked about before, and they could easily be in league with this conspiracy to bring mankind to his knees again. Why, even now, Focht's hidden legacy of troops could surface anew to finally conquer what could not be conquered the last two times, as Operation Scorpion and the Jihad.

**WRAITH:** A masterful plan, on so many levels!

**SHADOW:** Indeed, but still unclear who's really pulling the strings. Focht? Stone? The Knights themselves? And is Focht really alive and lurking in the shadows? Or has he died, leaving a worthy successor, like Stone or Redburn, to carry on the work? Where does it all end? These are topics for another time, dear truth-seekers, but rest assured, the Hand of Starling will lift that veil of secrecy and expose the truth for all to see!



## Touring the Stars with Bertram Habeas

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02/19/3134

*We began on Terra, millions of years ago. Today, mankind stretches out among the stars of the Milky Way, touching thousands of worlds, as far from our home as Clan space, more than 2,000 light-years distant. Yet who are we, really? What have we become in our relentless push outward and onward? I'm Bertram Habeas, and tonight, let's find the answers to these and many other fascinating questions together, as we tour the stars!*

### Volume XLII: Warriors of Vision—The Nova Cat Clan Today

**Fact Sheet:** Clan Nova Cat (Irece Prefecture, Draconis Combine)

**Founding Year:** 2810 (initial Clan founding), 3060 (abjured from Clans, resettled in Irece region)

**Capital (City, World):** New Barcella, Irece (Draconis Combine)

**National Symbol:** A snarling, black nova cat, superimposed on a Cameron Star

**Location (Terra relative):** Central region, Combine border with Rasalhague Dominion, Coreward

**Total (Inhabited) Systems:** 13

**Estimated Population (3130):** 12,040,000,000

**Government:** Clan (Caste-driven, warrior-dominant hierarchy)

**Ruler:** Khan Jacali Nostra

**Dominant Language(s):** English (official)

**Dominant Religion(s):** See Volume XXXIX for an explanation of Nova Cat spirituality, Shinto and Buddhism also supported.

**Unit of Currency:** Ryu (1 ryu = 0.94 C-Bills)

New Barcella, capital city of the Nova Cat enclaves throughout the Draconis Combine's Irece Prefecture, is a magnificent metropolis that bears remarkably little resemblance to its origins. When first seized by the Nova Cat Clan in December of 3051, it was a minor township, albeit one with a spaceport to handle traffic from nearby LexaTech Industries (a now-obliterated BattleMech production facility). In the years following the Cats' occupation, however, the renamed and redeveloped city has become the administrative and spiritual heart of the Nova Cat Clan.

At the heart of the city, just north of the hundred-square-kilometer expanse of Rosse Spaceport, stands a high wall that encircles the Ways of Seeing Park. Hallowed ground to the Nova Cats, this Park includes a circular, waist-high hedge that forms a ring two hundred meters in diameter. The grounds are carefully kept, and none may tread upon the lush grasses here, for this is this place that hosts the annual Oathmaster Grand Melee.

On the northern end of the park, perhaps the most important structure in all of Nova Cat space rises almost three hundred meters into the pale blue sky. Designed in the style of a neo-Gothic cathedral, and ringed by eleven smaller, house-sized chapels, carved from local limestone, this structure is the home of the Nova Cats' genetic repository, the very heart of the Clan's eugenics program. Though damaged during the chaos of the Jihad and again during the Second Combine-Dominion War, this sacred place is the emotional heart of a Clan sundered from its roots. Though the administrative, military, and industrial might of the Nova Cats is also housed within the boundaries of New Barcella, it is what stands within the Ways of Seeing Park that truly identify this Clan.

The Nova Cat Clan endures, no mean feat for perhaps the most downtrodden of Kerensky's children. Its existence has seen the death of the Wolverine and Smoke Jaguar Clans, the absorption of the Widowmaker and Burrock Clans, and the loss of contact with all others, save perhaps the occasional Sea Fox, Wolf (in-Exile), or even Ghost Bear trading expedition. And through it all, this Clan of honor and spirit continues to survive.

Unlike many of the Clans that now dwell within the Inner Sphere, the Nova Cats claim no worlds unto themselves. Instead, their enclaves are scattered, their civilization surrounded by peoples who still live under the laws and the samurai codes of the Draconis Combine. Once, the Nova Cats were conquerors, but today their fate appears little different than that of the Azami, another unique culture absorbed into the bosom of the Dragon, permitted their own autonomy, but only at the sufferance of their Inner Sphere hosts.

To mistake this arrangement for that of the conqueror becoming the conquered, however, would be foolish indeed. The Combine has no more conquered the Nova Cats than it has the middle-eastern/northern African warrior culture of the Azami. Like those warriors, the Nova Cats earned the respect of the Combine's samurai culture on the field of battle, demonstrating a tenacity and a zeal that could not be crushed by the will of House Kurita. Though the events of the Second Combine-Dominion War did limit them to their enclave "reservations," the Nova Cats were never really conquered, as the Principality of Rasalhague once was. Instead, they have merely received sanctuary, in exchange for their courage and strength. Today, like the Azami, the Nova Cats' way of life is only scarcely challenged, their loyalty to themselves and the needs of the Combine that supports them is unquestioned. Even under the xenophobic precepts of Combine government and society at large, the Nova Cats remain unbowed.

No discussion of the Nova Cat resettlement, I think, would be complete without touching on the Combine-Dominion Wars of the early 3060s and late 3090s. Curiously enough, though both wars could be blamed on the machinations of the Black Dragons Society, an organization dedicated to an imperial Combine, the fighting invariably included, to a major degree, a brutal clash between the Ghost Bears of the Dominion and the Nova Cats of the Combine. In both conflicts, of course, the Nova Cats fought with fanatical fervor, knowing that their very existence depended upon it, and in both wars the Clan earned the respect of its Kuritan hosts.

But the subtleties of politics would warp the effects on the Nova Cats themselves between the two wars. Where the first War reaffirmed Kuritan faith in the Cats' abilities to hold the line against Ghost Bear aggression, the second actually saw the

return of Combine troops to the Irece Prefecture, curtailing to an extent the Cats' autonomy. The first Combine-Dominion War also saw the ascent of Minoru Kurita/Nova Cat as the Clan's Oathmaster, further strengthening the bond between Kurita and Nova Cat. But the second drove a wedge between the two camps again when Minoru's brother, Hohiro Kurita, found himself forced to keep Combine troops in place, effectively restoring Kurita supremacy in the Nova Cats' gifted domains.

—Dr. Lorenzo Torres, Professor of History, University of Thorin.

Though Combine forces now stand on the Dominion border throughout the Irece Prefecture, and though some elements of the Draconis Combine may still be hesitant to accept the presence of the Clan culture in their midst, after seventy years the Nova Cats are clearly here to stay, even if they are viewed as a separate, but equal, culture under the Dragon. Indeed, "separate, but equal," has even applied to the Nova Cat military, which stands guard over the Clan's scattered enclaves, outposts, factories, and training camps. These troops nominally answer to their Khan, not to the Coordinator, and bear no crest or colors approved by the Draconis Combine Mustered Soldiery. Their dedication is to the Nova Cat people first, and the Combine second, though because their goals often coincide when it comes to defense, House Kurita has at times been able to persuade some to act in support of their host state. In this way—and perhaps only in this way—the arrangement between the Draconis Combine and the Nova Cat Clan differs from that between the Combine and the Azami. It is a balance of cultures and politics, made possible through mutual respect and strength of will.

And this is how the Nova Cat survives today, still embracing the ways of the Clans, the rites of the Trials, the honor of the Bloodname, the reverence of the Kerenskys. Though their merchants now trade freely with those of the Combine and its neighbors, and though their Touman is but a fraction of its pre-Jihad strength, the Nova Cat survives. The Clan's story is a testament to faith and spirit, the courage to take chances, and the will to never give up when destiny beckons.

Next time, join us for a special six-part series on the realms beyond the Inner Sphere. The Periphery is the destination for our next tour. Won't you join us? I'm Bertram Habeas.

## Official: Delays May Doom Otherworld Theme Park

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02/23/3134

AGRAPUR – Officials close to Governor Nicholas Justine (Towne-First Party, Turan Province) told INN today that delays in the development of the Otherworld Theme Park, a project still in the planning stages since it was first proposed over a year ago by Aquilonia Futures Development (AFD) and Towne-Wide Entertainment, may be doomed by ongoing delays blamed at least in part on the increasingly defense-based planetary economic climate. The statement comes only months after more upbeat experts of the entertainment and tourist industries reported that the Turan Province, which includes the scenic Rerani Coast and the historic village of Uthan Hel, was the planet's hottest vacation spot for off-worlders eager to get away from the chaos created by the ongoing communications crisis.

"Unfortunately, times have changed in just the last few months," said Gladys Donnelly, spokesperson for senator AFD. "The recent fighting in Port Howard, for instance, has driven home the reality of the political and military crises surrounding our world and engulfing The Republic. Tourism has again begun to suffer and government subsidies are finding their way more and more in defense projects."

Otherworld, an ambitious theme park that was to feature rides, games, and a state-of-the-art 10,000-person capacity stadium for live performances and holoshows, was initially approved for development in a six square kilometer plot of the Sudera Woods, just south of the provincial capital of Agrapur. Even after the collapse of the HPG network, AFD and Towne-Wide managed to overcome numerous bureaucratic and financial hurdles, including an eleventh-hour compromise with the Towne Wildlife Federation that allowed the companies to begin work clearing away the blighted woodlands. Today, the grounds of what could have been the planet's largest and most exotic theme park ever are now little more than piles of loose earth, mulch, and discarded branches, overgrown with weeds, and cordoned off by a chain-link fence.

"At this time, the Agrapur Province remains dedicated to providing stability and safety for both its residents and its guests," says Emelio Gaiwan, a spokesman for Governor Justine. "We remain committed to supporting the development of the [Otherworld] project, but this year has not been as good for the economy as we had hoped, and planetary needs must always come before the local agenda. Is Otherworld dead? Certainly not, but fiscal and security realities have forced us to place some tourist projects on the back burner."

## Prefecture III to Elect New Senator

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02/26/3134

SUKADE, OZAWA – Finally acknowledging the loss of Kev Rosse to his “private agenda” with the newly-formed Spirit Cats military faction, officials at the Prefecture III capital on Ozawa announced today that the process to start an emergency election for a new Prefecture senator has been approved; part of the delay, of course, is due to the ‘pony express’ system used to inform most of the likely candidates. With the Prefecture-wide election now scheduled to commence next month, candidates are already lining up for a shot at the empty seat in the Republican senate.

Ironically, the vote received overwhelming support at the emergency council session held in Sukade, the Prefecture capital city, despite its location on Ozawa, a world even now patrolled by Rosse’s Spirit Cat troops. The Spirit Cats captured Ozawa this past February in a lightning blitzkrieg against Bannson Universal security forces, who had claimed dominion since the departure of Duchess Katana Tormark and her Dragon’s Fury faction. Ever since the conquest, the Cats have continued to make good on the promises made by their local commander, Star Colonel Rikkard Nova Cat, not to interfere with local government and administration, a promise that apparently holds true for the world’s role as the Prefecture capital as well.

“Not only do we support this move,” said Nova Cat, “but I believe I speak for [Galaxy Commander Rosse] when I say we embrace it. That the path we tread upon may no longer be one in the same is a tragedy, yet it is heartening to know that The Republic can find its own way even as we continue to seek our own.”

Anticipating the approval of emergency elections from Sukade, nobility from all around Prefecture III have thrown their hats in the proverbial ring for a shot at the vacant senate seat, a remarkable sign of faith in The Republican government despite the ongoing communications crisis. Among the most noteworthy candidates on the ballot so far are Lord Jinjiro Worthington, and Lady Rene Oscar, governors of Cylene and Towne respectively, as well as Baron Montel Rafaello, ruler of the Juniper continent on Mallory’s World.

At this stage, it remains too early to tell who among so many candidates will be expected to run, much less claim the senate seat, but the decision to permit the emergency election—the first held since the untimely death of Senator Noah Fletcher in office back in 3112—finally resolves the question of how long Prefecture III will go without full representation in the Republican Senate.

## Touring the Stars with Bertram Habeas

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02/26/3134

*We began on Terra, millions of years ago. Today, mankind stretches out among the stars of the Milky Way, touching thousands of worlds, as far from our home as Clan space, more than 2,000 light-years distant. Yet who are we, really? What have we become in our relentless push outward and onward? I'm Bertram Habeas, and tonight, let's find the answers to these and many other fascinating questions together, as we tour the stars!*

### Volume XLIII: Living on the Edge—Origins of the Periphery

The Periphery. Few in the Inner Sphere like to think about it. Fewer still ever want to visit it. To them, the very term is a catchall for the dregs of humanity, a haven for pirates and lost mercenary commands, an untamed expanse of stars and worlds filled with untold dangers. To these people, one region of the Periphery is no better than any other, and even some otherwise astute historians often point to these regions as the cause—and the ultimate result—of mankind's follies.

Of course, like many popular notions, this one, too, is rooted in overgeneralizations and plain ignorance. The nations and worlds of the Periphery are a diverse lot, perhaps even more diverse than those of the Inner Sphere. They range from the political and industrial powerhouse of the Magistracy of Canopus, to the Clan-Periphery hybrid state of the Raven Alliance, to the fragmented, frontier-like nation-worlds of the Barrens. While most of the rumors of pirates and privateers roaming the Periphery may be true, they are no less true within the boundaries of the Inner Sphere. What truly unifies the Periphery is not its level of barbarism; it is the collective spirit of freedom embraced by its people, a spirit that has kept the mighty empires of the Great Houses from swallowing up these fringe regions for centuries.

It's strange to think of the Periphery as part of the Inner Sphere. For so long, we've prided ourselves on not being any such thing. To a lot of people out here, "Inner Sphere" still means the Great Houses that made the Star League, imposed it on us, and then broke it when they got tired of it. Wherever they run things, an ordinary person can't call her soul her own. Or so thought plenty of our forebears, who struck out for the Periphery in search of freedom from rules and regulations and bureaucrats.

—Naomi Centrella, Canopian Military Coordinator, *The Inner Sphere*, ComStar Press, 3063

By its very nature, there is no historically defined foundation date for the Periphery. Instead, what historians refer to when discussing the formation of the modern Periphery is the settling of a few key worlds, which would then rise to become some of the most powerful nations in the region. Apollo, Alpheratz, Canopus, Taurus—these worlds would become the capitals of new states. Their alliances formed—one way or another—from the same spirit of independence that created the Successor States, in reaction to the excesses of the Terran Alliance, but driven further outward as their founders disagreed with even these nascent governments.

The Taurian Concordat, for instance, began when Samantha Calderon, inheritor of a substantial fortune from a husband killed during the Outer Reaches Rebellion against the Alliance, financed and led an expedition to the Hyades star cluster. Over the years that followed, the new world would prove so resource rich that other colonies would follow, creating a small league of colonies known as the Taurian Homeworlds, until the Taurian Concordat was formally founded in 2335.

By way of comparison, the Rim Worlds Republic, centered on Apollo, was founded by a band of freebooters led by Hector Worthington Rowe, an Alexandria native who harbored a deep grudge against the Terran Alliance, and who personally launched a renegade war with the Alliance even as its power waned. Fleeing coreward, and resorting to piracy to sustain his forces' supplies and manpower, he would eventually settle on Apollo, to found a nation created along his own warped interpretation of Plato's Republic.

By contrast, the Magistracy of Canopus and the Outworlds Alliance, nations formed in reaction to the Age of War, were both created by fugitives and deserters from the nearest major powers. In the case of the Magistracy, its founder, Konstance Centrella, led numerous dissidents and fellow soldiers from the Free Worlds League away from that realm to found a place where like-minded dissidents could gather. Meanwhile, the Alliance was forged when Julius Avellar, a prominent FedSuns naval officer, disgusted by the excesses during the Age of War, retreated to his own sanctuary, and became a reluctant leader when his critical denouncement of war and military adventurism attracted a following that included the antitechnology Ommiss philosophical sect.

Thus did the four great realms of the Periphery form, to escape the excesses and the restrictive governments of the rest of the Inner Sphere. There were hundreds of other colonies in these days, of course, but either through fortune, or wisdom, these four centers of power grew over the years that followed, even as the six mighty powers closer to Terra turned their energies upon one another. The Age of War allowed most of these smaller fringe realms to expand, growing in territory, prosperity, and stability, until each came to possess the strength of a smaller Great House. Defense needs, made apparent by the infighting throughout the Inner Sphere, led all of them to create defense forces, increasing their appeal to nearby, unaffiliated worlds, which then joined them in turn. Of course, this prosperity only lasted as long as they posed no threat to the nearest Great House, which actually made the end of the Age of War and Ian Cameron's efforts to forge a new humanity-unifying mega-alliance a foreboding omen.

Who is to say what would have happened next if Cameron hadn't come along? It took his efforts at diplomacy to help bring an end to the Age of War, and it was his diplomatic savvy that paved the way for the formation of the Star League, which mainly focused on the six Great Houses. Meanwhile, the Periphery states were out there, growing. The Piranha Principle—a suggestion

that the Periphery powers, like a school of piranha, would be too difficult to overpower, because doing so invited attack from other corners—no longer applied when all the Great Houses became friends.

Thus, when the League formed, and First Lord Cameron officially declared an end to inter-House warfare, the Inner Sphere may have celebrated, but those living beyond the boundaries of the Great Houses' influence knew better.

There are many different reasons why the Star League, so soon after its founding and allegedly dedicated to peace across the stars, turned its attentions toward conquest of the Periphery. The ones sold to the people, for instance, included such high-minded ideals as enlightenment, or civilizing, of these supposedly lawless regions, since the Star League's goal also included securing the peace for all of humankind. Others justifications that caught on focused on local issues, such as the alleged "aggressions" of Periphery states—the Taurian Concordat in particular—against Star League members (though plenty of evidence suggests the naval engagements between the Davions and the Taurians boiled down to honest misunderstandings). Piracy, of course, was yet another excuse, though in many cases, the alleged Periphery "pirates" were, in fact, hirelings or even agents of the Great Houses themselves, used to continue settling scores left over from the Age of War.

But the truth, of course, was far more sinister, and yet ludicrous at the same time, for the Cameron Dynasty realized it could not cement its power over the newborn League without focusing its members on some unifying threat. Sooner or later, they realized, the House Lords would turn their ambitious eyes toward taking over the mighty empire they had built. It was thus that the Camerons hit on an elegant concept: If they were to outlaw war amongst the Houses, then the Houses would have to fight a new foe.

And the Periphery made a perfect scapegoat.

—Sir Hedgeswick P. Rothchild, *Deconstructing the Golden Age (Fifth Edition)*, Canopus Free Press, 3110

The stubborn refusal of the Periphery states to join in the Star League reached a head in 2574, after the four major Periphery nations once more refused to bow to diplomatic and economic pressures imposed by the League and clung to their independence. The following year, with his infamous Pollux Proclamation, First Lord Ian Cameron effectively declared war on the Periphery. If they would not join his League willingly, then they would do so at gunpoint. The next twenty-two years came to be known in the Inner Sphere as the Reunification War, and would see the four proudly independent realms on the fringes of human-occupied space brutally crushed beneath the combined weight of the Star League and its member states.

In the next installment of our special six-part look at the Periphery, we'll see how the fall of the Star League, the Succession Wars, and the beginnings of a revival affected these frontier nations. Join us as our tour of the stars continues! I'm Bertram Habeas.

## The Hand of Starling – Clan Wolf Breeding New Kai Allard-Liaos?

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02/28/3134

**SHADOW:** Well met, Truth-seekers! Once again, the Hand of Starling has returned to bring you the show The Republic doesn't want you to see! I'm your host, Shadow. With me as always are my fellow Illuminati, Wraith and Phantom.

**PHANTOM:** Everything you know is wrong!

**WRAITH:** Black is white, up is down, and short is long!

**SHADOW:** Riiight. Okay, before we begin today's topic: "Is Clan Wolf breeding a new generation of Kai Allard-Liaos?" our question of the week comes to us from a viewer using the on-line nick of PhazeOne. He (or she) says: "Well met, Starlings! I've been watching your show now for the past several weeks, and I have to admit, you got me hooked—"

**WRAITH:** Another has seen the light!

**PHANTOM:** Hallelujah!

**SHADOW:** Hehehe. "My question, however, is whether you have delved into some of the oversimplified and revisionist crap about the histories of the Successor States currently being rerun on INN. You know the stuff I'm talking about."

**PHANTOM:** Oh-ho! A certain "star tourist" we all know and love under fire, eh?

**SHADOW:** None other! Well, PhazeOne, the short answer to your question is: of course! Now, in many cases, we've been able to cite poor accounting in the historical series of which you speak, much of it jokingly explained away as data corruption through the mangled HPG grid, but we have also learned that some of these historical pieces have even come through the unreliable "Pony Express" systems, which we know are as prone to tampering as any HPG missive sent through an old Word of Blake Enigma Coder. That said, we of the Hand of Starling plan to shed light on some of Dr. Habeas' more egregious slip-ups, such as the infamous "Tharkad Disaster", which many folk have noticed lack some critical facts.

**WRAITH:** You mean, like the fact that a fusion reactor doesn't simply melt down?

**SHADOW:** Among other things. Brother Wraith. So, stay tuned, PhazeOne, and all shall be revealed in time! Now, tonight's topic: Kai Allard-Liao, long-time friend of Archon-Prince-turned-Precentor Martial-turned-Republic Paladin Victor Steiner-Davion, son of Justin Allard and Candace Liao, long-time thorn in the side of Capellan Chancellor Sun-Tzu Liao, hero of about a bazillion battles, and perhaps Solaris VII's most enduring Champion icon...

**PHANTOM:** Did you miss anything there, Shad?

**SHADOW:** If I did, Phantom, it's because you couldn't fit it on the cue card. While nobody can doubt that Kai is gone, the Hand of Starling dares to ask: Are there—or will there be—more in the future? The rumor: Clan Wolf's breeding protocols have samples of Kai's DNA and a sibko full of a hundred Kai Allard-Liao's are waiting to be unleashed. My fellow illuminati, what say you?

**WRAITH:** Bloodnames be damned! I'd guarantee it!

**PHANTOM:** Oh, heck! I'd bet there's already a full blood of Kai Wolves out there as we speak, just waiting to be sprung on some unsuspecting Lyrans, Falcons, or Rasalhagians!

**SHADOW:** What about the Horses?

**WRAITH:** What about them?

**SHADOW:** Never mind. Okay, gents. Back it up. One: How did the Wolves get their hands on Kai's DNA, and how long have they had it? Two: Why would they willingly upset their own eugenics program and risk further corruption of their rigid social structure in putting it to use? Three: Who should fear these spawn of Kai?

**WRAITH:** Well--

**PHANTOM:** I'm on it, Brother Wraith. In order, Shad, the Wolves have had access since the Dragoons revealed their origins to the leaders of the Inner Sphere on Outreach. Remember that Kai Allard-Liao himself was there and among the scions of the Great Houses—House Allard-Liao, obviously—who lined up to find out what they were up against in Kerensky's descendants. It's even said that in a mock Trial of Position while there, he scored five kills. Such a feat has never been managed by the Clans, even with their hyper-strict training regimens, and Kai did it without centuries of eugenics behind him. The Wolves would have been fools to overlook the potential.

**SHADOW:** Ah, but the Dragoons weren't associated with the Wolves by then...

**PHANTOM:** That's what they'd like us to believe, but think about this: Where did the surviving Dragoons go after Outreach was sacked? Arc-Royal, to find shelter and support among the Wolves (in-Exile), an abjured half-Clan we all know has always maintained shadowy, sideline relations even when they were busy trying to kill each other. Why not trade some choice DNA to assure future goodwill—or at least, keep the bloodshed to a minimum?

**WRAITH:** Which brings us to how the Wolves got Kai's blood. As to why they use it, again, the issue becomes one of expediency, and they don't have to admit to their rank-and-file where the genes came from. Heck, even the Wolves aren't above lying—even to their own—if it suits their needs. So, they paste some honored Bloodname on Kai's genetic stuff—say, Ward or even Kerensky—and no one is the wiser. Bam. A whole slew of new DNA just entered the mix. Of course, the whole scientist caste has to be in on it, to keep the secret, but then again, these warriors haven't probably been captured, killed, or otherwise analyzed by the neighboring Clans and Inner Sphere factions they might see combat against...

**PHANTOM:** So there we go. This also keeps the gene pool nice and fresh and cutting edge for the Wolves, all strictly legal or at least practically doable to sustain their development as the biggest Clan fish in the Inner Sphere—no pun intended to any Sea Fox fans, of course...

**SHADOW:** Hehehe. Okay, so we see cause, but now what about the effect? Who are these new super-warriors meant to one day fight, armed with Kai's genetic predisposition toward elite 'Mech combat skills and the brutally effective Clan training protocols? Questions one and two answered, but here's a sub-question: Would the Steel Wolves have access to these new "Wolf Kai's"? Would Wolf in Exile?

**PHANTOM:** Wolf in Exile, certainly! The Steel Wolves? No way! Sharing the DNA with the Wolves in The Republic risks stray "Wolf Kai's" entering The Republican mix.

**WRAITH:** And, considering the Wolves never fully abandoned the Crusade—though, since the Jihad, they too have found it necessary to focus on keeping order at home and (allegedly) diverting resources from a strict military budget—we can guess that the Wolves don't want their eventual enemies any advantages.

**SHADOW:** Then, the Wolves will turn these new super-soldiers upon us here in The Republic?

**PHANTOM:** Who else makes a worthier foe \*and\* lays claim to sacred Terra?

**SHADOW:** True points. But, if we're also right in assuming the Exiled Wolves possess the same advantage...

**WRAITH:** If you're about to suggest the Kell Hound's Wolves would come to the rescue with their own legions, I'd doubt it. Given their affiliation to the Kells, I'd say Wolf in Exile would reserve their Kai's to defend the Lyran state or may even have them employed as agents of Heimdall. Remember that Arc-Royal is a big-time Heimdall breeding and training ground, dedicated to battling the excesses of Loki and other subversive activities...

**PHANTOM:** That, of course, assumes the Exiled Wolves have made use of these genes.

**WRAITH:** You see a reason they wouldn't? They used Kell and now even Brahe blood, even when it comes from outside...

**PHANTOM:** Point.

**SHADOW:** Then we can expect—at least in theory—a showdown between the two Wolf Clans and their respective legions of super-soldiers bred from the DNA of Kai Allard-Liao?

**WRAITH:** In theory, yes. But I'd say we're more likely to see the Wolves save this new breed of mega-warriors for the ultimate prize: the capture of Terra itself.

**SHADOW:** Sure to be an exciting battle. I wonder if the Solaran Broadcasting Company would be willing to put down some odds on that one! Hehehe. In any event, truth-seekers, we're about out of time here. Come back next week, as the Hand of Starling continues to penetrate the veil of secrecy and brings enlightenment to all!



## Touring the Stars with Bertram Habeas

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03/02/3134

*We began on Terra, millions of years ago. Today, mankind stretches out among the stars of the Milky Way, touching thousands of worlds, as far from our home as Clan space, more than 2,000 light-years distant. Yet who are we, really? What have we become in our relentless push outward and onward? I'm Bertram Habeas, and tonight, let's find the answers to these and many other fascinating questions together, as we tour the stars!*

### Volume XLIV: The Periphery's Long, Hard Climb from the Abyss

The Star League's war against the Periphery was actually four smaller wars rolled into one. In the Rim Worlds Republic, League troops, with House Steiner support, were actually putting down a rebellion that had usurped a nominally pro-League government, ruled by House Amaris. In the Taurian Concordat, the war was more a Davion-led campaign to crush a defiant and well-armed neighbor, one willing even to resort to the use of weapons of mass destruction and scorched earth to secure its liberty. In the Magistracy of Canopus, the war's theme ranged from severe fighting against an impressively well-equipped army to a rather comical effort to resist the seductive ways of the nation's hedonistic culture, and atrocities here were lessened by House Marik's leadership and insistence on "a clean fight." In the Outworlds Alliance, despite the largely agrarian nature of its people, Kurita-supported League troops quickly grew frustrated at the determination of the resistance, and resorted to mass executions in an effort to gain compliance. This served only to drag the war on for years as the Alliance ranks swelled, rather than diminished. In the end, however, all four realms were forced to capitulate, with the Alliance surrendering in 2585, the Magistracy in 2588, and the other two states succumbing to Star League rule in 2596. By the following year, all four nations were placed under virtual Star League military rule, branded as Territorial States of the League.

In the century and a half that followed, the Territorial States did eventually come to recover, with some survivors of the Reunification War coming to realize that maybe—just maybe—life under the Star League wasn't so bad after all. But all of that would come crashing down again in 2751, when First Lord Simon Cameron was killed in a freak accident on New Silesia. The First Lordship passed to his juvenile son, Richard, under the regency of General Alexandr Kerensky, and suddenly the five House Lords were in effective political control of the Star League. They wasted no time in consolidating their power, and even went so far as to pass taxes on the Territorial States, placing a heavy financial burden on the conquered lands of the Periphery.

During this time, the young Richard Cameron was seduced by Stefan Amaris, leader of the Rim Worlds Republic, the only one of the Territorial States that did not openly complain about the unfair taxes. In the years leading up to his final ascension to the Throne, Cameron fell more and more under the spell of the charismatic Amaris, and came to see the other House Lords as jealous rivals. How many of Cameron's edicts were really the work of Amaris may never be known but, by the time he was of age to claim the First Lordship, he had already been convinced that General Kerensky and the House Lords were all against him, and he had alienated virtually every one of these leaders. Worse still, a crippling tax levied by the First Lord himself set all Periphery realms but the Rim Worlds Republic into rebellion, with several Taurian planets among the first to secede. In response, Cameron mobilized the bulk of the Star League Defense Force, under Kerensky's direct command, leaving the Terran Hegemony with a skeleton garrison, augmented by supposedly loyal House Amaris troops.

What happened next, one fateful December day in 2766, would mark the beginning of a time so dark for all of mankind that only the Jihad, over three centuries later, could compare.

"General:

I, with my infinite skills and aided by my loyal subjects, have struck, with a swiftness given only to the righteous, a blow that has corrected decades of injuries and slights to my family. I rule where the Camerons once called home. I control the Cradle of Humanity. All within the Hegemony have bowed before me; those who didn't are dead. Join me, General Kerensky. Become my sword arm and help me impress my word and wisdom upon the other realms. I've no reason to hate you; I wish only peace between us. Join me and convince your men and women to follow you, and I will give you power second only to mine.

But should you dare turn a blind eye to the wisdom of my offer and decide not to join, then heed my warning: I control everything the Hegemony has. All its defenses, all of its fortifications, are now manned by people loyal to me. Should you try to attack, every inch of Hegemony soil will be stained with the blood of the fallen, and every drop will be a burden upon your soul, which must already be heavy with guilt for allowing me to accomplish the complete control of your homelands."

—Communiqué to General Alexandr Kerensky from "Emperor" Stefan Ukris Amaris, 16 May 2767

Kerensky's war to liberate the Terran Hegemony began with the effective annihilation of the Rim Worlds government as he withdrew his forces committed elsewhere to smash the power base that made Amaris' coup possible. In the thirteen years that followed, Kerensky and Amaris turned their energies fully upon one another in a devastating war of attrition. By the time it was over, the Terran Hegemony was a collection of charred cinders and hopelessly shattered industries, and the Star League had effectively died.

In the Periphery, the fall of the League met with mixed feelings; an age of prosperity—but one that had been forcibly imposed—had come to an end, freeing the surviving realms to go their own ways. As the Inner Sphere states turned on one another, go their own ways these realms did, rarely interacting with their counterparts in the Great Houses (and then only at great cost). Still, freed of the constraints of the Star League, these nations grew, though at a far slower rate, thanks to the predations of waves of pirates and occasional infighting between neighboring realms, both ancient and newborn.

Having started off hobbled by the Star League, the Periphery's technological level remained below that of the Inner Sphere throughout the Succession Wars era, though in some areas these nations excelled even beyond the capabilities of their interior neighbors. The Magistracy of Canopus, for instance, gained a reputation for medicine that rivaled—and in some cases, even exceeded—the capabilities of the Great Houses. The Taurians, meanwhile, boasted a remarkably high literacy rate. The Outworlds Alliance, eschewing BattleMechs and mercenaries for much of its existence, raised a highly adept aerospace defense force, completely homegrown and capable of fending off pirates and Great House raiders alike.

As the thirty-first century dawned, new Periphery states had even begun to form, many of them from among the bandit lords who had, for generations, preyed on the borders of the Inner Sphere. The Marian Hegemony, a pirate realm with a government based loosely on ancient Rome, and the Circinus Federation, a loose coalition of agrarian worlds ruled by pirates and mercenaries, are perfect examples of these "bandit kingdoms" that earned a semblance of respectability over time. Others, such as Morgraine's Valkyrate, the Confederation of Oberon, and the Tortuga Dominions, also formed from pirate bands, but remained truer to their origins. Still others, such as the Fiefdom of Randis, the Niops Association, and the Rim Collection, formed along more benign lines, creating realms founded on ideals, rather than force of arms, adding more color to the sociopolitical tapestry of the Periphery.

The trickle-down from the technological renaissance of the mid-thirty-first century further boosted many of these powers, making the larger, more industrial realms, such as the Magistracy and the Concordat, true players in the universe. Of course, as the balance of power would shift in the Inner Sphere, both due to the recovery of lostech and the political changes caused by the short-lived union of Houses Steiner and Davion, so too would the realms of the Periphery suffer an upheaval from these new events. Somewhat surprisingly, it would be the Magistracy of Canopus that would first bring the nearly forgotten Periphery back into the minds of the denizens of the interior worlds, in a bold move that would have ramifications for decades to come.

In part three of our special series on the Periphery, our spotlight shines on the Magistracy of Canopus, one of the Periphery's most powerful realms, and its trials through mankind's darkest hours. Our tour of the stars continues next week. I'm Bertram Habeas.

## Senator McCoy's Daughter Kidnapped!

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03/06/3134

ARGOSIA – Police in Argosia officially announced today that unknown persons have kidnapped Lindsey McCoy, daughter of planetary senator Robert McCoy of Towne's Argos Province. The announcement follows the delivery of a pre-recorded holochip where the kidnapers demanded a half-billion C-bills from the senator's family in exchange for the return of the sixteen year-old heiress, and ends speculation about her disappearance following a night of partying in the provincial capital city.

Lindsey McCoy's father, Senator Robert McCoy, is also the affluent baron whose landhold includes over half the southern coastline of the tropical Argos Province, whose estates and assets have been valued at close to a billion C-bills in a recent edition of Nobility vidzine. Although he did not respond to calls from reporters this afternoon, a spokesperson for McCoy's family told INN that Senator McCoy and his family remain deeply concerned for Lindsey's welfare.

Police say that Lindsey McCoy, a student in the exclusive Argosia Valley Preparatory College for Young Women, went missing soon after attending a society ball in the northern part of the provincial capital. Close friends of the teenager said she then joined them at the Amarello, a popular dance club in the city's downtown district that caters to teens and young adults, where she remained for a few hours before leaving with an unidentified young man. Initial reports also suggested that Lindsey had been seen drinking, despite being under the legal age by city mandates. Representatives of the Amarello, however, have vehemently denied this, citing the club's policy for serving no alcohol without valid identification.

"[Lindsey] McCoy is a well known and very regular patron of our club," said one club manager, who refused to be identified. "Even with false ID, she could not have purchased alcohol here."

Argosia police say that the identity of Lindsey's unknown companion when she left the establishment remains under investigation. What is known, however, is that, less than fourteen hours after her departure, Senator McCoy officially reported her missing to the city police department. The arrival of ransom demands this morning at the McCoy estate confirmed the family's worst fears, and local and planetary investigators are already on the scene.

Reportedly, even Sir Kristoff Erbe, Towne's native-born Knight-Errant, will be joining the investigation in the days ahead, but officials with the Towne Bureau of Investigations have not confirmed this. In the meantime, a family, a city, and a planet, wait with baited breath.

### Towne Log

+ Half a BILLION C-bills!?! Holy !  
:- GreasL

+ There's no way old man McCoy is going to pay up that much. I've got a bad feeling about this one...  
:- RepMan

+ Say, the article doesn't say who's running the investigation. Doesn't that seem odd to anyone here?  
:- Synnik

+ It's Frances Becca again. Same girl who handled the "Little Luthien" case here. (They had it on the local feed.) All I can say is, good luck to McCoy, with \*her\* on the job!  
:- Draco041

+ Ah, jeez! Figures! Anyone look at a map lately? Agros and the Zingara Province are neighbors! This could be a copycat of the LL Killer, or maybe Erb didn't really get his man after all!  
:- RaiRai

+ Serves her right, anyway! Going off with some strange guy she met in a club? What woman in her right mind does that?  
:- Vesuvius

+ Uh, Ves. What makes you so sure she didn't know this guy? Wouldn't be the first time the date was blamed for something he didn't do....  
:- RepMan

## Touring the Stars with Bertram Habeas

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03/09/3134

*We began on Terra, millions of years ago. Today, mankind stretches out among the stars of the Milky Way, touching thousands of worlds, as far from our home as Clan space, more than 2,000 light-years distant. Yet who are we, really? What have we become in our relentless push outward and onward? I'm Bertram Habeas, and tonight, let's find the answers to these and many other fascinating questions together, as we tour the stars!*

### Volume XLV: Periphery Nations, Pt. I—Magistracy of Canopus

**Fact Sheet:** Magistracy of Canopus

**Founding Year:** 2530

**Capital (City, World):** Crimson, Canopus IV

**National Symbol:** A trio of gold, five-pointed stars and an ovoid starfield, set against a green circle with a blue rim.

**Location (Terra relative):** Rimward, beyond Capellan Confederation and Duchy of Andurien

**Total (Inhabited) Systems:** 39

**Estimated Population (3130):** 70,200,000,000

**Government:** Monarchy (matriarchal rule)

**Ruler:** Magestrix Ilsa Liao-Centrella

**Dominant Language(s):** English (official), Spanish, Greek, Romanian, Mandarin Chinese

**Dominant Religion(s):** Buddhism, Christianity, Wiccan, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism

**Unit of Currency:** Dollar (1 dollar = 0.54 C-Bills)

From the penthouse suites of the Majesty (formerly Mindstar) Enterprises' Grand Triumph resort hotel, one can survey the entire Majesty compound, a sprawl of holovid theaters, casinos, restaurants, massage parlors, malls, and amusement parks the size of a small city. This center of the Canopian entertainments trade is brand-new, the decades-long reconstruction of the fire-gutted remains of the old Mindstar compound only now reaching completion. Likewise, to the south, the city of Crimson features all-new architecture and fresh-laid exotic gardens. Shiny new cruise boats ply the waters of the once debris-choked River Tethis and its delta to the open sea. Only to the north, on the outskirts of the Thistletoen Fields spaceport, can the remains of the Word of Blake's hellish firebombing still be seen, in the form of a mound of charred and rusted metal, pushed beyond the outskirts of several blackened hangars along a disused stretch of runway.

Canopus was not spared the horrors of the Jihad, but the Blakists' use of conventional incendiary weapons, rather than nuclear devices or orbital bombardment, made possible the relatively easy reconstruction of the capital city and the mega-resort nearby. Despite the horrors of that war, the people here are friendly, carefree, and all visitors are welcome, be it for business, pleasure, or a little of both. The climate, however, continues to deteriorate thanks to years of strip mining and the damage wrought during the Jihad. Nowadays, it seems that the winters in this once-temperate region grow decidedly colder and longer with each passing year.

Under Star League rule, the Magistracy of Canopus, though technically an occupied state, fared better than most of its contemporary Periphery realms. Generous aid from the League helped restore the pleasure industry ravaged by the Reunification War, and the nation benefited from an age of peace and prosperity. By the time of the Amaris Crisis, these fortunes had reversed, and the Magistracy declared its independence and immediately switched to defensive mode, hoping to survive the difficult times ahead from a posture of armed neutrality.

Unfortunately, such neutrality would not be enough to weather the three-hundred-year storm that was the Succession Wars. With civilian interstellar travel limited at best, the Canopian economy slowly declined, while territorial disputes with the Taurian Concordat, communications breakdowns, and the predations of Inner Sphere and pirate raiders, all sapped the Magistracy's military and economic strength. The few surviving industries were more practical than the tourist-based trades of yesteryear, and diplomats frantically worked to resolve any political crises, lest another costly war rage on Canopian soil. Though these years were relatively peaceful (at least, from the Canopian point of view), the grandeur of the old Magistracy was lost over the centuries.

Ironically, it would be their one and only stab at imperialism that would revive the struggling Magistracy in the early thirty-first century. Hoping to capitalize on the end of the Fourth Succession War, the Canopians allied with the Free Worlds League's rebellious Duchy of Andurien, to assault the weakened Capellan Confederation. Though defeated in the end by a fanatical Capellan defense, this ill-fated campaign prompted the ascension of Magestrix Emma Centrella. A truly visionary leader, Emma managed to make peace with the Free Worlds League before a feared Marik invasion could punish her realm for its role in the brief Andurien secession. She also managed to single-handedly revitalize the Canopian pleasure industry with hefty personal bailouts to its remaining major corporations, such as Magliss Spirits and Mindstar Enterprises. The profits from this support allowed Emma to further diversify the Canopian industrial base, helping to recover some of her realm's lost prosperity.

With the Clan Invasion, the Magistracy once more turned to diplomacy to secure its survival, fearing the eventual arrival of Kerensky's descendants. Emma Centrella endorsed an ambitious plan to unify all Periphery realms in a coalition against the Clans, should they ever threaten them, but while such a coalition failed to materialize, the plan did result in an alliance between Canopus and the Taurian Concordat. Ironically, this bold political move eventually attracted the unlikely attention of Sun-Tzu Liao and his Capellan Confederation.

The thought of an alliance with the Capellans shocked practically everybody, including Magestrix [Emma] Centrella herself. Here, you had the socially open, militarily unremarkable, matriarchal Periphery state approached by a Great House. And not

just any Great House, but House Liao, the very same people the Canopians had fought barely a generation before, and who had a notorious reputation for brutality—as far as most outsiders were concerned, anyway. Sun-Tzu had to be crazy, right?

His proposals, however, were valid, well thought out, and unexpectedly respectful of Canopian culture, taking into account the military, economic, and sociopolitical needs not just of the Confederation, but of the Magistracy of Canopus, and even the Taurian Concordat (if they desired to join in this venture as well). Sure, it was obvious, even then, that the Capellans mainly wanted more troops to recover their losses of the Fourth Succession War, but the gains to be had were substantial, and that was just on the opening offer. The offer promised that, before long, the Canopians would have the power and the stability to rival any Great House, all without any binding contract of marriage or political union (Sun-Tzu was engaged to Isis Marik at the time, anyway).

To Emma Centrella, it was the most generous offer she could have imagined from a House Lord. Wholeheartedly dedicated to restoring and securing her realm better than it had been in centuries, she simply could not resist an offer like this.

—Valerie DuBois, *The Trinity Alliance: What Went Right?*, Hardcore Press, 3120

As it happened, Canopian and Taurian troops did indeed assist the Capellan state in reclaiming its lost territories in St. Ives and along the Chaos March front. This effort strengthened the so-called Trinity Alliance and proved that the warriors of the Periphery were actually a force to be reckoned with. Sun-Tzu Liao would even eventually wed Naomi Centrella, one of Emma Centrella's daughters, in the midst of the Jihad. While both realms fought side by side against the Blakists—the Taurian Concordat having already fallen out of the alliance due to internal and external matters—they would never formally unite under a single banner. Sun-Tzu Liao's promises not to force a political union beyond their alliance proved genuine to the last.

Today, the Magistracy remains its own entity, militarily formidable, economically vital, and socially free. Its government, remaining under the steady rule of the Centrella line (though Ilsa Centrella is actually the eldest daughter of Sun-Tzu; a situation which has caused a small minority within the Magistracy to contend that Sun-Tzu has indeed forced a Capellan rulership onto Canopians), is still a matriarchy. House Centrella still rules, though an electoral system technically has the authority to choose a non-Centrella Magestrix when an incumbent dies. A multilayered court system still oversees the rights of Canopian citizens, and their needs are represented by both a popularly elected Central Committee, which forms a legislative review board, and the Crimson Council, which handles all affairs for the nobility—all without Capellan oversight.

All three tiers of the Canopian nobility (the Froness, descended from the Magistracy's original settlers; the Durachi, merchant princes; and the Girin, recognized citizens lifted into the nobility) enjoy far more privileges than the underclasses—including the right to choose a substitute for military service, the right of females to choose their own mates (who cannot refuse, under Canopian law), and the right to trade outside Canopian borders. Yet, despite this, the system sees remarkably few abuses.

Canopian citizenship is open to all individuals desiring freedom from political, religious, or social persecution, in keeping with the spirit of the state's foundation, and all such citizens are free to own land, or pursue any desired social status. In exchange, all are required to contribute to the nation's defense in some way, be it through military service, involvement in the educational system (which has always been viewed as a cornerstone to the Magistracy's defense), or by donation of land or materiel to any war effort during times of crisis. Political parties are banned under Canopian law, but all citizens are required to participate in all elections. These systems help assure a sense of belonging among the people of this socially liberal realm, while contributing to its ongoing vitality.

The Magistracy of Canopus, a Periphery realm dedicated to the pursuit of pleasure and entertainment, yet strong and determined enough to defend itself in time of crisis, is certainly nothing like the stereotypical image one gets when thinking about the fringe worlds of human space. Indeed, there are few today who could possibly argue that House Centrella and its longstanding Magistracy are any less a major power than any of the Great Houses today.

Up next, follow me as we tour the Taurian Concordat, another of the Periphery's most noteworthy realms. I'm Bertram Habeas.

## Touring the Stars with Bertram Habeas

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03/09/3134

*We began on Terra, millions of years ago. Today, mankind stretches out among the stars of the Milky Way, touching thousands of worlds, as far from our home as Clan space, more than 2,000 light-years distant. Yet who are we, really? What have we become in our relentless push outward and onward? I'm Bertram Habeas, and tonight, let's find the answers to these and many other fascinating questions together, as we tour the stars!*

### Volume XLVI: Periphery Nations, Pt. II—Taurian Concordat

**Fact Sheet:** Taurian Concordat and Calderon Protectorate

**Founding Year:** 2335 (2253 as Taurian Homeworlds, Concordat); 3066 (Protectorate)

**Capital (City, World):** New Samantha, Taurus (Concordat); New Taurus, Erod's Escape (Protectorate)

**National Symbol (Both):** A bull's head with exaggerated horns that curl downward and encompass three gold five-pointed stars (Calderon Protectorate uses black stars.)

**Location (Terra relative):** Rimward, beyond Capellan Confederation and Federated Suns

**Total (Inhabited) Systems:** 22 (Concordat); 13 (Protectorate)

**Estimated Population (3130):** 33,031,000,000 (Concordat); 15,310,000,000 (Protectorate)

**Government:** Democracy (currently under military rule, Concordat); Democracy (Protectorate)

**Ruler:** Protector Kaff Doru (Concordat); Protector Sam Calderon (Protectorate)

**Dominant Language(s):** English, Spanish, French

**Dominant Religion(s):** Deism (official), Catholicism, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism

**Unit of Currency:** Bull (1 bull = 0.12 C-Bills)

New Samantha is a city that serves as both a grim reminder of the horrors of war, and as a symbol of the Taurian will to overcome any adversity. Once an extensive metropolis that dominated a vast flatland, at the juncture of two major rivers and a glacial lake, the original city of Samantha became so expansive that it overtook the once-separate spaceport, establishing a central point between the Old City and its South Quarter. Today, however, few who had looked upon such vistas would recognize the city of New Samantha, or its surrounding countryside.

The Word of Blake's strategy for the Taurian Concordat centered on the virtual annihilation of the Taurian capital, in a strike more treacherous than ever conceived before. Covert agents and engineering teams slipped past the defense networks and worked for months on their complex plot, finally sending several of the planet's smaller local asteroids—a natural feature of the system that has long served as the basis of the homeworld defense—hurtling into the surface, many aimed right at New Samantha. The unconventional bombardment smashed the heart of the Concordat in a short, merciless rain of DropShip-sized boulders, which flattened huge swaths of the surface and wiped Samatha almost completely off the map.

The Taurians, a proud and determined people, eventually rebuilt their city over the now-rugged landscape, around the triple-crater lake that filled up from the inadvertently diverted flow of the local rivers. Structures built to withstand heavy weapons' fire now dominate the low-slung skyline of this new metropolis, seeded with all manner of antiaircraft batteries and missile defense systems. Scattered among the streets of this rebuilt city are monuments to fallen heroes of the Concordat, as if the stern-faced people needed more reminder than the cratered vista all around them.

In this, the oldest Periphery realm still standing, the people of the Taurian Concordat loved their independence so much that the struggle to integrate them into the Star League was among the worst fighting of the Reunification Wars. As the first realm to openly rebel against the tax edicts levied by the League's last First Lord, more fighting ravaged the industries and defense forces that a century of Star League rule had nearly restored.

When the Star League fell, the Concordat, like the Magistracy of Canopus, opted for a position of armed neutrality, save for a brief but inconclusive conflict against the Canopians during the early twenty-ninth century. With a longstanding grudge against the Capellans and the Federated Suns, thanks to several incidents during and prior to the Star League era, the Concordat turned most of its energies toward beefing up its military industries, eventually producing the strongest armed forces in the Periphery. Each generation of Calderons, the monarchs whose dynasty ruled the Concordat throughout most of its existence, carried on this paranoia, focusing especially on the so-called "Davion bogeyman," many times to the nation's detriment. And it was after decades of high alert along the Concordat border, in anticipation of an attack that never came, that the power structure of the Concordat first began to unravel.

Marshall Hadji Doru was the first one to really step up and denounce Protector [Thomas] Calderon's paranoia for what it truly was—utter madness. Many in the Concordat, perhaps, hoped he would then either usurp power for himself, or place Thomas' son, Jeffrey, on the throne. Jeffrey, by all accounts a bright and insightful young man, was at almost the same time working to curry favor with the Canopian Magestrix, having secretly accepted her olive branch toward the formation of a pan-Periphery alliance. Knowing that the crippling effects of the heightened military alert were killing his realm's economy, Jeffrey laid the groundwork for a formal alliance in anticipation of the showdown with his father he knew was coming.

As it happened, the Concordat's Ministry of Trade and Colonization acted first. In 3055, they stormed in on a Privy Council meeting with the Protector and demanded an end to the alert status and civilian conscriptions, as well as a loosening to trade and travel restrictions, threatening to take the matter to the Court of Judicial Review when Calderon refused. When the Protector then demanded of Marshall Doru that he arrest the ministers, he set off the coup that toppled him from power. Instead of arresting the ministers, Doru arrested the Protector, and convinced Jeffrey Calderon to ascend to the throne.

Unfortunately, the people of the Concordat would know a Golden Age under Jeffrey Calderon for all too short a season. . . .

—Valerie DuBois, *The Trinity Alliance: What Went Right?*, Hardcore Press, 3120

Jeffrey Calderon did indeed bring sweeping changes and a new Golden Age to the Taurian Concordat in his brief rule, repealing many of the state-of-emergency edicts passed down by his father and those before him. He also brought the Concordat into an alliance with the Magistracy of Canopus, and worked together with the Canopians in colonizing the open space between their realms. Calderon was prepared to discuss entering into the Trinity Alliance with the Capellans when renegade Colonial Marshals from this New Colony Region took him and the Canopian leader hostage in an effort to forge an independent state. Jeffrey Calderon would die before the crisis ended early in 3061, leaving no heirs, and a reactionary, Lord Grover Shraplen, would ascend to the Protectorship.

Shraplen's ascent rocked the realm to its core. Though technically a democracy, with many layers of councils and ministries to serve as advisors and checks against the absolute power of the Protector—all intended to ensure the sanctity of civil liberties—the traditional ruler of the realm had always been a member of House Calderon. More than merely a change in tradition, however, was the fact that Shraplen was a known opponent to many of Jeffrey Calderon's reforms, a man who held to the same anti-Davion paranoia as the previous administration. His rise would prove a throwback to the days of Thomas Calderon, but ironically enough, it would be the Concordat's entry into the Trinity Alliance that would accelerate the collapse.

After throwing its weight behind Sun-Tzu and his campaign against St. Ives and the Chaos March, where the Taurian Defense Forces were savaged, the TDF began to rally for a breakaway. The New Colony Region seceded from the alliance, forming the Fronc Reaches, even as the Concordat military fought in foreign lands. Taking up the banner of change was Marshal (Baron) Cham Kithrong, an outspoken opponent of the Protector, who championed Jeffrey Calderon's illegitimate son, Erik Martens (Calderon), as a replacement for the Protector.

Rather than debate the issue, Shraplen attempted to bring Kithrong to heel by force, resulting in a brief civil war that tore the Concordat in two. Kithrong and his followers retreated to form the Calderon Protectorate, leaving Shraplen with only half a realm and an economy on the brink of collapse. In the midst of this crisis, a task force from Davion space entered the Concordat, sparking a conflict with the Federated Suns. Concordat troops, under Shraplen's orders, lashed out at the Davion realm, seizing several worlds before their offensive stalled in the Pleiades Cluster. Battered, divided, and on the brink of collapse, the Concordat forces held their positions, switching to a defensive posture and focusing only on surviving long enough to solidify their gains while the government rallied.

Then came the Jihad.

During that terrible war, the Word of Blake, taking advantage of Shraplen's paranoia of House Davion and his misplaced trust in their "advisors," enacted a terrible plan. Using their Erinyes system, the Blakist assault consisted solely of dropping several of the smaller asteroids near Taurus upon the planet itself, leaving just enough evidence behind to incriminate the Federated Suns. The horrendous attack, though seen a few more times during the Jihad, all but decapitated the Taurian leadership, leaving the rest of the Concordat convinced that the Davions had launched the strike. The Blakists' classic example of divide-and-conquer strategy succeeded brilliantly in setting the Taurians on the Federated Suns like a pack of bloodthirsty hounds, and in the fierce fighting that resulted, Taurian and Davion forces were horribly savaged, while several FedSuns worlds bore the scars of Taurian nuclear warheads.

The decimation of the Taurian Defense Force all but laid the realm bare for attack by pirates and Calderon revolutionaries, disrupting the government hold over several Taurian worlds, which remain independent to this day. Tenaciously clinging to the worlds seized from the Suns, the new Taurian leadership found itself in charge of an ever-shrinking nation, but even to this day, their troops remain on alert, holding onto these few gains made decades ago.

Today, the Concordat and the Protectorate are struggling shadows of what they once were, still fighting a low-intensity civil war despite generations of separation. Both nations maintain the trappings of the democratic system of the original Taurian Concordat, intended to ensure the civil liberties of all citizens. Both of these governments are also supported by massive bureaucracies, which include ministries of defense, trade, education, and the interior, as well as an extensive court system to resolve legal disputes on all levels of government and review legislation. But where the Calderon Protectorate is ruled once more by a hereditary member of House Calderon, the Concordat itself is operating under military rule, its Protector, Kaff Doru, raised from the ranks of the Taurian Defense Force, and operating under emergency powers.

Though they remain divided today, both of these realms maintain not only a shared history and government, but both also maintain the same famous Taurian stubbornness and love for freedom. In this ideal, they remain, as always, united.

In our fifth segment on the Periphery, we'll examine the Marian Hegemony, the fourth most powerful Periphery state to survive the Succession Wars and the Jihad that followed! Won't you join us? I'm Bertram Habeas.

## Touring the Stars with Bertram Habeas

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03/09/3134

*We began on Terra, millions of years ago. Today, mankind stretches out among the stars of the Milky Way, touching thousands of worlds, as far from our home as Clan space, more than 2,000 light-years distant. Yet who are we, really? What have we become in our relentless push outward and onward? I'm Bertram Habeas, and tonight, let's find the answers to these and many other fascinating questions together, as we tour the stars!*

### Volume XLVII: Periphery Nations, Pt. III—Marian Hegemony

**Fact Sheet:** Marian Hegemony

**Founding Year:** 2920

**Capital (City, World):** Nova Roma, Alphard

**National Symbol:** The bust of an armored Roman warrior against a tan banner that bears the name "Marian Hegemony" in English at its center, and the Latin words "Pax" (Peace) and "Mortis" (Death) on its opposite ends.

**Location (Terra relative):** Coreward and anti-spinward, beyond Duchy of Tamarind-Abbey and Rim Commonality

**Total (Inhabited) Systems:** 22

**Estimated Population (3130):** 28,605,000,000

**Government:** Monarchist Republic

**Ruler:** Caesar Ignatius O'Reilly

**Dominant Language(s):** English and Latin (official), German, Spanish, Greek

**Dominant Religion(s):** Christianity (Lutheran), Judaism, Islam, Agnostic

**Unit of Currency:** Talent (1 talent = 0.22 C-Bills)

Anyone walking the streets of downtown Nova Roma would almost believe they had stepped into a time warp, what with the classical Roman architecture and the virtual absence of motorized transportation in the heart of the capital city. Unlike most modern metropolises, the skyscrapers and office blocks of Nova Roma ring the downtown area, rather than cluster within it, creating a virtual oasis of a classical age in the heart of a modern industrial city. Powered transportation is almost completely forbidden in the central districts, where the roads are narrow and traffic lights few and far between. Instead, the locals here are encouraged to rely on unpowered bicycles, public shuttle cars styled as multipassenger chariots, or the subway for all their downtown transportation needs. Though electric lamps and neon lights may still be found by night, their presence almost vanishes by day, adding to the illusion of time travel.

Nova Roma was not physically annihilated during the Word of Blake Jihad, as many other state capitals were, despite then-Caesar Julius O'Reilly's resistance to the Blakists. Instead the people of this city died in the horrific blasts of neutron bombs, which left the buildings standing, desolate and haunted. A reconstruction was nonetheless ordered by Prefect Michael Alexander, regent for Julius' successor, Cassius O'Reilly, who enhanced the Roman feel of the downtown area, in keeping with the style of the rest of the realm.

For all its splendor and style, the Marian Hegemony is neither ancient nor as cultured as its rulers and tour guides might have one think. The realm was founded barely two hundred years ago, when Johann Sebastian O'Reilly, a Periphery native, struck it big with his discovery of a storehouse of germanium on Alphard (left over from the former Alphard Trading Company) valued at over fifty billion C-bills. With his newfound wealth, O'Reilly wasted no time hiring BattleMech units to help establish a colony on Alphard, and installed himself as its leader. As a former trade center, Alphard's modest industrial base and stores of germanium made it possible for O'Reilly to build a small empire, which he styled after Terra's ancient Roman Empire and named after Gaius Marius, a seven-time Roman consul.

But for all the classical styling, in truth, O'Reilly could not support the empire he dreamed of on a finite stockpile of germanium and the limited industrial capacity of a long-abandoned frontier world populated by refugees of the Succession Wars. To support his ambitions, he authorized and encouraged raiding along the borders of nearby states, including the Illyrian Palatinate, the Magistracy of Canopus, the Circinus Federation, and even the Free Worlds League. The Hegemony became just another pirate realm, albeit one with delusions of grandeur.

The rise of Johann's grandson, Marius O'Reilly, led not only to the increase of these pirate attacks but to an outright effort to conquer neighboring systems and assimilate them. Viewing expansion as the key to the Hegemony's survival and prosperity, Marius moved against worlds claimed by every interstellar neighbor save the Magistracy of Canopus. The stepped-up raids and assaults reaped far greater booty than two generations of casual raiding had, and Marius funneled these funds into the development of new industries, the foundation of educational institutions, and other efforts to strengthen the national infrastructure and military. Though the basis of this transformation was piracy, the result was a nearly self-sufficient realm on the threshold to being a respectable nation.

A foiled assassination attempt, allegedly ordered by an unknown Free Worlds League agent on Astrokaszy, spun the Hegemony back on the path of conquest with a brief foray to the unclaimed and fragmented Periphery planet on a mission of retribution and conquest. Only the marshaling of several other nearby realms' military forces forced the Hegemony to back down. In the years that followed, the Marians expanded through colonization, and it was while leading the colonial expeditions of the 3040s that Sean O'Reilly, Marius' son and successor, began to build his own power base.

A coup was most certainly in the works when Marius [O'Reilly] died—apparently quite by accident—in 3048. Up until this point, his son, Sean, was currying favor with almost every high-ranking officer in the First Marian Legion. Moreover, thanks to his siphoning funds from the Imperial Treasury to cover his rather wild lifestyle, which included no end of mistresses and gambling debts, relations between father and son had been strained for some time. In fact, there was a definite threat in



place that the elder O'Reilly planned to bar his son from succession and turn the realm over instead to his grandson, Julius. All that taken into account, it's no wonder that Marius' death was often rumored to be no accident, though no evidence found to date supports a theory of patricide.

Whether or not Marius was assassinated, of course, became a moot point when Sean ascended to the throne and, with his first proclamation as ruler of the state, replaced the title of Imperator, the title for Marian rulers since the Hegemony's inception, with a more ominous title: Caesar.

—Dr. Nickolas Smith, PhD, *Pirates and Politicians, What's the Difference?*, Tamarind Publishing, 3099

Sean O'Reilly's reign prompted the Marian Hegemony's greatest surge in military strength and aggressive expansion. He revitalized the military and reorganized it even more along Roman lines, and consolidated his own political power base, giving himself near-dictatorial powers over the Senate and the military. In the early 3050s, while the Great Houses were locked in struggle against the Clan Invasion, O'Reilly launched the Hegemony's most ambitious campaign ever against the nearby Lothian League. The conquest took longer than expected, thanks to League mercenaries who tried in vain to fend off the Marian Legions, but the realm did eventually fall after less than a year of fighting. Though resistance continued for many years, the Caesar declared victory and almost immediately began seeking new targets.

In the late 3050s, Word of Blake agents, attempting to destabilize the region further, entered into a secret alliance with the Marian Hegemony to upgrade its military and turn it against the Magistracy of Canopus. The plan's failure, however, prompted the Caesar to look desperately for a new conquest, a victory to assure the masses that the Hegemony remained strong. But while Caesar Sean was at the helm, it was his son, Julius, who would steal his thunder by launching an unsanctioned—yet tremendously successful—conquest of the Illyrian Palatinate. The Illyrian conquest became Julius' crowning achievement after negotiating a settlement with the Lothian resistance, and proved that the younger O'Reilly had not only built a power base within the Hegemony military (much the same way his father had), but was also adept at using it. Furthermore, unlike his father, Julius would see this power base used before an accident could claim the Caesar's life. During a ceremony honoring his accomplishments, the coup was launched, with the backing of more than just a majority of the Marian Legions, but also of a Senate swayed by Julius' declarations of his father's failures and indiscretions. By nightfall of 8 August 3063, Sean O'Reilly was gone, impaled on Julius' sword.

Under Sean O'Reilly, the Hegemony reached its peak of power and political standing, and drew ever closer to the classic Roman model after which it had first been forged. With his reforms to the government, he gave a voice to the plebe (lower) class in the form of the Plebian Tribunate, a body that won the right to vote in Hegemony affairs during the reconstruction period after the Jihad. He declared both the conquered Lothian League and the Illyrian Palatinate united territories in the Hegemony, and granted both nations a voice in the Marian Senate.

But it was Julius' triumph over his father that would also doom his reign as surely as it had begun. With Sean's ascent, the primary ties bringing the Hegemony covert support from the Word of Blake were cut off. Julius' decision in 3066 to assault the nearby Circinus Federation next pitted his Legions against Circinans who were, surprisingly, armed with Blakist-provided weapons. With the collapse of the Hegemony offensive, it became apparent that the Federation was profiting from Blakist support, and the rift between the Marians and their one-time backers widened, erupting in open conflict during the Jihad.

Though Blakist agents savaged the Hegemony in the latter years of the Jihad, after first exterminating the capital city in a lightning blitzkrieg, the Marian forces acquitted themselves well. But, while able to hold onto most of their territory, renewed resistance in the conquered Lothian League would eventually result in that state's effective separation from the Hegemony. The decades of reconstruction since have not seen this loss reversed, though every Caesar since Cassius O'Reilly has reinstated the Hegemony's claim to its "wayward protectorate."

Today's Marian Hegemony has come a ways from its days as a pirate state with dreams of greatness, but to many, its roots are still visible. Though a democratic system forms the basis of the Senate, which handles all day-to-day affairs of government, the patricians who elect the senators are hereditary nobles, a class that rules over the plebes, or ordinary citizens. Slavery is still condoned in the Hegemony, though laws granting very limited rights to this class have been passed in recent years. Yet all of these rights remain in place only at the sufferance of the Caesar, who retains the ultimate authority over the military and the patriarchs.

Yet, for all its flaws, the Marian Hegemony remains a player on the frontiers of the Inner Sphere; a harsh nation, for a harsh region.

In our final segment on the Periphery, the scattered minor realms and independent powers of the Periphery will be our focus, along with a brief mention of the pirates who even now stalk the space lanes beyond the boundaries of the Great Houses! Please join us. I'm Bertram Habeas.

## Touring the Stars with Bertram Habeas

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03/09/3134

*We began on Terra, millions of years ago. Today, mankind stretches out among the stars of the Milky Way, touching thousands of worlds, as far from our home as Clan space, more than 2,000 light-years distant. Yet who are we, really? What have we become in our relentless push outward and onward? I'm Bertram Habeas, and tonight, let's find the answers to these and many other fascinating questions together, as we tour the stars!*

### Volume XLVIII: Denizens of the Periphery

Tourist guides today don't bother with the Periphery world of Antallos, except to caution folks to stay away. But back in the time of the Star League, this planet was a hub of trade between the League and the nearby Federated Suns, Draconis Combine, and Outworlds Alliance. With the fall of the League, this world and its stores of lostech became a prime target for savage raids by neighboring realms, until all semblance of government finally collapsed in the late 2800s. The entire social structure here eroded into a fragmentation of city-states, many of them ruled by nomadic tribes and descendants of refugees from House Kurita and the old Outworlds Alliance, all patterned on unique sets of governments that often come into conflict. But it wasn't until 200 years later that Port Krin would arise as the dominant force in planetary politics, united by force and thriving on piracy and slave trading.

Outside the city of Port Krin, located on the southern shores of Talisea, is a world made up mostly of blasted desert wastes and badlands, with a smattering of city-states, only a few of which possess BattleMechs. Prospectors, scavengers, pirates, and nomads wander these wastes, their means of survival a potential hazard for any unwary traveler who crosses their paths. Out there, there is no law but survival of the fittest, and with pirates and lost mercenaries running the cities, treachery lurks around every street corner.

Antallos is the kind of world we tend to think of, if and when we do think about the Periphery. We imagine blasted wastelands, perhaps seeded with the decayed remains of a glorious past. We envision brigands and scavengers, scratching out a living in these wastes through murder and plunder. Our minds focus on these negative images, believing them to be all there is on the fringes of human expansion.

Yet, as we have seen, there are realms in these regions as rich and complex as any nation of the Inner Sphere. The Magistracy of Canopus, with its strong economy, rich cultural history, and economy of luxury, provides a striking contrast to the militant police state of the Capellan Confederation nearby, as does the fiercely independent Taurian Concordat to its monolithic neighbor, the Federated Suns. Even the Marian Hegemony, pirates made good by generations of ambition and struggle, stands as a curious counterpoint to the nearest former Free Worlds provinces of the Rim Commonality and the Duchy of Tamarind-Abbey.

Beyond these realms lie even more unique nations and minor powers. Beyond Lyran space, for instance, lies the Rim Collection, a seven-world democratic state founded in 3048 by a Free Worlds League expatriate and a local town councilman with dreams of greatness. Struggling for many years against pirate raids and the natural strife that comes with the birth of any nation, the Collection has remained a democratic realm, a confederation of worlds united for trade and self-defense, but free to elect their own leaders and create their own laws. The people here are as hard-working and independent as their nearest Lyran neighbors, and generally as benign.

Not so far from this realm lies the Rim Territories, an eleven-world bandit kingdom, forged from worlds that broke away from Lyran rule in the chaos of the Jihad, plus colonies settled by refugees of that same horrible conflict. Desperate for order and for protection, these people came easily under the sway of powerful bandit leaders based in the area, and continue to scratch out a living while their "protectors" prey on neighboring realms.

Further rimward, past the shattered remains of the Circinus Federation (a pirate state cut almost from the same cloth as the Marian Hegemony, but annihilated in the final years of the Jihad along with its capital world), is the Lothian League, a confederation of six icy worlds, founded by Taurian refugees from the Reunification War, and briefly conquered during the Hegemony's rise in the mid-thirtieth century. Though regaining their freedom in the chaos of the Jihad, the League and the Hegemony maintain strong ties, and there is still a distinctly Roman flavor to the governments that now maintain the Lothian worlds.

Wedged between the Hegemony and the Rim Commonality of the former Free Worlds League another tiny realm, a three-planet alliance known as the Niops Association, is located. Founded as a Star League-era astronomical research base, these worlds grew into a microstate after an influx of refugees from the Succession Wars arrived, and have lived in relative peace and isolation under the rule of noble intellectuals, descended from the original researchers.

Following along the rimward regions of the Inner Sphere, we find the Fronc Reaches, an eleven-world alliance once known as the New Colony Region between the Magistracy of Canopus and the Taurian Concordat. Since winning their independence in the mid 3060s, these worlds have remained loosely affiliated with the Magistracy of Canopus and—by extension—the Capellan Confederation, with a weak central government and a standing army that is composed of mercenaries and "rehabilitated" pirates. Much like the Taurians and Canopians who originally founded these worlds, the inhabitants here are hearty folk, determined to survive by their own blood, sweat, and tears, and equally determined to fight and die for what they have earned.

Beyond the boundaries of the Federated Suns lie two more Periphery realms as different from each other as night and day, with the Filtvelt Coalition, a seven-star breakaway state of the Federated Suns, definitely belonging to the "day." Culturally linked to the Davion realm, the Coalition is civilized, but no less determined to remain free of its motherland, its rulers sworn to hold onto the power they claimed when the Jihad cut them off from New Avalon. The Tortuga Dominions, of course, are the "night," by

comparison, consisting of six planets ruled by pirates; a true bandit kingdom, where justice belongs to the strong, and rulers are determined by their prowess with a BattleMech.

Farther coreward of these realms is another three-world league, like a twin to the Niops Association, but separated at stellar birth. The Mica Majority, a trio of mining worlds long run dry, was founded originally as a penal colony for criminals of the Draconis Combine. The men and women who live in the domes of these frigid worlds manage a modest existence through mining and trade with nearby systems, secure that the fruits of their labors are insufficient to draw the attentions of even the most desperate pirates.

As if to prove that Periphery realms can come in an even smaller size, however, we come upon Randis IV, a world dominated by an ancient brotherhood of MechWarriors, each of whom undergoes trials so grueling they could even test the mettle of an elite Clan warrior. The Brotherhood of Randis, like a band of Knights Templar, has protected this peaceful agrarian world for many generations, forming the pinnacle of a one-world feudal hierarchy known as the Fiefdom of Randis.

In the coreward regions, beyond the occupation zones of the Clans and the boundaries of the Rasalhague Dominion, lie the Barrens, an expanse of worlds where no laws hold sway, but where pirates and renegade Clansmen are a constant hazard. The true frontier, these worlds lost all semblance of the order brought to them under Clan domination; when, shortly after the terrible fighting of the Jihad, there were twin invasions by the Hell's Horses and Ice Hellion Clans (not to mention the catastrophic fighting among the Clan homeworlds, fighting the Clans refuse to discuss, which cut them off from Clan space). Once known as the region where three minor powers held sway—the Oberon Confederation, the Greater Valkyrate, and the Elysian Fields—these worlds are now united only in their people's fierce determination to remain free of Clan and Inner Sphere rulers. In this region it is not uncommon to find pirates at work, not looting or raiding these planets, but acting as mercenaries and protecting them in a series of informal alliances. Descendants of refugees from the Jihad may also be found here, working hard to develop respectable colonies far from an Inner Sphere they now see as corrupted beyond measure, a strange mix of the barbaric and the noble, in a region that has, for centuries, seen nothing but the former.

Scattered about these realms and regions are, of course, the independent worlds. Often preyed upon or preying upon their neighbors, or secure in their isolation and lack of valuable resources, these worlds are as homesteads in a vast frontier of space. Many are the homes of refugees from mankind's millennia-long folly of war, while others are treasure-seekers, after that odd, rumored Star League cache leftover from the Golden Age.

They are as different from one another as any two people can be, yet united in that they live on the fringes of known space. They are the people of the Periphery, the hearty and independent souls who dared to look beyond the bounds of the Successor States and find a future of their own.

The next leg in our tour of the stars will bring us to an unusual power, both immense and ineffable. They serve all, yet claim few territories of their own, surviving in perfect symbiosis with all of the Inner Sphere, though once they may have sought to dominate it. We review the history of ComStar next time on our Tour of the Stars. I'm Bertram Habeas.

## Touring the Stars with Bertram Habeas

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03/09/3134

*We began on Terra, millions of years ago. Today, mankind stretches out among the stars of the Milky Way, touching thousands of worlds, as far from our home as Clan space, more than 2,000 light-years distant. Yet who are we, really? What have we become in our relentless push outward and onward? I'm Bertram Habeas, and tonight, let's find the answers to these and many other fascinating questions together, as we tour the stars!*

### Volume XLIX: After the Storm—The Dawn of ComStar

The technology is as old as mankind's Golden Age, and rarer than even the mighty BattleMechs spawned from that same era, yet all of us rely on it in some way, shape or form. Indeed, even these words, written here on Mother Terra, have traveled through dozens—if not, hundreds—of star systems, to reach your eyes that you might learn from them. Of course, I am speaking of the communications network of hyperpulse generators that bind our worlds together and link us to the universe beyond. Communications, the lifeblood of any great civilization, has always been one of mankind's most overlooked yet most critical achievements. Thanks to the determined organization of a chosen few, you and I can see, hear, and learn from each other, even over the gulf of interstellar space, where radio waves would take years—even centuries—to reach.

The organization known today as ComStar formed from the merging of two major Star League-era interstellar communications conglomerates known as Communications Enterprises, Incorporated, and Starlight Broadcasting, Limited. Contrary to popular belief, this organization, often referred to as the Order of ComStar, was not the first steward of the hyperpulse grid, but it has certainly been the longest lasting. In its long history this Order has evolved from a mere corporation with a monopoly on the communications service into a political and military power in its own right that has at times been mankind's greatest champion as well as its worst enemy.

But what is ComStar today? And how did it come to be?

To understand where ComStar came from, we must first acknowledge the state of the hyperpulse generator network and what a monolithic system it had become under the Star League. Indeed, it took the scientific and technical resources of the Star League to even develop the system at all, much less distribute it among the worlds of the Inner Sphere. Prior to the HPG, communications between worlds were limited to laser-pulse messages, beamed to courier DropShips and JumpShips in a Pony Express system, or simple faster-than-light transmitters that were limited to scanned or text-only transmissions. Messages took months to reach Terra from the worlds of the Periphery. Obviously, this made running any star-spanning empire difficult, to say nothing of the Star League.

Thus, in 2614, did the League commission the development of FTL communications based on the theories of Cassie DeBurke, a professor at the prestigious University of Terra. The theory was simple enough: to transmit messages in the form of energy pulses in the same way that JumpShips travel through hyperspace. The result, first successfully tested in 2630, was the hyperpulse generator (HPG), effectively a huge "gun" capable of "shooting" complex messages as far away as fifty light-years. To reach the entire League, a network of these HPGs was then put in place, based on a simple two-stage system of primary HPGs (the First Circuit), and a secondary network of hyperpulse relay stations (the Outer Circuit). That the Star League footed the bill for the development of HPGs throughout all its member states was arguably its most magnanimous and longest-lasting contribution to human history. On a more practical level, it also allowed the Star League's ruling family, House Cameron, unparalleled access to all of the Inner Sphere, which they studiously maintained by developing a massive bureaucracy of technicians and communications specialists to run this network, the Star League Communication Network (SLCOMNET).

By the 2750s, SLCOMNET had become so huge and so specialized that no one could argue its vital importance to the Star League. The network was so large as to be almost incomprehensible, handling all data transmitted across interstellar distances—from letters between families to urgent orders from Terra for the massive SLDF. Transmission volume included signals as short as a single word of text, to as large as a three-hour holoivid program, shared with every world in a given region. Security and privacy became paramount concerns, as much as the technical expertise and the mathematical skills to assure that signals reached their destinations intact and ungarbled. This tremendous undertaking was beyond any one mere bureaucracy, and so, by the closing days of the Star League, SLCOMNET was heavily reliant on the support of such private companies as Starlight Broadcasting and Communications Enterprises just to maintain operations at a cost-effective rate. These companies would eventually prove vital to the survival of the network long after the Star League that put it together had crumbled to ash.

—Vladimir Toolippi, *Enlightening the Dark Age: A ComStar History*, New Avalon Press, 3125

By the time of Stefan Amaris' coup, the Star League's communications network was at its peak of development, linking every single inhabited world throughout the Inner Sphere and Periphery, backed up by mobile transmitters aboard many official Hegemony civil-service and military JumpShips and WarShips. It was a network entirely dependent on the technical expertise and massive bureaucracy that only the Star League could fund and maintain, and for that reason most people took for granted that the League would endure forever. With a single laser blast, however, Stefan Amaris proved such people wrong. As the Star League began to crumble like a house of cards, finding someone willing to maintain this vital, yet wholly overlooked and incredibly massive apparatus, became one of the last things the various House Lords could agree on.

The man entrusted with restoring the war-ravaged communications network was none other than Jerome Blake. As the highest-ranking member of the SLCOMNET hierarchy who was not captured or killed during the Amaris coup, Blake's heroic efforts to

maintain communications during the crisis, and to tap into the Usurper's transmissions in support of the SLDF's campaign of liberation, brought him notoriety and a reputation for integrity sorely lacking among other leaders of the day. Blake was named to head the reconstruction in 2780.

Yet, even as the House Lords approved his appointment to head the reconstruction of the Star League's vital communications network—a choice, ironically enough, advanced by Nicoletta Calderon of the historically anti-Star League Taurian Concordat—the same rulers were also dismantling the nation that gave birth to it. Kerensky's Exodus hammered the last nail in the coffin of the Star League, leaving Blake and the tattered remains of the SLCOMNET alone and unsupported as war began to grip the Inner Sphere.

By 2785, Jerome Blake did indeed manage the Herculean task of rebuilding the First Circuit of the former Terran Hegemony, linking the reconstructed A-stations on several key Hegemony worlds, but the accomplishment was a bittersweet victory. Already, tensions had escalated among the House Lords to the point where the only question was when—not if—war would come. With most of the SLDF gone—save those who turned mercenary, those who joined the regular armies of the Great Houses, or those who followed Kerensky's suggestion to swear allegiance to Blake's reconstruction effort—few remained who could protect the Terran Hegemony from absorption by its neighbors. Realizing that fact prompted Blake to work quickly on consolidating the gains of his years of effort.

As an entity, ComStar came into being in late 2785, when Jerome Blake gathered the chief administrators of all First Circuit HPGs and established among them a set of parliamentary rules and procedures for governing the interstellar communications network. His simple, two-page plan became the foundation of the Articles of ComStar, as the former Star League department of communications came to be known that same year. Having effectively transformed the bureaucracy into a loose corporate government, Blake gained the legitimacy and the support he needed from within the organization to not only better develop its infrastructure, but also to make use of its military forces, and to speak on behalf of his new organization in diplomatic relations with the other powers of the Inner Sphere. Among its first orders of business, this new order would seek to: establish its neutrality in the coming wars; assure its legitimacy—as master of the communications network—as a fair and impartial organization, to be dealt with and respected; and to secure a base world at the heart of the Inner Sphere, where it could maintain operations without interference from the House Lords.

Thus began Operation Silver Shield, the culmination of which included the occupation of Terra.

"People of the former Star League. I am Jerome Blake, Prime Administrator of ComStar. As of now, 0900 hours Terran Standard Time, military forces under my direct command have seized control of the Sol star system. ComStar is now officially in control of Terra and all former Star League facilities remaining in the system. From this time forward, I proclaim Terra and the entire Sol system as neutral under the protection of ComStar, under the terms and conditions of the Communications Protocol of 2787. As the previous broadcast has made clear, ComStar has sufficient military force to defend the homeworld of mankind from any aggressor.

"Our goals are peaceful. We seek the unity and prosperity of mankind. This action was taken to save life in the devastating war that is unfolding. ComStar will continue to offer its communications services to all member states, as long as the Sol system and our neutrality are honored."

—Jerome Blake, 28 June 2788.

With Terra firmly under his control, ComStar's neutrality assured by treaties with the Great Houses, and the introduction of the ComStar letter of credit (the C-Bill) as a common unit of exchange among all Houses and nations for ComStar's services, Jerome Blake's Operation Silver Shield was an unqualified success.

Join us next week for our second part of this fascinating four-part tale on the origins and evolution of ComStar through the dark years of the Succession Wars. I'm Bertram Habeas.

## Touring the Stars with Bertram Habeas

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03/09/3134

*We began on Terra, millions of years ago. Today, mankind stretches out among the stars of the Milky Way, touching thousands of worlds, as far from our home as Clan space, more than 2,000 light-years distant. Yet who are we, really? What have we become in our relentless push outward and onward? I'm Bertram Habeas, and tonight, let's find the answers to these and many other fascinating questions together, as we tour the stars!*

### Volume L: Mystic Technocracy—The Ways of ComStar

Today, many peoples throughout the Inner Sphere look upon ComStar as an enigmatic order, a peculiar mix of high technology and quasi-religious spiritualism. Their organization is the curious mix one might expect if a profit-conscious corporation and a silent and secretive brotherhood of monks ever joined forces. The evolution of this mystical technocracy has had its extremes, of course, as anyone who remembers or knows the history of the Jihad could tell you. But while the extreme ways and philosophies of the Word of Blake may have soured the image of ComStar for contemporary and future generations, their origin and the development remain evident in the order even today.

Though many have claimed that Jerome Blake was a mystic, the fact remains that it was not until the reign of Conrad Toyama, his greatest devotee and chief administrator of the Dieron HPG station, that the organization would become the quasi-religious power it now is. In fact, until Toyama, ComStar maintained a very corporate hierarchy, headed by a CEO (Prime Administrator), who held the strongest position over a board of directors (the First Circuit administrators), and which issued letters of credit, maintained its own corporate security force (known as ROM), dedicated to securing the organization's neutrality against outside interference.

In Conrad Toyama, Blake found his most fanatical believer, a man willing to do anything to achieve what he saw as the ultimate goals of ComStar, as Blake allegedly foresaw them. Prior to Blake's death, the charismatic and ever-loyal Toyama was a wellspring of support, who is even credited with coining the order's name from the names of the companies once employed to support the Star League's department of communications. His beliefs bordering on fanaticism, Toyama would turn to Blake's journals after the death of ComStar's founder, and it was from these that he founded the order's quasi-religion, the "Word of Blake."

—Vladimir Toolippi, *Enlightening the Dark Age: A ComStar History*, New Avalon Press, 3125

Various theories have sprung up in the centuries since Conrad Toyama, ComStar's second—and final—Prime Administrator—took office. Some claim he hastened the demise of his beloved master soon after the aging founder of the order began to succumb to illness and age, seeking only to seize power for himself. Others say he did indeed receive an epiphany when he visited Jerome Blake on his deathbed in 2819. Regardless, few stood in his way when he ascended to the head of the First Circuit.

Soon afterward, based on his own fanatic interpretations of Blake's journals—and, some say, after a short-lived rebellion and subsequent purge made possible by ROM agents throughout the organization—Toyama instituted sweeping changes in ComStar's style and focus. Almost overnight, the First Circuit became the pinnacle of the ComStar Order, the Prime Administrator became known as the Primus, and planetary administrators became known as Precentors. Support staff for the Precentors consisted of Demi-Precentors, while technicians became known as adepts, and trainees became acolytes. ROM, the corporate security force, became all-pervading, its new mandate now included that it ensure total obedience to the dictates of the First Circuit and the Word of Blake. Membership in the Order became a lifelong commitment rather than a mere job, to ensure that none of the precious secrets and technology ComStar protected, developed, and maintained could fall into the hands of outsiders.

To justify these changes, Toyama made the Word of Blake required reading for all levels of the Order. These reprints of Blake's journals now included annotations by Toyama himself, interpreting what he—and others—saw as divine inspirations, prophecy, and a holy mission for ComStar. By the end of Toyama's reign, the transformation's effects were unquestionable. ComStar was as the monasteries of Terra's European Dark Age, a secret and ostensibly neutral order of chosen men and women charged with the sacred task of preserving knowledge for the day when mankind would again awaken from its folly and welcome the Order as its proper saviors.

. . . Once the Great Houses have beaten themselves senseless and bloody, we can emerge, offering a new chance to recover what they have tried so hard to destroy.

All that saved mankind during its last so-called Dark Age were the churches and religions. These were havens for humanity's learning and they stood alone as beacons in the darkness and foulness that humankind had become. . . . If ComStar is to survive into the future, it must look to these religions as a blueprint for surviving the wars that are unfolding around us. [Salvation 4:18–24]

(In this one passage, Blake has laid the foundation for the mission of ComStar, to thrive and relight the lamp of civilization for mankind. Blake also foresees that by creating an oligarchy as the basis for ComStar, the organization's survival is guaranteed during the war of succession that the House Lords currently wage. Only by patterning ourselves after those religions that survived in the past will ComStar live on to the future.)

—From *The Word of Blake, First Edition*, ComStar Press, 2820 (Original remarks from Blake's journals. Parenthetical remarks were interpretations and explanations added by Conrad Toyama)

Indeed, many of Jerome Blake's "prophecies" did come to pass as the Succession Wars dragged on. Ignoring the Ares Conventions, the House leaders assaulted worlds using biological, chemical, and nuclear weapons en masse, destroying factories, cities, and entire planets if they could not capture and hold them. WarShips and JumpShips, critical to transporting men and supplies to a battle zone, became favored targets, with the former dwindling to extinction in the first two conflicts, and the latter so depleted that the ability to even make war—let alone maintain any semblance of commerce and trade—became threatened after a time.

Through all this, ComStar maintained its control over the knowledge and technology of the fallen Star League, enshrouding its command over the advanced interstellar communications grid with rituals as bizarre as chanting an incantation before working a transmitter, or praising Blake for every successful jump of its spacecraft. To outsiders, after generations of war and the general decay of civilization on hundreds of worlds, the adepts and preceptors of ComStar seemed less and less like a cult and more like real-life magicians as time went on. Many joined the ranks of ComStar to receive the benefits of its enlightenment.

To further emulate the religious aesthetics supposedly called for by the Word of Blake, the members of ComStar took to wearing robes, and their members often shunned direct contact with the peoples of the worlds outside their stations. The hyperpulse generator compound became a modern monastery; its technicians and administrators became its monks and abbots. To be one of ComStar's enlightened required one to surrender all material wealth and titles, but that did not stop many House scions and minor nobles from joining the Order.

When threatened by outside forces, either politically, financially, or militarily, ComStar could even use its control over communications as a powerful tool, threatening—and in some cases, executing—a complete shutdown of interstellar transmissions. Such "interdictions" would affect the offending realm until ComStar's demands for compensation or repentance were met, carrying more political power even than excommunication had during the Dark Ages of Terra's European continent. They also served as an ideal means of maintaining the Order's sanctity without resorting to its long-hidden and vast supply of Star League-era war machines.

But while ComStar's self-imposed mysticism did help preserve its secrets and the integrity of the Order, it also served as a breeding ground for some of the worst crimes in human history. Indeed, many historians today claim that the roots of most of the Succession Wars and the decline of technology can be traced to the machinations of ambitious ComStar Primuses, acts that perhaps even foreshadowed the inevitability of the Word of Blake and its holy war against mankind.

"The peace of Blake be with you."

For centuries, these words accompanied nearly every utterance of the acolytes and adepts of ComStar (and its Word of Blake splinter group). Even during the Jihad, both sides would intone this phrase as if in response to centuries of conditioning. These same words also hinted at ComStar's underlying philosophy, and the man the Order has revered among all others as its founder and greatest teacher. Jerome Blake saw a glimmer of hope among his followers that humanity would one day benefit from ComStar's efforts to preserve the lines of communication and maintain the knowledge they seemed fit to destroy in centuries of pointless warfare. This was the "peace of Blake" of which ComStar often spoke.

Unfortunately, Blake's followers, over the centuries, began to corrupt that same vision, building a religion around the basic principle of preserving knowledge. As successive Primuses saw, in the Inner Sphere, the ultimate prospect of control according to their interpretation of Blake's wisdom, some believed in helping the collapse of civilization along a little. In the end, is it any wonder that the most fanatical and reactionary among these children of "Blake's Word" launched the greatest and most vicious war mankind has ever known?

Sadly, today, the phrase "the peace of Blake be with you" has become yet another casualty of that terrible era, when the interpretations of fanatics transformed it into a curse spoken just before the pulling of a trigger or the detonation of a nuclear weapon. You'll not catch a ComStar adept or acolyte uttering the phrase today, as the hateful glares of those who remember only the worst in mankind have burned it away, proving that people can miss the message.

—Rene Alosano, *Broken Promises: The Legacy of the Jihad*, Republic Press, 3127

In our third installment on ComStar, we will look at the greatest and darkest moments of ComStar's history. The Clan Invasion and the Jihad are our focus for next week's Tour. Won't you join us? I'm Bertram Habeas.

## Touring the Stars with Bertram Habeas

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03/09/3134

*We began on Terra, millions of years ago. Today, mankind stretches out among the stars of the Milky Way, touching thousands of worlds, as far from our home as Clan space, more than 2,000 light-years distant. Yet who are we, really? What have we become in our relentless push outward and onward? I'm Bertram Habeas, and tonight, let's find the answers to these and many other fascinating questions together, as we tour the stars!*

### Volume LI: Light and Darkness—ComStar's Triumph and Tragedy

For good or for ill, ComStar remained the sole keeper of interstellar communications for the Inner Sphere and Periphery through the three centuries that followed the collapse of the Star League. Founded on the principles of Jerome Blake, and given a spiritual bent by successors such as Conrad Toyama and Primus Raymond Karpov, the Order grew increasingly mystical and secretive. Its influence in international affairs was both subtle and extreme, depending on the needs of the moment, and yet it retained the veneer of neutrality and peaceful intent as the guiding light for all of mankind—until the Clans appeared in 3048.

One of the greatest ironies of the Clan invasion, perhaps, is the very event that supposedly triggered it. Although the Clans had already spent perhaps a century debating the matter of whether or not to invade and conquer the worlds Kerensky left behind, the Warden faction—advocating a protectionist hands-off policy toward the Inner Sphere—had managed to keep the pro-invasion Crusaders at bay. Societal pressures might have eventually forced the issue anyway, but it was the arrival of a ComStar Explorer Corps JumpShip in Clan space that lit the proverbial fuse.

Citing that the Inner Sphere had now found a way to the home worlds, the Crusaders gained enough momentum through fear and paranoia to win a majority; the invasion became a measure of self-defense against the inevitable arrival of barbarian hordes from the Inner Sphere.

But what truly made the event ironic was that ComStar's explorer corps was created specifically because a past Primus, Adrienne Sims, had a vision of invading monsters from beyond the Periphery. That Sims' dream-inspired creation of an arm of ComStar to explore the depths of space actually brought about the very holocaust she sought to avoid has at once affirmed and damned the Order's mystic practices in the eyes of many historians.

—Rene Alosano, *Broken Promises: The Legacy of the Jihad*, Republic Press, 3127

As it happened, the Clan invasion began during the Primacy of Myndo Waterly, a devout follower of the Word of Blake as interpreted by Conrad Toyama. Fully dedicated to the prophesied time when mankind would turn to ComStar to be lifted from the ashes, she saw the Clans as the force that would bring about the much-anticipated Armageddon. Playing a dangerous political game, Waterly advocated ComStar's alliance with the invaders, under the guise of ComStar neutrality, offering the warlike Clans her Order's services in administering their captured worlds while they continued to advance. Though this decision did not sit well with all members of the First Circuit, ComStar did in fact facilitate the invaders for the opening years of the invasion.

Until, of course, it became clear the Clans were after Terra itself.

What followed was one of the most epic BattleMech clashes ever fought on a single world at one time. Precentor Martial Anastasius Focht, leader of the long-hidden ComStar Guards (shortened to Com Guards) challenged the invaders to a proxy battle for control of Terra on the Rasalhaguan world of Tukayyid. An elite-grade military commander—though many historians have speculated on where Focht received such training and expertise in an armed force that had not seen the light of day in centuries—he studied the Clans at length, and squared his forces off against those of all seven invading Clans in a grueling twenty-one-day war, with the fate of mankind in the balance.

The battle of Tukayyid was an unqualified success for the Inner Sphere, but even as Focht and his warriors battled the invaders, Waterly launched an attack of her own—against all of the Inner Sphere. Attempting to bring the Inner Sphere and the Clans to their knees in one fell swoop, Waterly ordered all HPGs throughout the Inner Sphere to shut down, a command only a small portion followed. Warned in advance, many Inner Sphere powers managed to secure numerous HPGs to keep the communications lines open, minimizing the damage done in Waterly's ill-fated Operation Scorpion. All at once, ComStar had become both humanity's saviors and its greatest betrayers. The event also triggered the Schism, and created the Word of Blake as an actual faction.

The story goes that Precentor Martial Focht and Waterly's own protégé, Precentor Dieron Sharilar Mori, staged a coup within ComStar immediately upon Focht's return from Tukayyid, removing Waterly and immediately announcing the Order would begin shedding its mystical trappings and trying to help the Inner Sphere. In Mori and Focht's minds, the Inner Sphere needed a unifying force willing to help stand up to the Clans, and they were determined to do so as partners, rather than as manipulators. The plans, of course, were far too progressive for most. Centuries of ingrained training and dogma could not change overnight, after all.

Over the next few years, over half of ComStar defected, joining other hard-liners, such as Precentor Blaine of Gibson, and First Circuit members, such as Precentor Demona Aziz, in self-imposed exile within the Free Worlds League. Proclaiming Marik their Primus-in-Exile, the Word of Blake, a collection of various ComStar sects united in their belief that the old mystical ways of ComStar presented the true vision of Jerome Blake, would eventually rise again; first by reclaiming Terra in 3058, and later by launching the most horrendous war in human history....

—Rene Alosano, *Broken Promises: The Legacy of the Jihad*, Republic Press, 3127



Indeed, the saga of the Word of Blake/ComStar Schism, initially regarded as an internal affair by most of the Inner Sphere, would become the most fateful development of the Clan Invasion. The majority of ComStar's ROM intelligence service defected with the other hard-liners of the Order, along with close to half the Com Guards, many of whom felt betrayed by Focht for so quickly embracing secularity after their hard-fought victory in the name of the divine Blake on Tukayyid. Despite this, ComStar insisted on regarding the Clans as the true threat, and helped broker the formation of the new Star League in order to counter that threat in the late 3050s. Even the loss of Terra, regarded as merely a symbolic prize by this point, did not seem to concern ComStar, which had made a home of its headquarters on Tukayyid, overmuch. As a result, the rest of the Inner Sphere also seemed oblivious to the danger.

Then came the fateful November day in 3067 when the assembled leaders of the Inner Sphere finally acknowledged that the new Star League was little more than a means to an end already realized. With the various House Lords too tied up in internal affairs spawned by the last two decades of near-constant conflict, the Star League dissolved, incidentally destroying a prophecy that all of the Word of Blake had lain in wait to see revealed. . . .

Exactly what the "prophecy" was that the Word of Blake's "master" hoped to see revealed is a matter of much debate, especially since almost all of the Word's top-secret records and journals of this mysterious shadow leader vanished in the nuclear fires on Gibson and Circinus. What is largely believed is that, with the "third peaceful transfer of power" (a reference to the Fourth Whiting Conference on Tharkad, where a new Star Lord was to be chosen), the Word of Blake was set to become a fully active member of the new Star League.

Lying in wait in several key systems, ready to demonstrate its ability and willingness to uphold the Star League as guardian of all its members, the Word was hoping to be hailed as a savior, easily on par with its estranged kin in ComStar. In some cases, a much more aggressive stance was assumed and plans for military actions were even laid—as on Outreach, where the Wolf's Dragoons had long maintained an anti-Word military campaign, and were thus deemed a real threat—but all evidence suggests the Word merely intended its emergence from the shadows of space over all Inner Sphere capitals as a celebration of it—and the Star League's—greatness.

Instead, the League had fallen into disarray. Its moment had been lost, stolen by petty House Lords who could not comprehend the effort and the dedication that had gone into this very moment. What came next was a tantrum on a scale the human race had never known....

—Vladimir Toolippi, *Enlightening the Dark Age: A ComStar History*, New Avalon Press, 3125

And so, with a wave of WarShips, nuclear weapons, biochemical attacks, and raging hordes of BattleMechs, the Word of Blake, deprived of an ultimate glory promised them during their long years in self-imposed exile, fueled by over three centuries of pent-up anticipation for a collapse of humanity that Blake had prophesied, yet which had never come, began a holy war against the universe. Trillions would die, planets would be shattered, and entire nations would collapse into anarchy before the flames of the Jihad finally burned themselves out, leaving behind an Inner Sphere forever changed.

Join us next week for our final look at ComStar today, after the horrors of the Jihad that nearly destroyed the keepers of interstellar communications, as we continue our tour of the stars! I'm Bertram Habeas.

## Touring the Stars with Bertram Habeas

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03/09/3134

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### Volume LII: A Partnership for the Ages—ComStar Today

**Fact Sheet:** ComStar

**Founding Year:** 2785

**Headquarters (City, World):** Sydney, Australia, Terra

**Official Symbol:** A white inner circle, slightly offset toward the bottom of a gray outer circle. Extending from the center of the white circle and pointing downward is a single gray tail.

**Location (Terra relative):** Facilities on roughly 98% of all inhabited systems within the Inner Sphere.

**Total (Inhabited) Systems:** N/A

**Estimated Personnel (3130):** 14,687,000

**Government:** Corporate (with monastic stylings)

**Ruler:** Primus Lisa Koenigs-Cober

**Dominant Language(s):** English (official), others per station.

**Dominant Religion(s):** Agnosticism (official), others per station.

**Unit of Currency:** C-bill (1 C-bill = 1 second of text-only HPG transmission time)

From the outside, ComStar's massive Class-A hyperpulse generator complex just outside Sydney, Australia, on Terra, is an impressive structure. Part fortress and part office complex, it is dominated by several small satellite receiver dishes clustered around a single, massive dish that occasionally "fires" a burst of blinding, blue-white energy into the sky. A powerful thrum accompanies each of these bursts, as much felt as heard by any living creature within a kilometer of the compound. Each thrum, one every hour on the hour, represents a massive batch of data, hurled into space and beyond with unerring efficiency made possible by centuries of proven technology and the studious maintenance of men and women who make it their lives' work to see to its continued operation.

Inside the massive ferrocrete walls that surround the ComStar compound, security troops wear the ComStar logo, while supplemental vehicle and BattleMech defenders remain in hangars marked with the insignia of The Republic of the Sphere, sheltered from the hot noonday sun. These guardians scan every guest who comes to the compound, with Star League-era sensors capable of detecting any weapon, chemical, or explosive known to man, looking for threats to the sanctity of the complex that serves as both headquarters and home to close to a thousand robed representatives of the Inner Sphere's communications network.

The fires of the Jihad consumed countless lives, shattered mighty armies, and brought nations to their knees. They also turned every aspect of life in the Inner Sphere upside down. As the opening volleys of the Jihad demolished capitals and key command and control centers, the Word of Blake, using its intimate knowledge of the hyperpulse generator network, also sent an invasive virus through the system that affected HPG communications throughout the Inner Sphere by flooding all channels with repeating or scrambled messages.

Overloaded, the network collapsed in several sectors, destabilizing governments and devastating local economies, while paralyzing military command structures. Chaos reigned for several years as the various nations and Houses scrambled, mostly on their own, to recover and regain control throughout the crisis, while the Blakists continued to assault world after world, shattering entire military commands and major industrial centers. Targeted above all other objectives were the factories, facilities, and military bases of ComStar, the Word's nemesis since the 3052 Schism. Com Guard troops, decimated by waves of defections and infiltrated by Word of Blake ROM agents, were repeatedly lured into traps, isolated, and destroyed with ruthless efficiency, forcing many commands to ally with local House units in order to stand a chance. By the time Devlin Stone emerged on the scene, over two thirds of the vaunted Com Guard had already been annihilated, with the battered remains clinging to an ad hoc coalition assembled under the command of then-Precentor Martial Victor Steiner-Davion.

Devlin Stone's arrival likely saved ComStar's military from immediate collapse as much as it saved the rest of the Inner Sphere from totally succumbing to the Word of Blake's Jihad. Although Victor Steiner-Davion had done a tremendous job with what he had, and even managed quite a few victories, his support apparatus had been so compromised that several coalition commanders were routinely subverting the Com Guards' command in order to fill holes in their own forces.

Stone and Steiner-Davion likely saw salvation in each other when the rebel leader finally made contact with the war-weary Precentor Martial. Stone saw in Victor a man who could provide vital contacts with the rest of the Inner Sphere commands struggling to beat back the zealots. Victor saw a man his Com Guards could further rally behind, and whose goals did not include self-aggrandizement. . . . Together, they could wield the Com Guards as a core unit in a coalition vaguely reminiscent of the short-lived new Star League Defense Force, a force that would unite nearly every Clan, the Inner Sphere, and the Periphery's power before the war's end.

—Vladimir Toolippi, *Enlightening the Dark Age: A ComStar History*, New Avalon Press, 3125

The Com Guards, indeed, made their last stands during the final days of the Jihad, often becoming part of the vanguard during assault operations against the last strongholds of their renegade kin. The history of the Jihad is replete with many instances of Com Guard troops fighting to the last man, demonstrating every ounce as much fanaticism as the enemy they once called brother. Thanks to many of their heroics, in fact, the coalition forces managed to bring a final end to the Jihad and exterminate the Word of Blake threat once and for all. At the same time the rest of ComStar struggled to reclaim the damaged HPG network, even in the decaying Free Worlds League, where once the Blakists held sway.

In the end, ComStar remained, but a changed ComStar. Its mask of carefully cultivated neutrality and spiritual enlightenment had been burned away by what amounted to a civil war. Its army had been virtually destroyed, its survivors transferred under the banner of Devlin Stone and his nascent Republic of the Sphere. Faith in ComStar as the guardian of communication and technology had been all but destroyed, yet there was no one else with the means to rebuild what had nearly been shattered during the Jihad.

For decades, the men and women of ComStar rebuilt. More secular than ever, they nonetheless retained ties to their mystical past, wearing the robes of monks and using the titles first enacted by Conrad Toyama as a symbol of the old ComStar. Yet the Order no longer had the fanatic mysticism of its past. No longer did technicians pray to make their machines work. No longer did every profound utterance become the quote of a sainted Jerome Blake. Most importantly, no longer would the Com Guards field an army of BattleMechs piloted by fanatical devotees.

In place of secret fanaticism, the Order has combined spiritual roots with an open, easy manner; a marriage of a monolithic corporation and a monastic brotherhood. No longer were their compounds sacrosanct from infidels, but were instead open community centers, creating a synergy of good will to heal the horrible wounds of doubt and war.

In the end, ComStar became, as now, a partner to the Inner Sphere, its compounds including a standing garrison of troops from its host nations, or mercenaries approved to operate within said nations. These token military forces today are as much a legitimate protection force as they are a sign of the Order's new covenant with mankind. In entrusting the protection of its valuable facilities, ComStar thus ensures its partners—its customers—of its intention, its new spiritual dedication, to never again rise up as a military power, to never again be able to bring war to the Inner Sphere on such a scale as the Jihad.

Slowly, over the decades since humanity's darkest hours, the men and women of ComStar have found the redemption and the salvation the Order has long sought. Once more, they are the keepers of interstellar communications, the lines that connect all of mankind in a universe of balance and harmony, safeguarding a part of our lives so basic—and yet so vital—that we all tend to take it for granted.

**03/09/3134**

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Citizens of Towne:

With a heavy heart, it is my unfortunate responsibility to inform you that the Towne Comstar INN will cease operations immediately. Since the loss of the HPG system, we have endeavored to maintain our plant wide network, while providing news and updates from across the Republic, as it became available.

The initial disruption of the Towne INN relay station was caused by a disruption in several key components. Eventually these components were replaced with back ups systems based heavily on short term spare parts.

The attack from Stormhammer forces last year managed to take not only valuable data, but many of our these spare parts. We have spent the last months searching for new components to replace those that were lost or already damaged, but we have been unable to find them.

Our technicians have informed me that the components used to update the INN Network are in the process of a catastrophic failure. While current data will be available for some time, we do not anticipate the ability to update the Network to return until our HPG Node is restored.

We regret that this will cause many of you to lose your connection to the outside world, and the Sphere. Stay with your families and friends in this darkest hour and pray with us that this dark age comes to an end soon.

Yours in faith

Lev Bouzerau

