

## Welcome to LinkNet

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The loss of interstellar communications that occurred in 3132 when the bulk of the hyperpulse generator (HPG) network was sabotaged made it effectively impossible for most of the planets of the Inner Sphere to talk to one another. The most obvious and immediate effect was that planets were cut off from efficient, economical communication with The Republic of the Sphere. In the near term, the result has been the creation of Fortress Republic: the once-expansive prototype for star-spanning peace has shrunk to a slightly expanded version of Prefecture X.

Admittedly, there were a few other incidents that helped birth The Fortress, but the loss of the HPG most dramatically affected the ordinary citizen.

We're here to help.

It took a couple of years, but eventually the HPGs that were still working managed to locate other active HPGs. For a while, we were six planets talking to each other on a fairly regular basis, sending the high-priority transmissions and not much else. When The Fortress went up, we lost contact with Northwind, and the rest of us - Hsien, Kessel, Achernar, Gacrux and Irian-decided we ought to acknowledge that what had been a problem was now a gaping void.

It was no longer enough to provide service only to those who could pay; we recognized an opportunity to live up to the purest goals of Jerome Blake and the highest ideals of Devlin Stone. Put in the plainest possible terms, we knew that we needed to serve the people who needed us most.

So we created LinkNet, a loose affiliation of five HPG stations. Our goal is to provide a round-robin news service, rumor network, want ads forum, and-most of all-a reliable opportunity for ordinary folks to find and talk to their loved ones. We can't run this as a free service, but it will be affordable enough that people can say what they want to say and keep in touch. We'll also do our best to collect and pass on the information we think you want to hear-sports news, tech news, the challenges other planets are facing in the absence of The Republic.

Each HPG will be responsible for gathering news and transmissions from their sector of space and passing it along, so we'll all hear from everyone on a regular basis. We encourage all citizens to take advantage of this service to send their own messages, but we also need each one of you to consider what you can contribute to the general information being transmitted. The more we hear from each individual planet, the better prepared we all will be to deal with what comes along.

So, welcome to LinkNet. A service created for you and supported by you for the benefit of all.

### LinkNet Contributing Writers

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## LinkNet

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**LinkNet** is a loose affiliation of planets with working HPGs. Our mission is to provide a forum to allow ordinary people throughout the Inner Sphere to reconnect with each other. Our secondary goal is to maintain a single source for news and information gathered from around the sphere, allowing people to keep in touch with events on other planets.

Because all the content posted on **LinkNet** will be generated by individuals from around the Inner Sphere rather than a staff paid by **LinkNet** or any of the individual HPG stations, we choose to accept a certain level of bias in preference to censoring any entries.

### Don't Get Me Started

This is your forum for telling us (and everyone else) what you think. If you've got an opinion about how things are going on your planet, tell us. If you feel the need to rail against the fates, this is your venue. If traffic is bugging you, use this space to vent your ire.

LinkNet reserves the right to edit your letter for length and inappropriate language. Please include your full name and contact info with your opinion, and tell us how you want your name to appear.

### Letters From Home

The worst thing about being separated by distance is not knowing what is happening in other places. The Blackout of the HPG cut off many, many people from their loved ones, and our goal is to reconnect at least a few of you. These letters, we won't edit. But we still want your complete contact info; we'll have someone on staff at each HPG looking for the connections between the letters we post.

### Rumors of the Republic

Exarch Jonah Levin has informed us that The Republic of the Sphere no longer exists. For hundreds of planets outside of what is now Prefecture X, that news is hard to swallow. First, because many of those planets found intelligent governance and lasting peace under the aegis of The Republic and are loathe to give up those advantages. Second, because many of those planets continue to benefit from the presence of Republic troops.

We believe, along with Jonah Levin, that The Republic continues to be an ideal worth fighting for. In that spirit, we provide this forum to keep people informed of events taking place on former Republic worlds. Perhaps more importantly, this forum will help us track the activities of the knights and paladins left outside The Fortress, whom we must assume will continue acting in the interests of The Republic. To paraphrase an old saying, "As go the knights, so goes The Republic." In the coming months, we will certainly discover whether that is true; and if true, where we are being led.

### Sports Around the Sphere

While some people are (literally) dying for lack of HPG communications, we know that other people just wish they could still get regular news reports. We aim to please! We'll pass on whatever sports news we gather, and hope that what we get will scratch your itch.

### Tech Notes

In this time of uncertainty, it's important to know that progress continues. With Tech Notes, we'll do our best to keep you apprised of ongoing developments in all sectors of technology—though we suspect the content will trend heavily toward BattleMechs and their associated systems.

Much as we dislike beginning with a disclaimer, we feel it is important to state that we can claim no responsibility for the accuracy of the announcements, advertisements and reports posted to this section, since it will be difficult to confirm the truth of the information provided to LinkNet.

## Jonah Levin's "Final Address"

1 October 3135

In the past few years, The Republic has been on a slow, steady slide toward the edge of an abyss. The catalyst for this slide was the loss of the hyperpulse generator network, and thus the loss of interstellar communications—lifeblood to any star-spanning nation.

Chaos, created by the Blackout, was compounded by our own fears, our prejudices, and especially by our greed. Weaknesses we thought we had vanquished. Weaknesses we deceived ourselves into believing could ever be eliminated from human nature.

During this time of trials and tribulations, we have all witnessed the best and worst that everyone—anyone, citizen or resident, peerage or proletariat—had to offer. We found greatness. And frailty. We discovered new allies, new enemies, and the depth of our own resolve to take a new and stronger hand in our own lives, our futures, and our destinies.

And if there was a failure, it was our failure. The failure of those of us entrusted to safeguard Devlin Stone's great legacy.

And now. And now...

There is nothing more to say, nothing more to endeavor, that we have not said or attempted in the last ten months. So it is with great sorrow but firm resolve that we put to you, the people of The Republic of the Sphere, that the time has come for drastic and irrevocable action.

To save what we can for the future.

With this goal, by the authority vested in me as exarch of The Republic of the Sphere, in accordance with the War Powers Act of 3082 and the Emergency Powers and Crisis Management Amendment of 3107, I have committed this nation to the following course:

First: Prefecture Ten is expanded, by decree, to include worlds on the list appended to this transmission. These worlds will sever immediately all economic and political ties to their former prefectures. World governors and military legates of these newly attached systems will consider themselves under the direct control of Terra, and the exarch or his appointed representative.

Second: All military forces able to be safely recalled and mustered for the ensured survival of The Republic have been relocated within the borders of Prefecture Ten, and will not be forward deployed until such time as is deemed appropriate.

Third: Following this final address, there will be no further contact, by transmission or transport, between Prefecture Ten and any outside world or power. This self-imposed interdiction will be enforced by the most severe military means necessary.

Fourth. Last: Full faith and sovereignty of The Republic of the Sphere is now invested solely within Prefecture Ten. All other prefectures are released to the full and sovereign control of their people, to decide for themselves how best to weather the coming storms.

These commands, by design and effect, do hereby constitute a New Republic Territory, under the direct and complete aegis of Terra.

And formally dissolve The Republic of the Sphere.

I cannot help, in this dark and uncertain time, but to think of what we all have lost. To imagine the terrible and far-reaching consequences of this day's actions. But there is nothing more we can do, for now, except to pray that we may yet persevere and preserve the light which has guided us for so long; to hold onto the faith that has carried us so far.

The Republic was more than a dream of utopia. It was an ideal. One which we were challenged to live up to each and every day. That bright fire may have been reduced to a guttering flame, but it shall never be extinguished. And the fire shall return! The Republic may be absent for a time, but know this and remember it well:

We are all Keepers of the Flame.

## Letters From Home -- Week 01

3136-0125

**To:** Ann Wister, Nanking, Prefecture VI  
**From:** Christopher Wister, Van Diemen IV, Prefecture VII

My darling Ann,

How much I miss you. I wish that I had never taken the job at the BattleMech factory on Irian, since it has taken me away from you. I have not heard anything of Nanking since shortly after I left, but I hope and I pray that you are still alive and well, and that this letter somehow reaches you. I miss you more than I could ever say, and I want you to know that I am doing everything I can to find my way back to Nanking. I left work at the factory, because I was desperate to see you again. I purchased passage on a DropShip bound for Liao, hoping to get back home to you, but the captain would not go further than Van Diemen IV after he heard that the Capellans had taken the world. I asked him to refund my passage, and he gave me some of my money back, but he would not return it all because he claimed he needed to make money on the voyage as well. I have taken up work here on Van Diemen for now, trying to make enough money to make it home to you. I know that I shouldn't have spent the credits to send this message, but I had to take the opportunity to tell you how much I love you and miss you, and that I'm doing everything I can to get home as soon as possible. You are in my thoughts and dreams constantly, and I cannot wait to take you into my arms once again.

With all my love,  
 Your Christopher

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This is going out to all of you out there who were with the 125th Lancer Dragoons on Fletcher during the Jihad. It is my unpleasant duty to inform you that the Old Man is starting to fade, and he wants to see the unit back together before he leaves us on the Last Tour of Duty. Colonel Youngman'd like everyone to come to Bridges here on Hamilton. When you get in-city, drop me a line at The Terrace, and I'll get you a place to stay and help get you settled. If you don't have the credits to make it, get word to me, and I'll see what I can do. Even if it takes a while to get here, the Old Man said he wanted everyone in the old Dragoons to see each other again-even if you don't get a chance to see him off. So try to make it even if you have to travel a ways. For those of you who are still on active duty, Colonel Youngman understands that you might not be able to get away from your new units, and would like you to send an update to let everyone from the 125th know how you're doing. The Colonel and I look forward to seeing those of you who can make it, and to hearing from those of you who can't.

Ever Onwards!

Baron Ernst Flint,  
 Lieutenant Colonel (retired)  
 125th Lancer Dragoons

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**To:** Vernon "Bendy" Benderson  
**From:** Alice Norton, Alphard, Prefecture VII

I'm not sure where you're at, Bendy old buddy, but I thought this might be a good time to get in touch. My unit got orders to pull back towards Prefecture X a couple weeks back, but we've been here on Alphard for quite a while, and we've gotten pretty close to the locals. When Major Kharkov told the legate that we had orders to pull out, the legate asked the old man to stay on. Hell, he practically begged him. The legate said if we pulled out, we'd be leaving the planet defenseless, and I agree. Luckily, so did the colonel, so he decided to hang on. The reason I'm trying to get ahold of you is that the colonel wants to expand the RCT, and we can't do that without some more good officers. Before you read too much into this, I'm also trying to get ahold of just about everyone from the old Sandhurst class. What you and I had together was good, but not that good.

We're not trying to start any sort of mercenary unit or go off planet, we just want to be sure we can protect the people of Alphard from anything that comes our way. If you've got a 'Mech and can move it, that'd be wonderful, but if you can only come yourself, that'd be enough. We've got volunteers from the populace, but we don't have experienced officers to lead or train them. I don't know where you're at, but the comms officer said that he knew of some sort of ring of HPG stations that were up and sending, and he'd get it circulated through in case you or any of the other old Sandhurst chums were anywhere near any of the stations. We've got enough of a force to drive off any jackals that might be attracted by the idea of a defenseless planet, so I'm not too worried about how far and wide this message might get, but I would like to get you out here with us. You're a good man in a fight, Bendy, I won't snow you, and we need men and women like you. You know it's not my style to beg, but all of us officers from my old unit are getting pretty worn down training the militia to combat-ready standards-and I'm getting pretty close to that point. If you can possibly make it, and you're looking for a good cause, please, come out and join us. The legate said he'd reimburse any out-of-pocket expenses incurred by seasoned officers coming out here to join up, so don't worry about the cost.

Hope to see you soon,  
 Alice

—:—

Dear Mom and Dad,

We've been out here on Acubens so long that I sometimes feel like I grew up here. I still remember Sabik, but it's been so long since I was there that sometimes the details blur. I know that I'm supposed to be out of the army by now and on my way home, but they extended our terms of service for another six months. Last time they did it, there was a lot of griping, as you'll recall, but I think everyone assumed that the terms would be extended this time. There's just so much going on that The Republic can't afford to let any trained soldiers go home. Don't worry though, I'm always careful, and there hasn't been much action here, just some skirmishes with a bunch of mercenaries hired on by a bunch of fat cats who don't want to listen to the governor anymore. I don't think we'll have any problem putting them down, they're not a top-notch group, and we've gotten good at what we do.

The chow has gotten better. I guess while we're busy getting to be better soldiers, the cooks are getting better at making good food out of what little supplies they get in. It's still nowhere near as good as your cooking, Mom, but not much is.

You remember my friend Brian McMurtry I was telling you about, the driver of our tank who got in some trouble in town over a local girl? Well, he and I sat down and talked for a long time, and he decided to do the right thing, and asked the girl to marry him. The wedding is set for next month, and I'm supposed to be the best man. It's quite an honor, and I'm glad it's all working out. Brian's really happy, and so's his girl.

I need to get going, the alert just sounded. I'll send another letter to you soon and tell you all about the preparations for the wedding. I hope I can make it home in six months ... we should have things cleaned up here by then, and so maybe they won't extend our contracts again.

Your son,  
Simon Bradley

#### **Postscript by Adept Phineous Pile:**

In the same batch of comm-traffic from PFC Bradley's unit that contained this letter, we received the following. I don't want to keep the Bradleys in suspense, so I decided to append it to the letter, please copy it as well.

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Bradley,

I regret to inform you that your son, Private First Class Simon Bradley, was killed in the line of duty, fighting against rogue elements on Acubens. Simon was one of the best soldiers in my lance, and a wonderful friend to those around him, always concerned with their welfare and happiness. He died fighting to save his crewmates, holding off enemy forces long enough for all of them to escape, including the wounded driver of his tank. I know that nothing I say can make this blow any softer, but your son was one of the best men I have had the honor of commanding, and hopefully you can take comfort in knowing that you raised him to be a shining example of what The Republic of the Sphere represents. If there is anything I can do for you, please do not hesitate to let me know.

You have my deepest condolences,  
Lieutenant D.H. Lytle Commander,  
1st Recon Lance, Delta Company, 3rd Hastati Sentinels

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I've tried everything else, so why not try this? Micah, if you're out there, please answer. I know you were mad, and you probably still are, but we're your family, and you should be here with us. Your mother and I both said some things we shouldn't have, and we're sorry for them. I know you wanted to go to the Academy, but we were worried, worried about what would happen after you graduated and went out into the world. Now you're out in the world even sooner than you would have been if you'd gone to the Academy, and without any of the training, and your mother and I are scared. We're scared out of our minds, and we just want you to come home. We'll talk about the Academy, we'll talk about anything you like, just so long as you're home and safe. If you won't come home, Micah, please send word at least. Just something to let us know that you're still alive, that you're still out there, and that maybe there's a chance that we'll be able to see you again. That's all we want.

With all our love,  
Your mother and father

—:—

Hi guys,

I finally made it to Irian. I've taken a job at one of the factories here, and it pays real well, a lot better than anything back there on Savannah. I finally got a chance to see Dominion Over All; they may have banned it back home, but it's showing all over the place here. It's pretty good, but I've seen lots better at home. I guess they were worried about people getting scared at home—it does show the Rasalhague Dominion in a pretty bad light. It doesn't seem quite right, either, it seems like they're pushing too hard, trying to make the Dominion seem like more of a threat than it really is. Supposedly it's based on some book, so I might read that and see if it makes any more sense. Anyhow, I don't want to waste time talking about movies and books ... there's

money to be made here, and lots of it. The work is different from what's available at home, but it's easy compared to most of the work at home, too. At the factory where I work, all I do day in and day out is solder one piece of a circuit board to another. It's a bit boring, but it's really easy, and they don't seem to realize just how easy it is, because I get paid as much in a day as I would in a week doing anything that isn't illegal on Savannah. I know it costs a lot of money, and it might be hard to find a DropShip making all the right hops to get here, but my shift manager told me that if I knew anyone else who was looking for a job, he'd pay top dollar. I feel kind of bad with you guys stuck back on Savannah while I'm making all this money here on Irian. Beyond that, the girls are great here, they're friendly and independent, and I know that people are the same everywhere, but it seems like they all look better here. Anyhow, I'm running out of word count, I only get so many words for my money, so I'll sign off, but really, if you can, you should all make the jump over here. I can't wait to talk to you all again.

Tim

## Solaris VII 3135 Grand Tournament Recap

### 3136-0125

For those of you out there on backwater worlds without access to any good feeds, I thought it'd be nice to start out LinkNet sports coverage with a recap of the recently completed 3135 Solaris VII Grand Tournament. As you all remember (and you must have been living in a cave if you don't), Jacob Fryer, the 3134 champion, fell victim to a spectacular cockpit shot by Tandrek Stables' Lillian Chiang in the middle of the season, leaving the field wide open at Grand Tournament time.

I'll skip any description of the qualifiers, except to note a couple of spectacular matches, and then go through each round individually.

#### Qualifiers

The big highlight of the qualifiers was watching Clayton Bullock in his *Anubis* run circles around Virgil Luciano's *Thor*, pecking away at the bigger machine's armor until he created a weak spot and toppled the heavy 'Mech. Unfortunately, Luciano got in a couple of good shots on Bullock's *Anubis*, and Bullock went down hard in the next round, even though he was facing another light 'Mech.

Another highlight (or lowlight, depending on who you ask), was Boris Vassilev's 1minute-34 second victory over Fitzhugh Stables' Irene Cleveland. Vassilev managed to get the drop on Cleveland, blasting her with every weapon on his big, bad *Malice*, and it was Good Night, Irene.

The match that captured the imagination of most Solaris fans was the fight of the *Neanderthals*, Lex Corpuz against Alberto DeJesus. Per a prior agreement the match was weapons-dead and, recognizing the primitive appeal of their 'Mechs, both pilots agreed that instead of the standard mace they would each carry their respective *BattleMaster* 'Mech arms into combat. Corpuz has never said where he got the green-and-brown arm that his 'Mech carries, but many of you will remember the spectacular fight in which DeJesus pulled the arm off "Linebacker" and used it to finish off the *BattleMaster*. The match was a true slugfest, with each *Neanderthal* eventually wearing down its bludgeon until all that remained were sad toothpicks of once-proud war machines. Finally managing to break from the close combat and gain some distance from Corpuz's "Buford," DeJesus raised "El Diablo Rojo's" right arm high to signal the beginning of the Peoples' Shoulder maneuver—and the ultimate demise of Buford. If weapons had been live, Corpuz certainly would have leveled Buford's twin extended-range PPCs and blasted DeJesus into the next arena, but instead all Corpuz could do was drop into a three-point stance and wait to apply Excessive Force. Irresistible force met immovable object and moved it, knocking Corpuz down and ultimately ending the match in a win for DeJesus and his Hombres Stable. Still, there were clearly no hard feelings between these two combatants, who shook hands amicably at the end of their confrontation and vowed to return with sturdier pilfered 'Mech arms in a future match.

#### First Round (32 pilots)

This round saw all 'Mechs competing against 'Mechs of like weight-classes except for a lone *Violator* being put up against a *Jackalope*. This was the most entertaining battle of the first round, with the lighter *Jackalope*'s driver, Isaac Lynne, doing his level best to dance and dart around Moira Hernandez's *Violator* until Hernandez managed to grab an ankle just as the *Jackalope* bounded into the air, bringing the little 'Mech crashing to the ground. Moira quickly applied the *Violator*'s infamous drill, leaving the *Jackalope* little more than salvage. Lynne was tossed around the cockpit, but not badly hurt during the fight. Boris Vassilev attempted to repeat his performance in the qualifying rounds here, but he was outmaneuvered and outmatched, taken down by Trisha Swanson, a front-runner from Cenotaph Stables.

#### Second Round (16 pilots)

After a night of frenzied repair and rearmament, the second round of the Grand Tournament began. This round saw nearly all of the lighter designs eliminated (including the brutal destruction of fan-favorite Michael Tate's *Goshawk* by Levi Haynes in his *Marauder IIC 2*), though Moira Hernandez pulled through once more, getting behind Jing Lee's *Thunderbolt* and dropping him with a fiery blast of MRM fire. This round also saw the first death of the Grand Tournament, as a headshot from Huntsmen Stables' Joshua Simmons' *Mangonel* killed Violet de Mornay in her Nova Cat's cockpit at the end of a grueling and hard-fought duel.

#### Quarterfinals (8 pilots)

Making someone a fortune at the betting tables, Moira Hernandez and her *Violator* managed to scrape together another win, despite a gauss hit in the second round that nearly severed her *Violator*'s left arm. This time, she used the chaos-mode setting of the Steiner Coliseum to her advantage, and managed to close with Gerhard Von Strucker's *Catapult* without taking too much damage, putting the drill in for the win.

Levi Haynes nearly annihilated William Chase's *Black Knight*, with the Renegades Cooperative pilot barely managing to eject before his 'Mech collapsed under the weight of the *Marauder*'s fire.

Trisha Swanson continued her good showing by winning a close-run fight with Joshua Simmons, using her *Scourge*'s superior speed to evade fire and leap around the *Mangonel*. Trisha's pinpoint accuracy allowed her to pick away at Simmons' legs, eventually toppling the Huntsman pilot.

The final match of the quarterfinals saw Horace Wolfe's *Zeus* taking down Sarah McMillan's *Battlemaster* with concentrated long-range fire, and then there were four.

### Semifinals (4 pilots)

The Semifinals saw Moira Hernandez matched up against Trisha Swanson, and Levi Haynes taking on Horace Wolfe.

Moira gave the match her all, but without the speed advantage she had enjoyed for the last two rounds, and with her *Violator* chewed up from facing down heavier machines without ample time for repairs, it was only a matter of time before Swanson put the *Violator* down for the count. The *Scourge*'s pilot did her stable proud, however, doing only as much damage as was necessary in order to win the match, holding back some of the *Scourge*'s prodigious firepower to keep from endangering her opponent's life.

The battle of the titans turned out to be an outright slugging match, with both 'Mechs advancing on their opponent, apparently mutually unsure of their ability to win a long-range sniping match. As the 'Mechs drew nearer, it became clear that Levi Haynes' fire was more accurate, and the weight of disciplined, well-aimed fire began to take its toll on Horace Wolfe's assault-class *Zeus*. After losing his right arm to a volley of ATMs, and with his left leg shattered by repeated PPC strikes, Wolfe surrendered the match, and a place in the finals, to Levi Haynes and his *Marauder IIC 2*.

### Championship Match

Trisha Swanson (*Scourge*, Cenotaph Stables) vs. Levi Haynes (*Marauder IIC 2*, Starlight Stables)

Though Trisha had beaten several assault 'Mechs over the course of the tournament, including Boris Vassilev's *Malice*, the betting odds were heavily against her in this matchup. With both 'Mechs equipped with jump jets, much of Swanson's advantage from her earlier matches was negated, and if her 'Mech was faster, it was also seriously outgunned. Given a day and two nights to make good the damage from previous combats, both 'Mechs were in good condition when they entered the championship arena, although they both still bore the scars of five long days of fighting.

From the beginning of the battle, it was obvious that Swanson intended to make Haynes chase her, using the available cover to the best of her ability and using her superior speed to keep out from under the *Marauder*'s weapons. Although he had to be careful of his heat, Haynes could afford to be liberal with his PPC fire, while Swanson had to take care not to waste shots with her 'Mech's gauss rifle. This allowed Haynes to keep Swanson on the run for the first four minutes of the match.

It was a testament to Trisha Swanson's skill that she managed to keep her *Scourge* relatively undamaged during these intense four minutes, though her machine lost a significant amount of armor to repeated PPC strikes. At four minutes and 36 seconds into the battle, Trisha fired her gauss rifle for the first time, skipping a shot off the sloped armor of the *Marauder*'s torso as Haynes desperately twisted away.

This single shot changed the initiative of the match, as it put Haynes on the defensive, allowing Swanson to stop dodging and attack. Two more gauss rounds followed the first in quick succession, the first missing completely as Levi hit his jump jets in a desperate bid to escape, and the second striking the *Marauder* in the right rear just as it was landing, destroying one of the jump jet units and effectively grounding the assault 'Mech.

From this point on, Swanson used her red and white *Scourge* like a light 'Mech, circling around the beleaguered *Marauder* and firing on Haynes with her quartet of medium lasers and her medium pulse laser, keeping him on his toes while she set up for the kill with her gauss rifle. Haynes, however, proved that he deserved his spot in this championship match, luring Swanson into over-committing herself to get off a gauss shot. When she popped out from behind cover at close range, Levi was waiting, and fired a pointblank salvo of ATMs at the *Scourge*, staggering the smaller 'Mech with missile impacts.

Trisha was able to keep her 'Mech standing, however, and got in the gauss attack despite the fearsome missile assault, disabling one of Levi's ERPPCs even as her medium lasers scored on the blue and silver 'Mech's ATM launcher, causing a series of minor explosions. The significance of this strike didn't become evident for some time, as Swanson ducked her *Scourge* out of the *Marauder*'s line of fire before Haynes could fire another volley of ATMs.

Swanson returned to her light-'Mech tactics, demonstrating the exceptional training provided by Cenotaph Stables, by wrenching her damaged heavy 'Mech around in maneuvers that would challenge a light 'Mech. It was almost not enough, however, as Haynes was able to set up a missile shot on Trisha's *Scourge* while the *Scourge* was in mid-jump, soaring over one of the obstacles scattered about the arena. It quickly became evident that Swanson's laser hit on the launcher had caused more damage than was initially apparent, however, as only three missiles actually launched, the others detonating in their tubes and causing a massive explosion that nearly gutted the 'Mech of the Starlight Stables champion. Haynes attempted to fight on, however, until Swanson darted around his flank, taking out his second PPC with a pinpoint gauss strike and leaving him nearly defenseless. Not willing to fight on with only his two small lasers, Levi Haynes broadcast his surrender, leaving Trisha Swanson the 3135 Solaris VII Grand Tournament Champion!



## Whose Sphere is it Anyway?

3136-0125

Adept Samuel Bingham  
Gacrux

In this Age of Turmoil, it is sometimes difficult to ascertain just who are the various militias, splinter groups, and states fighting across the reaches of the Inner Sphere, and what they represent. Nearly all of them claim to be fighting for peoples' rights-for self-determination, for protection, for territory, or for any of a dozen other things. They cannot all be on the side of us, the people of the Inner Sphere. So, starting coreward and proceeding around the Inner Sphere in a clockwise direction, it will be my pleasure to identify for you the major groups contesting territory in the Sphere.

### Clan Jade Falcon

One of the so-called Crusader Clans, intent upon gathering all the people of the Inner Sphere under their green wings. The stated goal of the Clans is to reach Terra and take it in the name of Kerensky, but the Falcons take it a step further. Being the genetically altered freaks that they are, they're obviously not working for the good of the people, but at least they're honest about their claims of conquest.

### Rasalhague Dominion

A happy combination of Clan Ghost Bear and the Free Rasalhague Republic. If you believe that, I have some undeveloped land in downtown Geneva to sell you. Clan Ghost Bear didn't get the results it wanted on its own, so now it's hiding behind the guise of a former state of the Inner Sphere. The Bears say that they're moving into the Republic of the Sphere in order to keep the peace, but anyone can tell that they're really just heading for Terra as quickly as any of their other Clans.

### Draconis Combine (House Kurita)

The Snakes like to pretend they aren't controlled by the criminal yakuza and that they're a nation of honorable samurai. Despite their protests of moral superiority, however, they've been quick to snatch up worlds along their former border with the Republic of the Sphere.

### Dragon's Fury

A once-proud splinter group under the command of Republic Prefect Katana Tormark, the Dragon's Fury have sold out to the Draconis Combine lock, stock, and smoking barrels. Now they're fronting the Kurita push into what used to be Prefecture III.

### Clan Nova Cat

Another Clan which has supposedly allied itself with an Inner Sphere nation, the Nova Cats call themselves mystics. Frankly, anyone who uses as many controlled substances as they do would see things too. They serve as shock troops for House Kurita-when they're not dealing with the munchies.

### Spirit Cats

Before he got himself whacked by a sniper, former Republic Senator Kev Rosse founded the Spirit Cats, a group dedicated to the ideals of Clan Nova Cat. Just what those ideals are (besides following their "visions") is up for debate, as the Spirit Cats have been wandering more or less aimlessly since Rosse was killed.

### Swordsworn

Duke Aaron Sandoval left Republic service when he saw a chance to expand his own personal influence. Now the Swordsworn march to First Prince Caleb Sandoval-Davion's tune, pushing the frontier of the Federated Suns deep into Prefecture IV. Openly expansionist, they don't fool anyone with their claims to be following the wishes of the people they conquer.

### Federated Suns (House Davion)

Not since the Fox himself, old Hanse Davion, have the Fedrats been ruled by a more Machiavellian First Prince. Letting the Swordsworn run wild isn't enough for First Prince Caleb Sandoval-Davion; he's bringing in the big guns of the Armed Forces of the Federated Suns to snatch up as much territory as they can while the Republic is busy elsewhere.

### Capellan Confederation (House Liao)

The Cappies are pushing to take back into the fold planets they once controlled. They haven't said what they plan to do when they run out of former Liao worlds to conquer, but you can bet that it won't have anything to do with going home. Daoshen Liao may not be as crazy as old Sun-Tzu, but he's not exactly the most stable person in the Inner Sphere either, so there's no telling which way the Cappies'll leap.

### Bannson's Raiders

We all knew that Jacob Bannson was a corporate raider, but when his security forces started hitting planets nearby his headquarters, it was a big step even for him. Now that he's tied the knot with House Liao, he's going to have to step lively to stay in charge of his assets. Bannson's boys (and girls) have never talked about helping people, they've made it quite clear they're just in it for the money.

### Free Worlds League (House Marik)

Uh ... which one? Right now there's at least half a dozen people claiming to be the Captain-General, but none of them have taken time out of squabbling amongst themselves to snatch up anything significant from the faltering Republic. Don't expect much out of these guys, I'm mostly mentioning them for old times' sake.

**Stormhammers**

While it's true that the Isle of Skye has always wanted to be free of the Lyrans Commonwealth, Landgrave Jasek Kelswa-Steiner apparently decided that The Republic of the Sphere was much worse than House Steiner ever had been, and took a significant portion of the planetary militia with him. Now, Kelswa-Steiner hasn't exactly managed to bring Skye back to the Commonwealth, but (he actually lost it to the Falcons, but who's counting?) he did get people riled up.

**Lyrans Commonwealth (House Steiner)**

The economic powerhouse of the Inner Sphere, House Steiner has taken very little action against The Republic of the Sphere, only moving in to provide protection for those planets within its sphere of influence after The Republic left them in the lurch.

**The Republic of the Sphere**

Last but not least, we have The Republic of the Sphere, Devlin Stone's great vision of protection for all people within 120 light years of Terra. Oh, right-that was before the coward Jonah Levin took the exarch's throne and drew his forces back into so-called Fortress Republic. Now The Republic is a frightened minor power in the middle of Great Houses and Clans fighting for dominion over innocent people. Leaving you to wonder, whose Sphere is it anyway?

## Battlefield Report -- Poznan

3136-0203

This came from a courier who regularly sends from our HPG station. She figured that since it was open when she took receipt of it, it was open for anyone. It seemed clear that this information would be of interest to people who want to keep up on the ongoing conflict between House Liao and Republic remnant units in what used to be Prefectures V and VI.

Adept Lamont Wainright

After Action Report - 3rd Battalion, 1st Regiment, Poznan Militia

15 January 3136

0523 Local: 15 January began for 3/1 before local dawn, with Company K's 'Mech lance (LT Armstrong) and an armored infantry squad (1SGT Linee) from 3rd Platoon beginning a 6-hour patrol into the contested area south-southeast of New Shanghai City.

0546: LT Armstrong reports seismic activity indicative of 'Mech movement "some distance away" to the patrol's northeast. 2 troopers and MSGT Fanning's *Stinger* detached to investigate while remainder of patrol continues as planned.

0555: MSGT Fanning reports multiple mag-scan contacts, LT Armstrong orders him to hold position and turns patrol toward Fanning's position.

0558: MSGT Fanning reports visual contacts with four unidentified 'Mechs, then positively identifies the contacts as members of the Confederation Reserve Cavalry, one *Griffin*, one *Panther*, one *Havoc*, and one *Sun Cobra*. LT Armstrong orders Fanning to fall back toward the patrol.

0559: MSGT Fanning reports incoming LRM fire as well as armored vehicles and infantry moving up to support Liao 'Mechs. LT Armstrong requests support from Company K

HQ. Remaining units (CPT Burnett's *Mangonel*, the armor lance under LT Nagumo and remainder of LT Metcalf's armored infantry platoon) of Company K immediately dispatched to support Armstrong's patrol. Companies L and M activated, to be dispatched as they became ready.

0600: Trooper Miles KIA, MSGT Fanning and Trooper Wayne continue fighting retreat. Fanning's *Stinger* takes hit from Liao *Sun Cobra* and *Griffin*, damaged severely, but still combat effective.

0602: Remainder of LT Armstrong's patrol links up with MSGT Fanning and Trooper Wayne and continues fighting retreat toward battalion positions.

0603: CPL Espero KIA, Trooper Weber WIA. *Wasp* piloted by 1SGT Vincennes damaged by PPC blast from CapCon *Panther*, then struck by gauss round from *Sun Cobra*. 1SGT Vincennes KIA. LT Armstrong scores hit on Liao Fulcrum hover tank with his *Centurion*'s AC20, disabling the tank's main weapon. 1SGT Eriksson follows up, scoring the kill from his *Ghost*.

0603 to 0606: LT Armstrong's patrol continues withdrawal, trading shots with CapCon forces.

0606: 1SGT Eriksson's *Ghost* heavily damaged by Liao vehicles, but still combat effective. 1SGT Linee KIA, Trooper Wayne takes command of surviving infantry. Several Liao infantrymen and vehicles killed or damaged by members of LT Armstrong's patrol. Armstrong scores several hits on CapCon *Griffin*, causing it to withdraw from battle with severe limp.

0606 to 0612: LT Armstrong's patrol continues withdrawal.

0612: Companies L and M mobilized, Company M moves out to support Company K. Company L assigned to guard base area.

0612 to 0615: LT Armstrong's patrol continues withdrawal.

0615: First elements of Company K reinforcements enter visual range of the running battle. This includes MSGT Killens' *Uller*, 1SGT Findlay's *Spider*, and LT Nagumo's Zibler strike tank and Hadur fast support vehicle. CPT Burnett estimates he and remainder of force is three minutes behind.

0616: As first reinforcements reach engagement range, LT Armstrong's *Centurion* takes hits from Liao Kelswa assault tank, losing left arm and rendering LRM launcher inoperable. Hadur fast support vehicle opens fire, followed shortly by MSGT Killens' *Uller*.

0617: 1SGT Findlay's *Spider* attempts to close with Liao forces, but is struck by concentrated fire from several vehicles. CapCon *Havoc* moves in behind Findlay's 'Mech and topples it. 1SGT Findlay WIA, ejects. Liao armored infantry jumps forward, swarming 1SGT Eriksson's *Ghost*, using explosive charges on joints. 1SGT Eriksson forced to eject.

0618: LT Armstrong and MSGT Killens fire on Liao *Havoc* while MSGT Fanning, Trooper Wayne, and Trooper Weber engage armored infantry responsible for loss of 1SGT Eriksson's *Ghost*. Enemy *Havoc* heavily damaged, forced to retreat. Liao infantry forced to fall back, several KIA or WIA.

0619: Remainder of Company K engages Liao force. Surviving Liao 'Mechs begin retreat while vehicle and infantry assets engage Company K fiercely to cover the withdrawal.

0620 to 0629: Company K presses Liao covering forces hard, sustaining and inflicting more damage, but not suffering further KIA. Regulator II, Bellona, and Glory fire support tanks destroyed, Fulcrum, Bellona, and Kelswa damaged.

0630: Company L arrives in full and engages enemy units.

0632: Final Liao forces driven off or destroyed. CPT Burnett declines LT Armstrong's request for pursuit, begins recovery operations for ejected pilots and wounded infantry and vehicle crewmen.

0658: Companies K and L return to base.

LT Armstrong is to be commended for his inspiring leadership and marksmanship, though his intent to pursue Liao forces using heavily damaged units is indicative of his general inexperience. CPT Burnett did well in restraining his ardor. Trooper Wayne did extremely well in taking over command of remaining infantry assets after the death of 1SGT Linee and CPL Espero. She has been brevetted to CPL, and we expect great things from her. The loss of so much of LT Armstrong's patrol is a grievous blow to Company K's combat strength, but the ability of Liao forces to penetrate so deeply into areas thought to be under militia control is even more worrying. Despite losses, we will be forced to step up patrols in the area to ensure that it is indeed secured.

Major William Randolph  
Executive Officer, 3rd Battalion, 1st Regiment  
Poznan Militia

## **Duke Corwin Sandoval of Robinson Responds to Levin's Final Address**

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**3136-0203**

It is always a sad state of affairs, to see the once-mighty brought low. In Exarch Jonah Levin's own words, for years The Republic has been on a steady slide toward the edge. It has suffered from the chaos of the Blackout, compounded by its fears, prejudices and greed.

Even though The Republic has been forced to admit its failings, and to accept the loss of Devlin Stone's final legacy, certainly they have taken the right and proper steps toward ensuring a safe future for their citizens and residents— all descendents of expatriates of the greatest realms in the Inner Sphere.

By the exarch's decree, The Republic has been restricted to a handful of core worlds that can be adequately protected by their embattled armies. The Republic also has placed itself under a voluntary interdiction, preferring to have no contact with the Greater Powers of the Inner Sphere. No communication. No trade.

They have formally cut ties to their provincial worlds, surrendering them to the will of the people.

And certainly the will of the people shall be to join themselves once again with the Great Houses that have provided for them throughout history. Witness the actions of First Prince Caleb! Recognizing one of the Draconis March's favorite sons as his new Prince's Champion, and welcoming back into the Federated Suns those worlds which Erik Sandoval helped to shepherd and safeguard.

Yes. A sad day. But a day anyone might have foreseen. The Republic was a utopian dream. One that proved to be too great a challenge to sustain. That bright fire now gutters out, and in its place we shall provide a new, stronger guiding light. The Draconis March supports the will of Prince Caleb, and extends its hand to our neighbors, these former worlds of the great Federated Suns.

We will help to save what we can.

For our future.

## TECH WATCH: Victory Conditions Industries and Eris Enterprises Team Up

3136-0203

It's mobile, agile and highly portable and, for well-established militaries, downright affordable. Victory Conditions Industries (VCI) and Eris Enterprises design groups have teamed up to produce an innovation in the field of reconnaissance BattleMechs: the *Jackalope*.

It may not look like much, but this mini-powerhouse offers the capability of swinging the tide of battle; at the very least, offering a perceptible edge on the battlefield. This 30-ton workhorse is built with solid endo-steel construction and encased in a ferro-fibrous shell. Underneath that glows a 240 XL Victory fusion power plant, sending this sprightly 'Mech skirting along at 129 kpm when at full "hop." This speed is complimented by a veritable battalion of eight Dynamo jump jets, capable of bounding the *Jackalope* up to 240 meters in a single leap.

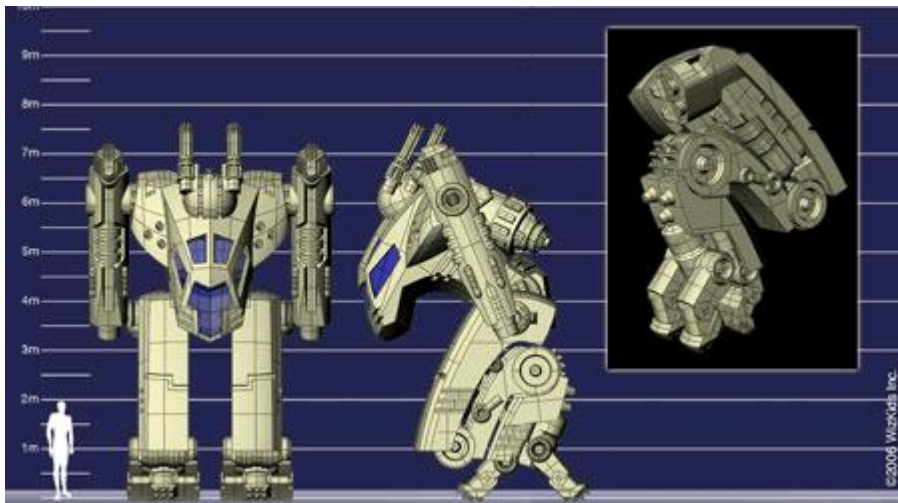
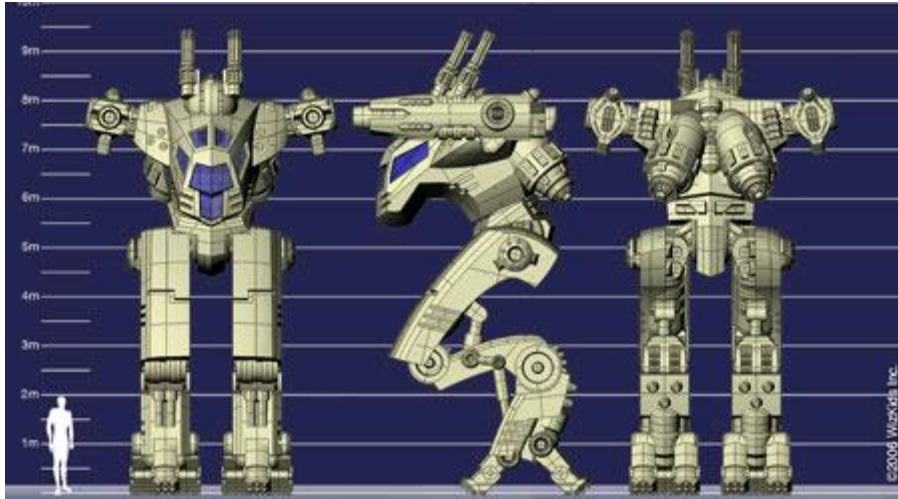
And just what do those jump jets help transport? The standard *Jackalope* (JLP-KA-L) variant carries two Conquest extended-range medium lasers and a Victory advanced missile system 6-rack. Standard on every variant is the Clean-Sweep anti-missile system, capable of defending both itself and its comrades from pesky incoming missile fire. Inquiries about the probe technology of this BattleMech are met with a polite "no comment." The only complaint about this design is that this 'Mech's armor may not be quite up to snuff. At 81 percent of its maximum armor tolerance, it can run into trouble fairly quickly once an enemy damages an all-important leg.

Which brings us to the most innovative feature of the *Jackalope*: designed specifically with DropShip transport in mind, this BattleMech literally "folds" itself into a compact bundle, allowing more room for additional cargo and making it possible to carry enough *Jackalopes* to quickly overpower weakly defended strategic areas. An Eris Enterprises spokesperson says, "The unique leg design was on our drawing board for about a year. However, it was only through VCI's engineering team that it was able to come to fruition. We're very pleased with the result, and look forward to working with VCI on future projects."

Additional variants of the *Jackalope* sacrifice armor for even greater speed on the battlefield, but VCI isn't saying if they have any takers for it yet. One thing is certain; we'll be watching for more joint ventures from these two companies.

## THE BREAKDOWN

<b>BattleMech:</b>	Jackalope JLP-KA-L
<b>Mass:</b>	30 tons
<b>Chassis:</b>	Triumph Endo Steel
<b>Power Plant:</b>	240 XL Victory Fusion
<b>Walking Speed:</b>	86.4 km/h
<b>Maximum Speed:</b>	129.6 km/h
<b>Jump Jets:</b>	8 Dynamo Jump Jets
<b>Jump Capacity:</b>	240 meters
<b>Armor Type:</b>	Ferro-Fibrous Advantage Armor
<b>Armament:</b>	2 Conquest ER Medium Lasers 1 Victory Adv. Tact. Msl. 6 1 Clean-Sweep Anti-Missile System
<b>Cost:</b>	4,500,000 C-bills (discounts for bulk purchases)



## Letters From Home -- Week 02

3136-0206

Dear Mother,

We are finally starting to push them back. The raiders' last assault on our lines stopped their momentum and now we are ready to take the fight to them. Our leaders have spent a great deal of time planning the upcoming offensive, and I have little doubt that we shall push them back to their base and mop up the lot of them. We may even capture their DropShip if they are not quick enough to get off-planet. I am extremely proud of the men in my platoon-they have seen combat first-hand, and have not flinched. When the attackers came here, my men (and myself as well) were as green as freshly cut grass, but we are starting to react like veterans, and I am sure we will win out.

It will not be an easy fight, however, as they are well-armed, and they will be desperate. Also, we tracked them into a really nasty stretch of ground, with a series of canyons and gullies that will surely break up our assault force and make coordination difficult. If we succeed, however, we will be able to drive these corsairs completely off the planet, and make it once again safe for the citizens living here. That gain is so worthy that almost any price would be cheap to pay for it. If I should not return, therefore, I want you to know that I went without any terror of death, and that my chief worry is the grief my death will bring to those so dear to me. Since having found the love I share with Mary, there has been so much to make life sweet and glorious, that death, while distasteful, is in no way terrible.

I am certain that I will carry my part off with honor, as will those men under my command, and if I should fall, you must try to assuage your sorrow with pride and satisfaction in the knowledge that I died well in so great and glorious a cause. Remember how proud I have always been of your superb courage in the face of adversity, and don't permit my death to bow your head.

My personal effects will be sent directly to you. Your good taste will tell you which to send along to Mary.

Godspeed, and may you carry any burdens which I or my passing place upon you as well as I know you shall.

David

—:—

Dear Solomon,

I know it has been some time since you last heard from me, and no doubt you are wondering what the cause has been for this long delay in writing. Obviously, some of it is the cause of the loss of the HPG grid, but I cannot put more than a little of the blame on that occasion, the most of it has been on me. This is by far the most difficult thing I've had to do, and you must realize how much it pains me to do this. I've always been honest with you, and I believe you deserve only the truth from me, for you are yourself so wonderful and honest a person. So I will be perfectly honest with you. Sol, I've met someone I care for very much, and I cannot carry on with our engagement.

I realize only too well how you must feel right now, but I had to tell you. How could I have gone through a life with you, only loving you with a part of my heart? You deserve more than that, for you are too fine a person to receive anything so cold as half my devotion. While it is true that you have been gone so long with the RAF, don't think for a moment that this is your fault. It is neither of our faults, really. Neither of us wished to have things happen as they did, it just happened and we can't do anything about it. I guess it's what they call fate.

You've been wonderful to me all along, and I think you are one of the most sincere people I've had the honor of meeting. I'm certain you'll meet someone soon who will be able to give you what I no longer can. I'm returning your gifts and the ring to your mother, which I believe is the only fair thing to do. I will tell them in person, but I wanted to thank you for how wonderful she and your father have been to me. If I could find any way to spare you and them all of this heartbreak, I would, but I see no way.

Please try to find some forgiveness in your heart, for I honestly didn't want it this way. I'd very much like to remain friends, but that is entirely up to you. Here's wishing you the very best in life, for you certainly deserve it. Good luck to you always, and here's wishing you good fortune, and a happy voyage home as soon as possible.

Annette

—:—

This ain't so much a letter home as it is a request for information. I know there's lots of you leeches out there looking through the letters posted here on LinkNet even though they ain't addressed to you, and I thought that I might be able to get some use out of you. You see, I'm looking for someone, and he don't want to be found. If I've seen these letters put up on LinkNet already, I know that there's lots more of you reading them, and I'm sure some of you want to earn some money.

The guy I'm looking for is named Raphael Furnato, and he's a captain with the Third Triarii. He makes a big deal about his duty and his honor, but the truth is that he don't care a lick for either. He's looking out for number one, and he doesn't care who gets hurt so long as it ain't him. He's already killed three guys and two gals who got in his way, and he would've gotten away with it



too if it hadn't been for the journal one guy kept that talked about meeting this rat Furnato, about a deal they worked out, and about his second thoughts on the deal.

You see, the deal was to bring in labor for a company that didn't want to pay its workers. Yeah, that's right, little Raphael's been moving slaves. I'm spendin' time and money to put this info up because I know some of you like to pretend you're good and noble, and I figured that you folks might be interested in him because of what he's done. For you real leeches, like me, who don't care quite so much about do-gooding, I've got something to catch your attention, too: cash. That's right; cold, hard cash. I'm willing to pay in good cash for any information that leads me to Furnato. Either reply to this message here, put something in LevinsList for me, or get word to me privately on Sabik by courier. If the data's good, your pay will be too.

Dog Soldier on Sabik

—:—

Rick,

Everyone always seems to think we have it easy here on the JumpShips, hopping from system to system when we're not frantically trying to make repairs and keep the K-F drive functioning. They think that somehow we know what's going on, just because we've become the primary method of communication between planets since the Blackout. They're all wrong, though. We don't know anything more than anyone else, and it's frightening. You never know if there'll be pirate fighters or a DropShip waiting for you when you jump in-system; you never know if there'll be a blockade around the next planet.

I think it's the uncertainty that's the hardest part. Before the Blackout, we knew what was going on all around us. Now that there's almost nothing left of the HPG net, we don't know anything outside of what we can see for ourselves.

We've carried just about everything since I left you and Alex back on Moore, from food and medical supplies to mercenary companies to a paladin (yes, Sire Otto Mandela traveled on our ship once) to a DropShip full of refugees. Every trip has a couple of couriers on it, but maybe they won't be needed quite so much now that this LinkNet thing is up... it'd be wonderful to be able to talk to you across the stars again, but it seems that we're not quite there yet.

I guess I shouldn't let my frustration run away with me like this, but every time we reach a new planet, everyone wants to know everything that's going on in the Inner Sphere, even if we came from the exact opposite direction of the planet they're asking about. It's just assumed that since we're part of a JumpShip crew, we know everything that's going on everywhere. I hope your job is still going well, and that Alex is behaving himself (at least as much as he ever does) and is doing well in school (and not correcting his teachers too often). I should be able to make it home in a few jumps; the captain has been talking about passing by Moore soon, since so many of the crew is from there or has family there.

I'll see you soon, give my love to Alex,

Evie

—:—

Dear Soldier of the Republic Armed Forces,

My name is Jeanie, and I'm eighteen years old. I live on Achernar, and I want to thank you for everything you're doing for us. Over the years you've defended Achernar and a lot of other planets around the Republic, and you've done a real good job. Some of you saved my life a couple months ago, when you were fighting against some of those Swordsworn just outside the city I live in. I got cut off from my house by an attack, and a couple of Republic soldiers in some big battle armor got me out of the street just before a couple Swordsworn tanks rolled through, and made sure I was safe and got me back to my house. I already thanked them, but I know that there are thousands of you out there, fighting day after day, without any thanks at all, and I want you to know that we appreciate everything you do for us.

These days, all you hear about is how the Republic's getting beat up, and pushed back, and you never hear anything good about the RAF. But I know that you're a brave bunch of men and women doing your jobs as best as you can, and I want you to know that you're making a difference. I know that there are lots more like me who also think that you're doing a great job, and quite a few who are only alive because you put your lives at risk for us. Lots of people say that the Republic's dead now, but I know that as long as we keep believing in it, and as long as you keep fighting for it, it'll still be alive, and it'll still be worth fighting for.

After I graduate from high school this year, I plan to enlist in the planetary militia. I'd try to join the Sentinels or Protectors, but I know that they aren't really recruiting anymore, at least not out here. It wouldn't do much good anyhow, considering that from what I've heard, House Davion has taken most of the planets around Achernar, but I still want to join the militia. If enough of us do, we can keep Achernar for the Republic, and maybe even some of the planets around us. And since the exarch closed off Prefecture X, that's all we can really do, isn't it? Anyhow, I just wanted to know that you are an inspiration to me, and that one day I hope I can pay back the soldiers who saved my life by saving someone else's.

Wherever you are, remember that you are appreciated and loved for the work you do and that you are doing a good thing.

Godspeed, good luck, and thank you,  
Jeanie Bartholemew



## 3135 Inner Sphere Football League Playoffs

3136-0210

by Astrid Wagner

Kessel—It has been an interesting month in American Football. Two games shy of the end of the regular 3135 season, the Geneva Guardians and the Seattle Seahawks had the best records in the league (both at 22-4). The only teams even close were the Kessel Kings (18-8), the Wing Warriors (17-9), the Outreach Dragoons (also 17-9), the Pittsburgh Steelers (16-10), and the Fletcher Furies (also 16-10). Then Jonah Levin closed Prefecture X, trapping most of the best teams in the league inside the New Republic Territory, along with the commissioner of the Inner Sphere Football League. Given that fully half of the teams in the ISFL were now within what was once Prefecture X, including most of the teams who would have gone on to the playoffs, a meeting was arranged between all of the remaining ISFL head coaches. They were finally able to meet on Kessel in early December, to decide what to do about the remainder of the season.

Two items were on the table, electing a new commissioner and deciding what was to be done about this year's playoffs. Coach Yannick Van Kersher of the Kessel Kings was quickly elected as the new commissioner, and the agenda moved on to the playoffs. Several coaches suggested organizing the playoffs based on each team's current record. Needless to say, most of these votes came from coaches of teams who stood to make the playoffs if this plan moved forward, but who did not have a chance otherwise. Others suggested canceling the playoffs and championship this year. Commissioner Van Kersher suggested that the league proceed with the tournament, but invite participation from teams from other nations within the Inner Sphere. This suggestion set off a firestorm of debate, ranging from whether there were sufficient teams in any other nation to make the idea worthwhile, to whether it would disrupt the sanctity of the league.

Commissioner Van Kersher had answers to all these protests. His ace in the hole was in producing Arlis Gurdel, a Bloodnamed MechWarrior of the Rasalhague Dominion and coach of one of the teams of the Rasalhague American Football League. The RAFL was about to start its own playoffs, and—as a show of solidarity with the people of the former Republic of the Sphere—were willing to combine their leagues for the purpose of the playoffs. This single proposal launched four days of argument, but in the end, Van Kersher and Gurdel got their way. The only outstanding decision was how teams from the two leagues would qualify for the joint playoffs. It was decided that the top 8 ISFL teams would compete amongst themselves for the first round, as would the top 8 RAFL teams, after which the top four teams from each of the two leagues would be assigned pairings by random draw and the final two rounds of the playoffs would lead up to Super Bowl CLXX.

The first round consisted of the Kessel Kings dominating the Skandia Seekers, the Fletcher Furies squeaking out a win against the Ingress Inquisitors, the Vega Vanquishers beating up on the Bordon Bears, and the Alcor Adders pulling out a surprise win against the Wing Warriors. The four teams coming out of the RAFL were the Rasalhague Roar, the Alshain Claws, the Utrecht Kodiaks, and the New Oslo Vikings. For the first round of the combined playoffs, the Rasalhague Roar faced the Alshain Claws, the Alcor Adders faced the Utrecht Kodiaks, the New Oslo Vikings played the Fletcher Furies, and the Kessel Kings were matched up with the Vega Vanquishers.

The Rasalhague Roar punished the Alshain Claws in a tight game to start off the combined run towards Super Bowl CLXX, with quarterback Deckard DelVillar leading the Roar with 253 yards passing and another 63 rushing, including 2 passing touchdowns and a single run that ended in a TD. Claws halfback Vance Ghost Bear kept the game close with a 187-yard running game and two touchdowns, but in the end DelVillar and the Roar pulled out a 31-24 win.

The Adders-Kodiaks games was the first time the ISFL players and coaches really got a feel for how differently the all-Elemental teams of the RAFL played the game. The bruising, one-sided contest was ugly from the beginning, with the Kodiaks runningback Bjorn Ghost Bear running through, around, and over the entirety of the Adders defense for a 70-yard touchdown on the first play of the game. The game was 56-3 at the end of the third quarter, when the Kodiaks put in nearly the entirety of their practice team, who still managed to score two touchdowns and only gave up a single field goal in the remaining quarter.

The remaining three ISFL teams tried to tell themselves that it was a fluke that Alcor even made it into the playoffs, and that they could handle the Rasalhague players better, but they were disabused of any such notions by the 76-10 squashing of the Fletcher Furies by the New Oslo Vikings.

In an anti-climactic defensive battle, the Kessel Kings managed to hold the Vanquishers off in a grueling victory, including a franchise record of 4 interceptions, the 10-3 final score finally ending the horrible day for Vanquishers quarterback Matt Bremen.

The semi-finals saw the Rasalhague Roar lose a close game to the New Oslo Vikings and the Utrecht Kodiaks matched against the now-underdog Kessel Kings. Most odds-makers decided that the luck of the draw had just effectively given the Utrecht Kodiaks a bye to face the Vikings in the Super Bowl, but they hadn't counted on the brilliance of new Kings head coach Ronald Keldane or the virtuoso performance quarterback Chris Quartermain would provide. Having seen the howling blitzes that the Kodiaks favored, Keldane pulled all of the Kings' wide receivers and replaced them with fullbacks and tight ends, and Quartermain ran an offense based on screen passes, quick outs, and draws.

Frustrated by these stings and the hard-nosed defense led by middle linebacker Jeremy Fielding, the Kodiaks began to play more conservatively in the second half. In response, Coach Keldane put the wide-outs back in, and Quartermain connected with a couple of long strikes, completely flustering the Kodiak defenders. Meanwhile, constant replacements on defense allowed the Kings players to keep up with their larger counterparts and hold on well enough to keep their offense in range.

With 1:30 left on the clock and the Kings down by 4, Fielding managed to strip the ball from Kodiak quarterback Damon Ghost Bear and recovered the fumble on the Kessel 25-yard line. Quartermain led an amazing drive, managing the clock well, but ended up taking his last timeout with 3 seconds on the clock, still on the Utrecht 38. With time for a single play, Quartermain

aired it up, leaving the game in the hands of fate. Luckily for the Kings, fate was on the side of 2.1-meter-tall wide receiver Billy Kline, who came down with the ball in the end zone for an amazing Kessel Kings win.

After the high dramatics of the Kessel-Utrecht game, Super Bowl CLXX was something of a letdown. Though ISFL fans had gotten their hopes up for another come-from-behind victory by Quartermain and the Kings, it was not to be. Worn out from their shooting match with the Kodiaks, the Kings barely managed to hold onto their dignity, losing 34-17 in a rather convincing match.

As the clock wound down on Super Bowl CLXX, controversy began to flare amongst the coaches and staff of the ISFL. Alcor Head Coach Michael St. James has called for the removal of Commissioner Van Kersher, claiming that the integration of the ISFL and the RAFL will bring about the end of the ISFL as a viable league, and only time will tell if Van Kersher can hold his position after the stinging defeat suffered by his former team.

## Does Size Matter

### 3136-0210

Most men say no. Most women prefer to keep their opinion to themselves. The Houses and Clans obviously say yes. For the Periphery nations, the answer has long been an unequivocal "It depends."

The Republic appears to agree with most men.

From its inception, the Republic of the Sphere chose not to compete directly for total world count. Instead, they asked only for enough planets to provide a buffer zone between Terra at their heart and the potential threat posed by every surrounding nation—carefully choosing those planets to provide for its needs as an interstellar entity.

And now, as the New Republic Territory, it is aptly named. Barely larger than most Periphery states, the Fortress can hardly position itself as a powerbroker among nations. It has abdicated its authority, repudiated its dependents, cut off communications with its most loyal representatives—simply put, it has chosen to preserve a remnant of itself at devastating cost to the larger body.

What's the point of this exercise? Does Jonah Levin truly expect us to believe that what remains of Devlin Stone's idealized government is strong enough to persevere in its reduced state? How likely is it that The Republic will really expand again, that it will successfully re-imagine and restructure itself such that it can emerge from its isolation and shine a light on the misery and pain that seem an unending part of the human experience? Even more fundamentally: what unknown asset does the New Republic Territory possess that will allow them to prevent hyperspace travel into and out of their declared borders?

Our leaders would be guilty of the poorest sort of governance if they blindly put their faith in a promise of hope: we need a government, not a religion. But our leaders will be equally culpable if they simply accept that history must repeat itself, and weakly submit to the first House or other nation that attempts to reclaim former holdings.

We cannot simply exist, waiting to embrace whatever is born from the ashes of Stone's dream. We need not simply accept the decisions made for us by more powerful political groups. We must ignore the peripheral nation at the center of known space, and choose for ourselves the path we will walk.

## Letters From Home -- Week 03

3136-0210

Dear Jeanie,

I read with interest your letter thanking me and my fellow soldiers for our service. It's certainly nice to be thanked for the jobs we do.

If you're serious about joining the local militia and eventually helping Achernar rejoin the Republic, I have some advice for you: don't. You're much better off putting your mind to work at one of Achernar's good universities and doing your family proud. We don't save people so they can turn around and risk their lives – or worse, throw them away for one of the petty Houses that will probably come and enslave your homeworld. We risked our lives so you wouldn't have to.

I don't know if any other troops are going to respond to you, but I want you to know that this soldier would much rather you take the gift we gave you and put it to good use in school, than to put yourself at risk for a dream that's all but dead.

If the Republic is coming back, it won't be because a bunch of lunkheads in war machines have conquered the people they're trying to save. It will be because there will be someone out there smart enough to know when to beat our swords back into plowshares.

Feel free to write me back.

Best,  
Lt. Jason Clyne

—:—

From: Andrea Aragones, JumpShip *Gibraltar*, Prefecture IV  
To: Professor Herman Goodsell, Hall University, Prefecture VI

Dear Professor,

I'm not sure if this message will find you, but I imagine this is the best chance I have of my message getting through. I've made a rather exciting discovery. The Gibraltar, the JumpShip upon which I'm currently traveling, recently made an unscheduled stop on the outward side of the Schedar system for maintenance. We had a few days of downtime, so I took a shuttle with a couple of other scientists to catalog the system's Oort cloud.

Sifting through the data later, I discovered an anomalous reading. I double-checked it to be sure: there was a JumpShip somewhere in the Oort cloud. First, I thought I was merely seeing a reflection of our own ship. I ruled that out; the design was too different. Then I thought it might be some Clan or terrorist invasion force, but the lack of power and life support systems ruled that out as well. So I took the ship in for a second look the next day.

There's a JumpShip there, alright, but it has been out of commission for at least two hundred years!

I didn't have enough fuel to make a full survey, but I did manage to catch the name painted on the pockmarked hull, and that's why I sent this. Professor, I've located the Pride of Davion!

If you receive this, send me a response as quickly as possible. I anxiously await your reply.

Andrea Aragones, GLT Recovery Inc.

—:—

From: SSG Jack Brickman  
To: James Corrdry III

James,

So, remember that Mad Cat you loaned me? The one that saved my life a half-dozen times? Well, I've got some good news and some bad news.

The good news is, it's still in one piece.

The bad news is, I had a damn good poker hand and I still lost it.

That's why I didn't put a return address on this letter. Calm down and let me explain.

We were getting chummy with some Republic garrison troops left behind after the curtain fell. What can I say, we felt bad for 'em, you know? Soldiers' honor and all that. It's not like we can kill each other all the time.

Well anyway, we're playing a few hands of Omaha and one of the Republic boys breaks out a jug of some of that Skye whiskey—you know the stuff, it tastes like all the best parts of a peat bog and a woman. So we're all pretty happy, and I'm dealt a pair of bullets. I start betting a little crazier than I should have, and I've got one guy staying in—this lieutenant with War College training written all over him like a damn book.

The flop comes with three kings. A full house. I start going crazy. So does the other guy. He's got this smug smile on his face that just screams bluff. Then, he bets his 'Mech. One of those shiny new Republic Thors. Something like that would have set us up for a year.

I do the only thing I can do, I call him. And he turns over the fourth king.

So anyway, I'm going to get your Mad Cat back if it's the last thing I do. But I figured if you see it driving by for some reason, you should probably know what happened and that I'm going to spend every waking moment on that bastard's manicured tail looking for it.

Say hi to Kate and the kids for me,  
Jack

—:—

To: Kyle Umar, Lyon, Prefecture IX  
From: A Friend

Mr. Umar,

I recently came in possession of a locket containing a signature chip bearing your contact information. The locket is a small gold affair with a picture of a woman in the middle, and an inscription on the back. I found it in a building scheduled for demolition, and it was too beautiful to destroy. I'm being intentionally vague about my whereabouts, but if you provide me with full contact information, I will send it to you immediately.

Also, I have to admit that I'm interested to know if there's a story behind this particular locket. I realize it's none of my business, but if you want to share your tale with a friendly stranger, I wouldn't turn it down.

I'll be watching LinkNet for a reply.

Sincerely,  
A Friend

—:—

From: Gerald Brubacher, Styx  
To: Megan Brubacher, Skye

My love,

I'm not sure how much longer I can handle this. The boss says we're here for two more months at least, but if I make it through another week, I'm going to consider it a miracle.

Our team has been reassigned to clean up urban housing developments for rebuilding. Supposedly we're under the protection of the local Kurita garrison, but if these clowns are House then I'm Devlin Stone. I've got a thousand C-bills that say they were the local organized crime syndicate before the invasion. They commandeered our last industrial 'Mech for spare parts. I "accidentally" removed the fuel filter from the diesel engine before we turned it over to them. I hope they choke on their own sooty cloud of filth.

Yesterday I watched a kid die. We were razing an apartment building that had been heavily damaged in a battle a couple of weeks ago. Inside, we found an undetonated SRM that was still active. The scanner told us it was going to go at any moment—probably a miracle that we hadn't been killed yet—so we played it safe and went for an EMP generator. We cordoned off the area, but some kid whose parents were now charred remains in a local morgue followed this flea-bitten mutt into the rubble before we could stop him. I'm sure you can figure out what happened next.

He screamed in pain for a good couple of minutes before he died. All I could hear was Johnny screaming, imagining our baby there instead of this malnourished orphan.

I'm not sure what you're reading or hearing on the news, but that's what this stupid war has brought. Not glory to Houses or Clans, not a better life for anyone, but a lot of orphans and dead children. The hazard pay isn't worth this anymore. The next kid I see dead, I'm coming home.

Your Gerry

—:—

To: Whom It May Concern  
From: Trapped Citizen

I am interested in discussing a business opportunity with certain concerned parties about passage inside Fortress Republic. I have multiple, untraceable accounts full of C-bills and personal responsibilities that require me to be inside the curtain. All rational people know that Levin's bullyboys can't be everywhere at once, and rumors of ships making the jump are already starting to circulate.

If you're one of those proud enough to stand up to isolationist tyranny, contact me through the LinkNet and we'll negotiate a price. No reasonable offer will be refused.

Long Live Freedom!



## TECH WATCH -- Coming to a Battlefield Near You - Sextupeds

3136-0210

Much has been made of the benefits of the BattleMech's sibling, the QuadMech. Can a SextuMech be far behind? Maybe not, some sources say.

"We're all aware of the added stability a four-legged platform offers, so why not one that offers added mobility as well? Not to mention that the opportunity for additional heat sink placement in the legs could make such a design formidable on a water-dotted battlefield," BattleMech engineer Wyatt Stanislav asserts. While the potential benefits of an even-more-rapidly cooling 'Mech are tempting, the drawbacks to the design are too great, states BattleMech designer Andrew Slade. "Sure, it SOUNDS good, six legs being better than four, but the walk cycle for a unit like that would sway like a Canopian consort. It's just not feasible."

Despite potential drawbacks to such a design, rumors are circulating that not only are such BattleMechs viable, they've already been constructed. Hazy pictures are making the rounds that claim to be covert footage of a sextuped design being field-tested. We playing the recording on our holovid and felt the claims might be true, though with no sound accompanying the footage it is difficult to be sure. While the sextuped design seemed to handle terrain a lot better than your average quad, it seemed a bit shaky when moving and firing at the same time. If the footage is genuine, it's certainly a 'Mech that can't walk and chew gum at the same time.

Still, many engineers and scientists point out that looking to nature for future BattleMech designs isn't all that farfetched. Says Stanislav, "The latest Clan Jade Falcon designs are an excellent example of taking inspiration from nature. The exceptional heat-dissipating 'wings' are a direct reflection of certain animals who use their own wingspread to cool off in tropical climates, or certain mammals who employ an exaggerated ear surface-area to do the same."

So IS there a sextuped among us? If so, how long before we see a no-legged 'Mech crawling along the battlefield? Ah, how we long for the simpler days of humanoid design.

## What's This Then

3136-0210

You don't know how long I've been waiting for this. I've thirsted for it like someone who's wandered the desert for years. I've hungered for it like a Cappie who has gone two whole days without the taste of someone else's blood on his lips.

Okay, that last line might have been a little cruel, but we're a little on edge over here. We know how House Liao's been looking at Prefecture VI lately, like it's a big snack buffet, and where I sit is a little too close to Prefecture VI for me to feel relaxed. Do I think they're going to be here tomorrow? No. Am I worried that the Cappies will use their recent upswing and The Republic's implosion to push as far as they can into Republic territory, gobbling up as many planets as they can? Wouldn't I be crazy to not worry about that?

But I'm getting ahead of myself. I was talking about what I was hungry for and why. It's this—information, communication. People on different planets, in different Prefectures, being able to actually talk to each other without huge delays. The isolation that came after the collapse of the HPGs drove me crazy. I'm a courier, information is my business. Trying to maneuver around the Inner Sphere and keep up with the current events on the planets I was going to (it's always good to know who's in power before you land) was impossible. I was flying blind, and I hated it.

So this may not be like old times, but it's for damn sure better than nothing. I look forward to hearing what's going on in the rest of The Republic—if we can even use that name for areas outside Prefecture X—and I'll pay my way on this system. There's plenty going on in my neck of the woods and I'll pass the dirt along as I figure it out. I've been Sphere-trotting for a while, but it looks like I'll be settled down here on Augustine and the surrounding planets for a while (the reasons for that are a little more complicated than I can go into here). So I'll dish whatever rumors and actual truth I can dig up.

Like this, for starters. You may have asked yourself earlier, when I was ranting about the Cappies, why I'm more worried about them than I am about the Marik-Stewart Commonwealth. After all, Marik—the planet, that is—is only two jumps away from Augustine, while the nearest Capellan planet is three jumps, and it ain't got the heft of Marik. And it's not like the Commonwealth's been sitting around meekly, trying to convince us they're going to be a good neighbor and saying they'd never, ever, never invade us. So why am I more worried about the Cappies?

Mmm. Should I say this outright or just drop hints? Hints are so much more fun, especially when I'm not one hundred percent sure of my facts. So here's the hint—in the end, the key to Marik-Stewart's future may lie one slightly coreward jump away from Augustine.

Anyone else want to post their thoughts on this, I'd love to read them.

By DeandraL  
Hyppo, Augustine  
Prefecture VII

## Caught between the Davion and the Deep Blue Sea

3136-0217

Well, much as I'm not a fan of the Sandoval regime, I have to agree with Duke Corwin on at least one thing: it's not a total surprise that The Republic didn't last. And I predict a theme, in which every House declares its willingness to "pick up the slack left when The Republic abandoned its worlds, in order to protect the populations of those worlds against predation."

What I expect every House will fail to mention is that if their former holdings don't come along peacefully, the House itself will be the predator.

We've already seen this happening in Draconis Combine space, in the actions of the Rasalhague Dominion—though they at least give lip service to a higher purpose—and in the large area of the Inner Sphere fondly referred to as Marik space. And not forgetting, of course, the unsubtle activities of Daoshen Liao, which are a particular worry here on Achernar.

Old habits die hard, it's true. And the habit of belonging to the Sandovals and, by extension, the Federated Suns, is an old one. As far as I've heard, we Achernarans have no particular complaint against House Davion. As huge nation-states go, they weren't bad: we had sufficient military protection, they supported our industry, and they allowed the Achernar family to govern us without too much interference. We had freedom of speech, freedom of religion and freedom of economy.

But here's the thing: we also had all those things under The Republic, with the exception of the Achernar family ruling us, and a distant branch of the family still represented us on the Senate. And now, without The Republic, things remain pretty much the same, including access to military protection.

So what's our motivation to return to Davion rule?

Prince Caleb isn't much of one, if the scuttlebutt making the rounds is true. Having a Sandoval as the Prince's Champion doesn't strike me as a guarantee of a successful administration. And with Bannson currently in control of Achernar IndustrialMechs, our economic future seems secure enough for the moment.

When Duke Corwin says, "We will help to save what we can ... for our future," he is not talking about keeping The Republic alive.

I'm not saying that we should violently resist becoming part of the Federated Suns again. But I'll need a bit more convincing to accept that immediately bowing to their governance is our best choice.

## Dieron Lament

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3136-0217

by N. Gibbert

*Tahlwynn, Dieron  
Prefecture II*

How did this happen? Shouldn't I be on the inside?

All right, I guess I should have adjusted by now. But we're *right on the border*. No one is closer to the Fortress of Prefecture X than we are. Well, okay, maybe Castor, but that wasn't part of Prefecture X to begin with. We were. We should be in there, safe and snug, instead of being left out here to watch the Dragon creep closer and closer.

Listen to me, saying "we." Like I'm a Dieron native. I haven't even been here a year. I fled from Styx when the Combine forces poured in. I didn't want any part of that fight. So I went somewhere I thought would be safer.

Clearly, I should've gone a little farther.

But I guess I can't complain. For the moment, we're okay. The trouble is, our back's against the wall, since it's pretty clear that no one's going to come from behind us to help us out. If the Combine takes Styx and Athenry—especially Styx—I think we'll be pretty vulnerable.

I don't intend any disrespect to the Dieron militia. I'm sure they'll put up a good fight if the Combine comes here, but you have to understand that the military around here hasn't been the same since the curtain dropped behind us. They're, I don't know, dispirited, disorganized. I suppose that's what we should expect when the military structure has to run around with its head cut off.

That leads me, though, to what I really wanted to talk about, and that's what's happening on Styx. I don't intend to go back there, but I still worry about it. I've still got friends there. They're the kind of people who I guess are a little more willing to stick it out through the tough times than I am. I figured I'd see them here before too long, since when I left it really seemed like the Combine was going to run rampant over the whole planet. I've been sitting here, waiting to get word that all Republic forces on the planet have surrendered, but that word hasn't come yet. Does anyone know what's going on there? Is the Combine just taking their sweet time to finish off the planet (something that, I admit, seems completely out of character for them)? Or is there actually some sort of successful resistance on the planet? And if there is—what is it?

## Letters From Home -- Week 04

3136-0217

To: All Interested Parties

Re: Solaris VII Qualifiers, Telos IV, Pref. II

The Hannibal's Elephants Solaris VII team is looking for a few worthy gladiators to enter the grinder! If you need sponsorship, we're your ticket. All potential candidates should book passage for Telos IV for qualification rounds beginning 20 March 3135. Mechanics will be on-site to provide prequalifying repairs, so don't let a few scratches keep you from taking the opportunity of a lifetime!

Should you qualify, Hannibal's Elephants' will present you with an exclusive contract, and you can join the team who has fielded some of the best Solaris VII fighters in history. Think you've got what it takes to join their ranks? Come prove it to us!

—:—

To: Harmony Goodchild, Sector 593, New Canton, Prefecture VI

From: Your Husband, JumpShip Aristotle

Dear Harmony,

We just got the word that it was over. Levin shut us down, cancelled the party, and left us to rot. I knew I didn't like him, but this goes beyond like and dislike. Hell, this goes beyond reason and logic.

I explained the news to the men, and they didn't say a damn word. Can you imagine that – two hundred infantry grunts with nothing to say? It was as scary as it sounds.

It's hard to imagine what comes next. These are the moments I tried not to think about. One of the Houses or Clans is going to move in, but we took a little poll, and none of us are comfortable with that. We're not going back to the way things were; that's not what we've been fighting for.

There was some talk of going merc, but I don't think that's going to happen either. We've managed to get in touch with a couple of other units, and we're going to try to consolidate and then figure out what the hell we're doing.

Which is all a long way of saying I won't be on the grid for a while, but I'll check LinkNet as long as I can. I'm not signing this in case someone out there with a grudge finds it, and I don't want to give anything more away in case the wrong eyes are reading it.

Much Love,  
Your Husband

—:—

I Saw You!

When my unit was on Styx before the recent troubles, I saw you watching a victory parade. You were on the balcony of an apartment building, maybe the 25th or 26th floor. I was the guy driving the Rifleman II, the only one in the parade. I only saw you for a second, but I have not been able to get your face out of my mind.

I'm trying this LinkNet thing to see if I can finally figure out who you are. My name is Brian Lynch, and I'm a MechWarrior by trade. Well, that's obvious I guess. I inherited this 'Mech from my father, who was a fairly famous mercenary in his day. I'd like to think the RAF fights for something a little more noble, but I don't want to drag politics into this.

If you're out there, tell me who you are, if you saw me, if you're single or not. Your memory has kept me alive, and at the very least I'd like a name to put with a beautiful face.

Brian Lynch, Ningpo, Pref. V

—:—

Are you looking for that special someone?

Whether it's a long-lost love, a recent break-up, or you're just "in the market," Cupid Connections can help!

We've got a two-hundred-year history of bringing kindred spirits together (or together again). In fact, if you're not fully satisfied, we offer a money-back guarantee: anyone we can't find, or find evidence of, and you get your money back!

The time to stop wondering and start living is now. The only thing holding you back is contacting us—and the fear of What Could Be. Don't be afraid of your future—contact Cupid Connections today!

—:—

Dear Carmine,

It was nice to hear from you, especially since you were thoughtful enough to include holo-stills of those adorable kids of yours. They're gorgeous! Really! I've seen lots of children in my time, but I have to say that in terms of looks yours would be right near the top of any list I was making. I mean that with all sincerity.

Things are great over here. I've got 300 stores on Milton alone. Three hundred! Can you believe it? Who would've thought when I sold my first comm in the Paradise Foundation store that it would come to this? I'm sure you've seen all the write-ups about our growth (you better have—I've forwarded all of them your way!), so you've been able to follow our progress. It's been a great ride!

And it's not stopping yet—we're going interstellar! That's right! Starting this year, we'll be opening a dozen CommHere stores on Alchiba! These stores present a terrific opportunity for our company, introducing us into totally new markets that I'm sure will greet us as enthusiastically as the people here on Milton have. I'm telling you, Carmine, as your friend, that if you've ever thought of investing in the company, now's the time. This move to Alchiba could be the first of many such expansions, and our future growth is poised to be absolutely explosive.

Now, I have to admit, there have been a few people—mainly people outside the company—who have questioned the wisdom of our ambitious expansion plan. Why now? they ask. What if war comes to the planets we expand to? It's seemingly touched every other place in The Republic—why not us? Are our plans really as foolproof as they seem?

I certainly recognize the legitimacy of those concerns, as the war fears that have gripped our nation are all too real. I've got two responses I've been giving to people—one for public consumption, one that I reserve for friends like you. The public answer is that, in times of war, communication becomes that much more important. You want to know where your loved ones are. You want to be able to keep up with the news and pass along important items the moment you hear them. Our products, then, become even more crucial when war approaches. As terrible as war is, it tends to spur our business forward, not slow it down.

The private response I have goes something like this: let's say war comes to Milton and Alchiba. Let's say the worst happens and the planets fall to some foreign power. What does that mean for us? Well, in all likelihood most, if not all, of our stores will remain standing, as they're hardly prime military targets. People will still need our products, and we'll still be selling them. The only real difference is we'll pay our taxes to a new government. By and large, business is business, and it will continue on just fine no matter what the 'Mech jockeys and their bosses decide to do.

I think our plan is rock-solid, and I hope you'll decide to join us in this stage of the journey. Even if you don't, though, I wish you and your family all the best, and I look forward to seeing you the next time you make it to our part of the prefecture.

With warmest regards,

Paul Silversmith  
CommHere, Ltd.

—:—

Dear Dorothy,

Just a quick note to let you know the tornado put me down safely in Kansas again. That never gets old for me—how about you?

I sure miss you. I'm real proud you signed up for the RAF in the first place, and even prouder that you're sticking it out now even though the Republic decided not to stick around for you. I just wish I knew what was happening where you are, and that you knew what was happening here with us.

Mom and Dad are doing real well—just as feisty as ever, even though they're getting up there in years. The store is holding its own. Somehow, they manage to get in the goods that people need. I think a lot of it has to do with the fact that they keep their garden in good shape, and always have a few chickens laying eggs. And the ones that don't lay any more ... well, they get their own display in another part of the shop, just like always. What the DropShips don't bring, they grow or barter for.

And I'm still doing the baking. I've developed some new recipes that taste great and use less of the stuff that's getting harder to find. I've never really wanted to grind my own flour, but I'm starting to look for a partner with some old-fashioned know-how, because I can see that day coming. And you'll appreciate this; I've discovered a real talent for shaping rolls into configurations that appeal to the various factions that still manage to peacefully co-exist around here. You know what I mean.

Funny that with all hell breaking loose across the Sphere, things here haven't changed hardly at all.

Well, back to the grindstone. Hey—maybe one day soon, that won't be just a figure of speech!

Best wishes from beautiful planet Mara. May your steps soon land on her fertile deltas.

Yours truly,  
Evinrude

## Our Glorious Victory: A Response by His Celestial Wisdom, Chancellor Daoshen Liao

3136-0217

Citizens, rejoice! The Republic of the Sphere has fallen. We have listened to the words, this final address, of Jonah Levin, and we read the truth which even now he tries to hide in foolish optimism and false pride. He admits The Republic has fallen to The Abyss. He admits so much, for those who listen to the great secrets of the universe. Does he not state:

*Chaos, created by the Blackout, was compounded by our own fears, our prejudices, and especially by our greed. Weaknesses we thought we had vanquished. Weaknesses we deceived ourselves into believing could ever be eliminated.*

By their devil-exarch's own words are they condemned. That their sins, and the sins of their ancestors, have finally returned upon them the destruction they sought for so long to visit upon our nation, our peoples. Now they will know the karmic retribution for a generation of evil. Where:

*During this time of trials and tribulations, we have witnessed the worst that everyone—anyone, citizen or resident, peerage or proletariat—had to offer. We found frailty. We discovered new enemies.*

And the people of The Republic wonder why it has failed. Failed ultimately to the crush of such burdening weight. Perhaps because their mayfly nation was built upon flesh and blood stolen from the other great realms of the Inner Sphere. Did we not challenge such audacity from the very beginning? Did we not finally show them the error of their ways in these past few years, as our Capellan brothers and sisters finally threw off the yoke of Republic oppression?

And how do they met their end? With final humility and penance for their dire transgressions against others?

*Prefecture Ten is expanded, by decree, to include the worlds on the list appended to this transmission. These worlds will sever immediately all economic and political ties to their former prefectures. All military forces able to be safely recalled and mustered for the ensured survival of The Republic have been relocated within the borders of Prefecture Ten, and will not be forward deployed until such time as is deemed appropriate. Following this final address, there will be no further contact, by transmission or transport, between Prefecture Ten and any outside world or power. Last: Full faith and sovereignty of The Republic of the Sphere is now invested solely within Prefecture Ten.*

*These commands, by design and effect, do hereby constitute a New Republic Territory, under the direct and complete aegis of Terra.*

*And formally dissolves The Republic of the Sphere.*

They run! They hide! They refuse to admit their error, and promise, falsely, that they can and will salvage ultimate victory. Is there any greater hubris? Any greater example of their perfidy? Like an adoptive parent who decides, belatedly, that the responsibility of family is too much for them, taking home their favorites and turning out the others to their own fate.

Well. We shall not be so callous and cruel. We shall gladly accept the burden and responsibility of family for our lost Capellan children.

We! Who have kept the true flames burning for so long. We shall show the fallen Republic what true leadership, and true strength, can accomplish.

And let their brief light forever be extinguished!



## Warning from Wasat

3136-0217

I didn't know exactly where to send this, but I knew I wanted it to get out, and I'd seen some good stuff on this new LinkNet thing. This is a warning to all you RAF units out there that didn't get the recall orders, and all the militia units supporting them, or out on their own: you can't trust anybody.

Some of you might be wondering who I am. I would have said it was none of your business, but I guess since I'm writing this up, it is. I'm Hunter Malone, and I'm a 'Mech jockey for the Second Hastati Sentinels. I suppose it's more accurate to say that I used to be part of the Second, since most of 'em made into Prefecture X before the Fortress went up. Me and my unit, we almost made it, but we got caught up helping the people here on Wasat fend off a pirate raid and missed our JumpShip. Since we couldn't move on without a JumpShip, and since we couldn't get into the Fortress even if we had a JumpShip of our own, we decided to settle down, hang out here. It's been good for us so far, and the locals like having us around. You wouldn't wonder why if you knew what happened just a couple of days ago.

A DropShip flashing RAF transponder codes came in-system with the semi-regular JumpShip that drops in on us from time to time, and so we let it land. We're thinking that even if they're just going to move on, it'd be good to see some of the old guard again. It was a bunch of Triarii glory-girls, some battalion from the Protectors that was out on a speaking tour when the Fortress went up. Anyhow, when the DropShip touches down, out these guys come, all suited up in their 'Mechs and vehicles, almost like it was a hot drop. Their leader, a Major Weinright, sends out this broad-range transmission about how the exarch had betrayed the people, and Levin was installed by a coup, and the Senate was the only hope for the Republic and we should throw our lot in with them.

Being a loyal bunch of RAFers, this didn't sit too well with any of us, including our captain. Some of us served with the exarch back when he was just a knight, and we know that he's got what's best for the Republic in mind. Then came the kicker: this Weinright puke said that if any of us powered up our reactors, or moved our vehicles, we'd be guilty of treason against the Republic Senate, and that he and his unit'd shoot us down. Now, listening to treason and slander is one thing, but being threatened by someone we thought was our friend was something else. Luckily, I was running some diagnostics on "Ace" at the time, and so I didn't have much of a warm-up period. In no time at all half our 'Mechs were up and running, a lance of tanks had formed up with us, and some of the militia were moving out to join us.

It was a nasty fight. A fancy writer would probably say, "the sky lit up with actinic flashes of man-made lightning," or some rot like that, but all I know is that it was a downright ugly, knock-down, drag-out fight. Being that we were all wearing the same colors, it was hard to tell who was going to shoot at you, and who you were supposed to shoot at. I'll give those publicity-hounds their due; they fought hard, and they hurt us bad, but I could tell they hadn't seen as much fighting as us Sentinels, and we eventually drove them off.

Next time you think you know who your friends are, though, double check it, 'cause since the Fortress went up, even the people you trust most might be gunning for you.

## Calling All Militias

**3136-0224**

My name is Nolan O'Shea, and I live on Van Dieman IV. When Levin pulled back all Republic forces to Prefecture X, I understood what he was doing. I also understand why. Faced with the squabbling hordes, he didn't have much choice but to do what he did to preserve the great ideal that was (still is, as far as I'm concerned) The Republic. Many of us that feel this way, so we've formed a militia to keep Van Dieman IV safe until Levin returns for us.

We figure we can't be alone, that there are others like us doing the same thing. If you're out there, we need to stick together, to support each other as best we can until The Republic can get back on its feet. Now, we might not have a "real" military with logistics officers, counterintelligence, and the like, but we happen to have nearby planet Irian with a working HPG and our own two hands. To do our part, we'll be sending out information on units we've been seeing (and beating!) in the hopes that other organized militias out there can use it to defend their planets, and maybe even start sending out some intel of their own.

Recently we had the pleasure of fighting off what looked like new battle armor—jump-capable units equipped with shoulder mounted lasers that are able to move a lot faster than your average battle armor. They're easy to spot on the battlefield thanks to their hunched-over forms and longer-than-average arms. Several militia members here report seeing them use these longer arms to actually run faster. I haven't seen it myself, but I trust these guys.

On the battlefield these units don't seem to do much damage with their weapons. They did more damage running through our front-line forces and knocking over our own battle armor. Their long arms came in handy for clotheslining more than a few of them, sending the front line into chaos.

It looks like they've sacrificed armor in order to gain all that speed, so putting them out of commission isn't hard if you know where to aim. Most of our guys started aiming for the shoulder-mounted laser. A good hit on it generally sends these units to the ground flat on their backs, or at least stops them from moving long enough in order to put them down for good. We've found that salvaging these is easier when you take them out by shooting the laser. Most of the suit stays intact that way. It also looks like these are purely home-grown units; no real Clan technology to speak of, so they're easier to repair. Because of that, if you spot these, take as many as you can.

We don't know what other armies call them, so if someone knows, please share with the rest of us. We hope this helps someone. If it does, return the favor if you're able and send something out for the rest of us to work with. We'll send out more as we get it. Until then, stay free.

# Durban Cup Finals Begin

3136-0224  
by Ethan Pasternack

Staff Columnist, Canopus Intelligencer

At long last, it's that time of year—or, rather, that time of the quadrennium—when we long-suffering fans of what is without a doubt the greatest sport in the Inner Sphere finally get our big interstellar championship.

I am, of course, talking about the 197th Quadrennial Durban Cup Finals! For those of you who have spent a little too long planetside, the Durban Cup is the Interstellar Yahn Sun League's premiere event, featuring the eight best players in the Inner Sphere.

For those of you who haven't just been planetside, but have been stuck in stasis or under a rock all this time (and my editor insists that you read our newsfeeds), I'm talking about Yahn Sun! How any of you missed a sport this big, I have no idea, but in case any of you are reading this, here's a link to a quick overview of the game.

## The History of Yahn Sun

For the rest of us, here's the list of players heading into the Finals.

Seat	Division	Name, Homeworld
1	X	Nigel Wolf, [Clan Wolf Stronghold]
2	I	Jack "Danger" Small, Terra Firma
3	VI	Marcus Loretto, Skye
4	IX	Aria Jonsson, Tukayyid
5	IV	Kenzo Asahi, Galedon V
6	V	Jerem Frankel, Praxton
7	III	Vic Davis, Waypoint
8	VIII	Yuki Sakura, Chichibu
9	II	Tim Durell, Islington
10	VII	Waldorf "Wally" Tucker, Vega

As you can see, we have some familiar faces—Small, Loretto, Jonsson, Asahi—but there's a lot of new blood in there to keep things fresh. Tucker, Durell and Frankel are solid favorites from their divisions, but Yuki Sakura and Vic Davis both came into their division championships on wild card slots and upset the divisional favorites for the win.

But the big story of the tournament is Nigel Wolf. Not only is he from Division X, which hasn't had a 1st seeded player in forty years and has never had a Cup champion, but he's also a Clanner, ladies and gents. That's right, he's Clan blood, and everyone still remembers who destroyed the Durban in 3051. Will she be avenged at long last, or will Yahn Sun be just another Clan conquest?

Well, it's time to find out. I'm now comfortably aboard the IYSL DropShip *Cape of Good Hope*, sitting in my cabin under full-G burn away from Canopus IV. The action begins in two standard days, folks—may the best player win!

## Letters From Home -- Week 05

3136-0224

Moore, Prefecture I  
18 May 3135

Brata Yeska,

I hope this message finds you well. I have been long thinking of you, and of home, since the darkness began. Relaying messages by courier is both difficult and expensive (and, I understand, hardly reliable), but such is the price if I am to tell you of this latest news:

I've found grandmother's tomb.

Nineteen years of searching since mother left us that locket, and after wandering on spaceships from home to distant Odessa, the clues led no further than Moore—our very own back yard. Leave it to our dear babushka to choose the scenic route, eh?

It's a simple site, Yeska, Spartan yet dignified. A marble block barely a half meter tall, bearing only the name "Stevens" (I *knew* Grandmother was not truly of Russian descent!) and no years of birth or death inscribed. The plot is one of only a dozen here that even bear names; in fact, the vast majority of this cemetery appears to have been devoted to victims of the Blakist holocaust, and a disaster here they call the Day of Fire.

I suppose it is fitting I should find our *babushka* in here, then, *da*?

Ah, but I wander again. Mother always said I am too verbose for my own good.

In any case, I must confess to crime of desecration. It was not enough to make an ultrasonic scan of the tomb, to see the urns in the coffin as I expected. (Correction: Urn, singular, for there was a body within as well.) I needed to *know*, and for that, I needed the DNA.

I will not tell you the details, Yeska. They are unnecessary. It is enough to say that I was able to obtain the evidence that suited me, evidence that proved—beyond all doubt—that I had indeed found our grandparents. (The remains in the urn *were* Grandmother's; she had been cremated just as mother said.)

In finding her, I have completed the first step of the journey she left behind in legacy.

Wish me luck, *brata*. I shall send to you another message when I attain the next clue.

With you in spirit,  
Stef

## Traitorous Cyclops

3136-0224

Have you ever stared down death? I have, and it really gets a girl thinking about what really matters in life.

A month or so back on Azha, I was working with a small merc outfit called Bailey's Brawlers, contracted with the planetary government to resist the Liao attempts at occupation. Aaron Bailey's a pretty good guy, but his Brawlers are light on 'Mechs, so he hired me on as an independent contractor to beef up his command. We set down outside a little podunk town up in the northern hemisphere, well behind the lines, but we were pushed up pretty fast. The Brawlers had a couple of Enyo strike tanks, half a platoon of armored infantry, a Cizin, a JES III, a platoon of regular leg infantry, a *Phoenix Hawk I*, and my own *Uziel*, "Bandit"—not much to put up against regular Liao troops, but we weren't supposed to be the main force, just some stiffening for the militia. A hard fight, we figured, but nothing big. In fact, the governor had picked up some other mercs, some group called Cyclops Company built around a big tan-and-brown *Jupiter*, and they were supposed to go into the line alongside us.

We were on the line for almost two weeks before the Capellans jumped us. We got hit with a heavy attack, coming head-on into our sector. At first, the militia commanders refused to reinforce us because they thought that this wasn't the big push, and things got hairy. Bailey took a bunch of hits in his *P-Hawk*, one of the Enyos and the Jessie were out of commission, and the leg infantry was starting to crack. It didn't look good for the Brawlers, and it didn't look good for me either. I knew if the Brawlers broke, I didn't have the speed to outrun the *Mjolnir* or the *Blade* hanging back behind the pair of *Targes* leading the assault.

I'm willing to admit it, I was looking for a good way out when the call came down that Cyclops Company was on the way. Being a merc doesn't pay if you're dead, so most mercs have a bug-out plan. I was working on mine when I saw that blessedly-big *Jupiter* lurching into the fight. Now, getting out of a fight is a good way to stay alive, but fighting hard is a good way to get a bonus so I hit the Liao forces hard as soon as I saw back-up on its way. I blasted off my last salvo of SRMs and started tearing away with my PPCs, and I even managed to knock one of those *Targes* down. I was pretty sure it wasn't out, but at least it was down.

It was about that time the *Jupiter* came up even with Bandit, and I fired again as soon as my PPCs had cycled, spiking my heat but putting on a good show. It wasn't just a show for the Zibler I caught with the shot—the double-tap dang near slagged the poor thing. I was about to turn around for another shot on the downed *Targe* when I noticed that the Cyclops commander's 'Mech had stopped right next to mine. I looked up, and I was looking down the barrels of the *Jupiter's* autocannons. The bloody things looked like they were the size of my whole cockpit. I was sure I was dead; some trick of the light allowed me to see the *Jupiter's* pilot gazing down on me almost sadly from his own seat.

They say your life flashes before your eyes right before you dust off, and I can't say they're entirely wrong. I saw every decision that had brought me to this point, and my mind screamed at me, asking why I hadn't made a different choice each step of the way. I couldn't have been looking up into the *Jupiter-jock's* single eye for more than a few seconds, but it felt like forever. The one-eyed guy drew a finger across his throat, then pointed down at my 'Mech. He didn't have to ask twice with those big guns pointed right at my head. I shut Bandit down, and the Liao push swept right past me and the remnants of Bailey's Brawlers.

I'm not sure what made the other merc let me live. It certainly would have been easier for him to shoot me down where I stood, but I'm mighty glad he didn't. Apparently, the Liao forces don't want to make mercs mad, because they let me go, but I never did find out why the Cyclops turned traitor and let the Capellans through.

## Yahn Sun: The Spacer's Sport

3136-0224

This is a quick overview of the game of Yahn Sun and the tournament structure surrounding it, meant for those who, through some tragedy of circumstance, have never heard of it. I've also included a brief history at the end, but it is far from complete.

The mechanics of the game are quite simple. It's a two-player game of magnetic target throwing, played in a variable-G environment. From a distance of about 10 meters, each player uses one wide, flat, magnetized disc called a Cap, which he or she throws at a slightly larger wide, flat, magnetized target called a Mark, which is placed by a player on a large, rectangular, semi-ferrous playing surface referred to as the Board. The goal of the game is to get your cap closest to the mark.

A game is played in a series of rounds. Each round consists of the following: one player throws the mark onto the board, and then each player gets one shot to hit the mark with their cap. The player whose cap lands farthest away (including if the cap misses the board completely) then has one Rebuttal, consisting of two more shots to get closer to the mark. Note that a player can choose to keep the first result on a rebuttal, but he then gets no second shot. If the player making the rebuttal remains furthest from the mark, the point for the round goes to the other player. If the rebuttal succeeds, then the other player has one rebuttal of two shots. If he succeeds, he gets a point. If he fails, the point goes to the other player.

There are two additional rules.

1. If either player actually lands his cap touching his opponent's cap, the opponent's cap is removed from the board. This is called a Shunt. If the shunted player has already used his rebuttal for the round, then his opponent wins the round. Otherwise, he may use his rebuttal.
2. If either player actually lands his cap touching the mark (known as a Strike), that player immediately receives a point, regardless of the outcome of that round.

That's the basics. A regulation Yahn Sun match consists of five games, each game consisting of three rounds. Whoever gets the most points in the match wins that match, but that rarely matters. Placement in the tournament is determined by totaling all the points from all your matches.

The League is organized into ten Divisions, which each have internal competition brackets for their 3-year regular season and a Divisional Championship tournament. Those Champions are ranked against each other based on their stats, and are entered into the roster for the Durban Cup Finals. The winner of the Durban Cup has his or her name etched onto the Cup itself, next to all the previous Durban Cup winners in history; a custom championship Yahn Sun playing cap; rights to display the Durban Cup Champion logo in perpetuity; and the right for his or her ship to transport the Cup (under IYSL supervision, of course) to the next Durban Cup tournament.

### A Brief History of Yahn Sun

The game of Yahn Sun is very old, dating back nearly to the beginning of humanity's exploration of the stars. Its origins are not entirely clear (some even say it's based on an old planetside game, but most sane folks know that's crap), but it has traditionally been something we spacers play as a way to pass the time on long, intersystem runs. Back in the old days, spare parts from mag-coils were used as caps and marks, and the founders just threw them at empty (or at least mostly empty) cargo containers using chalk marks on the deck to denote the throw lines. The crew of the Tikonov Grand Union Jumpship *Yahn Sun* were the first to take the game seriously (hence the name), and they created the rules and tournament structure we still use today.

Originally, there were only a few ships carrying people who played the game, so whenever their paths would cross they would have a tournament. Once the game spread, however, that system proved too informal. Somewhere along the way, a genius at the fledgling IYSL came up with an algorithm that took all the known JumpShip schedules and routes for the ships involved and created a series of Divisions, with each ship belonging to the Division it would encounter most on its normal business. Ships would update the IYSL when their routes changed and their Division would change accordingly, with the algorithm making sure the Divisions remained equal. The original three Divisions expanded and contracted over the centuries – at one point just before the Second Succession War there were seventeen! – until settling down about two hundred years ago to the ten we know today.

## Stockwatch

**3136-0225**

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*25 February 3135*

The preliminary reports for the fiscal year-end numbers for the Irian investments show the expected upward trend.

Orders to Brooks, Inc have improved by 25 percent over last year. Management projects that manufacturing capability will be sufficient to meet this increase, primarily because 50 percent of final 3136 orders are to be delivered in Q1 and Q2 of 3137. Ibrahim assures me that the plant will be up to full capacity no later than 31 March—but he's been saying that for the past two fiscal years.

Brooks is still 30 percent below its historic top profitability, but your initial growth projections remain on target.

Irian Non-Ferrous is still struggling to meet expectations. Primary causes of failure to perform are linked; appalling working conditions, and lack of labor force. Recommend implementing growth plan Beta, requiring further investment in infrastructure and automated systems to improve production. Initial analysis of profitability remains unchanged, but growth plan Alpha has proven insufficient to meet expectations.

## Free Skye!

3136-0303

### An Unofficial Response from the Lyran Commonwealth

*During this time of trials and tribulations, we have all witnessed the best and worst that everyone—anyone, citizen or resident, peerage or proletariat—had to offer. We found greatness. And frailty. We discovered new allies, new enemies, and the depth of our own resolve to take a new and stronger hand in our own lives, our futures, and our destinies.*

*And if there was a failure, it was our failure. The failure of those of us entrusted to safeguard Devlin Stone's great legacy.*

The Isle of Skye has forever known the same adversity that now plunges The Republic into a new and lasting dark age. Did this not cause us to seek the supposed freedoms offered by Devlin Stone? Did we not—finally!—break free of the stifling oversight of House Steiner in search of our own identity. Our own destiny?

And what did we find?

That we had exchanged one master for another. And this time, for one who cared less for our culture and our identity, working through "resettlement programs" and "cultural exchange" to erase what we had forever clung to so fiercely. Skye did not support Devlin Stone. We supported his ideal that every citizen, every world, had the right to make of itself what it could, for the betterment of all.

We were deceived!

*And now. And now...*

*There is nothing more to say, nothing more to endeavor, that we have not said or attempted.... So it is with great sorrow but firm resolve that we put to you, that the time has come for drastic and irrevocable action.*

*To save what we can for the future.*

It should be apparent to even the most stubborn and hidebound among us now, that there is no future for us with The Republic of the Sphere. Our opinions were not sought. Our cries for help and understanding have not been addressed.

On The Republic's watch, we have suffered the depredations of Clan Jade Falcon and the loss of the world of Skye itself. We have learned—at a high cost—that Skye must first and always rely only on itself, and the strength of all like-minded people. And with the clarity of hindsight, we can now see that if there is to be a strategic alliance, it must be with a power that, at the very least, respects our culture because it is one in which they partially share!

It is time to go home. To save what we can—for the future, indeed.



## His Celestial Wisdom—Not!

3136-0303

*Editorial from the Ningpo University student newspaper*

Reading Grand Chancellor Fullofhimself Liao's declaration of Glorious Victory: It seems the foxes are back in charge of the henhouse. I suppose it was too much to ask that the Confederation would go quietly into the night like so many of the galaxy's now-defunct oligarchies.

Chancellor Liao's tired jingoism is but one of the byproducts of the shameful decision Levin made to withdraw. The Republic may have been flawed, but it certainly did not fail. It was the greatest chance since the Star League to return control to the people over that of the blue-blooded, half-crazy "leaders" like the chancellor, who seeks only to exploit his own citizens for personal gain—as if he could be any richer!

The chancellor wants to extinguish the flame, but I have news for him: You cannot douse that which you do not understand. For those of you born with a silver spoon in your inbred mouths, you will never understand that being in control of our own destiny was what endeared Stone's dream to us all. He may have been dead when I was born, but I know enough about life under the so-called Great Houses to know that I would rather perish in resistance than go back to a system in which I could be pressed into fighting in order to line someone else's pocketbook.

What the chancellor will never understand is that for every one of us you kill with your words, a dozen more will see how ruthlessly you treat those you supposedly want to protect. For every freedom you steal, you generate more hate and resentment toward an antiquated system of so-called government. For every 'Mech that destroys a home or ruins a family, we will remember the symbol of the Capellan Confederation, and we will remember the name of Chancellor Daoshen Liao.

Do not expect us to submit to your insanity, chancellor. We are no longer your people. Many of us never have been.

# Letters From Home -- Week 06

3136-0303

Hello Mom and Dad,

Here I am at Camp Granada. We have to write home every week, so I am writing to you today.

First off, I hope you can find a way to send more cookies. That last box barely made it through the new censoring group that has decided to check all the mail. If I hadn't been assigned to peeling potatoes for lunch, I never even would have known you sent me a package. As it was, I had to share what you sent with five other guys who I don't even like. They're bullies.

Geez, I hope they don't read the mail we send out, too, or I'll really get pounded.

Anyway, we're swimming and canoeing and using bows and arrows and learning knots and doing chores. Next week I have to pick three new things to do and I hope I get off kitchen patrol. But I also don't want to be cleaning toilets.

I hope this is enough of a letter for this week. I'll probably write to you again next week, too.

Your son Joe

P.S. The counselors have changed a lot since we first got here. They don't pay as much attention to us kids as they used to, which is why I think I have to work in the kitchen every day now.

—:—

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Pulaski,

I am pleased to inform you that your son, David, has been accepted into the Lloyd Marik-Stanley Aerospace School on New Olympia.

It was an easy decision to welcome a student of such technical promise and sterling character to our hallowed halls. We feel confident he will do well with us, and graduate to a prominent position in the glorious military of the Marik-Stewart Commonwealth.

We are pleased to offer a full scholarship for David's initial year. Further scholarship monies will be available based on his performance evaluation at the end of the first four quarters.

Please fill out the attached forms and return them, along with your formal acceptance of this invitation on behalf of your son, to the LMS Aerospace School by 31 March 3136.

Welcome to the family!

(signed by)  
Admiral Daniel Schlöndorff

## Transcript of the Northwind Highlanders Annual Golf Tournament

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**3136-0303**

**(Audio Only Play-by-Play)**

*Announced by Angus MacDougal*

It's a fine day for a bit of the old game here at Highlander Headquarters. This year's Northwind Highlanders Golf Tournament is taking place on Tigress (because we've been shut out of Fortress Republic and are away from our normal links). This is Angus MacDougal, 2nd Lt. for the Northwind Highlanders. Today's tournament is brought to you by Northwind Panino Island Distilleries' Single-Malt 129 label—the only Scotch that's been alive longer than The Republic, God rest poor Stone's soul.

There's a wind blowin' in from the west that's sure to improve Gerry Halsom's slice. Sorry about that, Gerry! The course is haphazard, but we've done our best out here on Tigress. The terrain is a bit dry and dusty, so the fairways and greens are going to run fast. To make it more interesting, we've laid out 'Mechs across the course as obstacles, because the only thing higher than our knees here are a few scrubby bushes. No water, but lots of sand, and a few thousand tons of metal obstacles, all told. Should make for a fantastic day on the links!

[transmission garbles]

On the seventh hole, 1st Lt. Gene Griffin leads at 2 under par, and the dust is thick out there. There's a *MadCat* standing in his way, though, and Griffin is terrible at making lower shots through a 'Mech's legs. He's lining up the shot . . . as predicted, it bounced off the 'Mech's chest and stuck in a crack between the armor plates! He's not happy about that! I'd just like to remind our audience that Griffin is drinking NPID's Single-Malt 129 label as he tosses his club at his caddy. Unfortunately, he'll have to play that shot as it lies.

Now lining up is young Watson. Watson is 5 over, but he's sure taking his time with this shot. Watson has really had a rough time on these longer par 4s. There he goes and . . . beautiful! That's got to be a 250-foot drive! It's going to put him in a great position for a chip to the brown—excuse me, the green—and then an easy birdie putt to get him back in this game.

[transmission garbles]

Remember, NPID's [hic] 129 Single Malt is the greattesht Scotch, so have some. Griffin and Watson, tied at 1 under, on the 18th. Both in birdie position. Griffin putts firsht, and he misshes it by a half-inch if it's a mile. He's not happy about that. Something about jamming Watson's gauss rifle the next time they go on patrol, and it's hard to make out what they're saying, but it does not appear to be polite. Watson lines up his putt. He's really taking his time again, playing serious. It's in! Watson wins by one stroke! I'm going to open the last bottle of NPID 129. Remember listeners, you should have a bottle too. That'sh all for thish year [hic]. Maybe next year we'll be able to go home but politics never interferes with a good game of golf or a good bottle of NPID 129 [hic]!

## Hellion Hughes: Time to Send Him Packing

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**3136-0310**

**by Chuck Tullifer**

*Autumn Wind Intelligencer* (July 3135)—He's gifted. There's no denying that. With only a handful of major competitions under his belt, Christopher Hughes (readers outside the Commonwealth may know him as Christopher Marik) has managed to make himself a household name here in the Marik-Stewart Commonwealth, even for those not aware he is the son of Jessica Hughes, leader of the Oriente Protectorate.

Yet despite his attributes, I think it's time to say good-bye and so long to this wild child. Even in a sport in which attitude is treasured above good gear and luck, Christopher has proven he is a danger not only to himself, but also to those around him. He's even a danger to the very terrain he encounters.

Last month Hughes participated in a grueling, week-long hoverboard marathon to cover most of K20's slopes. Midway during the competition, he deliberately ignored the banning on the Kallfield ice slope on the northern face. Mr. Hughes was made well aware of the protected status of that region, yet deliberately ignored all warnings, simply to boast at being the first to hoverboard that treacherous terrain. In the process he nearly killed himself and also caused an avalanche that may have annihilated a good portion of the protected region's indigenous icehawk population.

Attitude is one thing. Stupidity and carelessness that destroy our natural resources for his own aggrandizement? Not even Extreme Sports should accept that attitude.

Duke Anson Marik graciously allowed Mr. Hughes to enter our realm, and this is the thanks we get? Time to say good-bye to Hellion Hughes and boost him off our worlds before he destroys something—or someone—else.

## As released from Voice of the Dragon, Algedi Offices

**3136-0310**

**Your source for complete and impartial news coverage**

*Ohayo!* Citizens of the great and eternal Draconis Combine.

With so much confusing and often contradictory information spreading across the border from The Republic of the Sphere, it has fallen to our humble offices to shed light on the dark times that now plague our neighbor. This responsibility overwhelms us. And should our efforts draw praise, it must be in the name of Coordinator Vincent Kurita under whose leadership we all benefit.

By now, most have likely heard fragments from what has become known as Exarch Jonah Levin's "Final Address." Underground movement of bootleg clips, which dangerously take much of his speech out of true context, have penetrated as far as Benjamin (report those involved in the spread of unlicensed news at your nearest police precinct or military office). Here, then, is the unedited opening to this historic speech:

*In the past few years, The Republic has been on a slow, steady slide toward the edge of an abyss. The catalyst for this slide was the loss of the hyperpulse generator network, and thus the loss of interstellar communications—lifeblood to any star-spanning nation.*

*Chaos, created by the Blackout, was compounded by our own fears, our prejudices, and especially by our greed. Weaknesses we thought we had vanquished. Weaknesses we deceived ourselves into believing could ever be eliminated from human nature.*

In response, Tozama Daimyo Urizen Makahasa, the esteemed and honorable lord governor of Algedi, had this to say:

"Strength! Of character and of heritage. This is what The Republic of the Sphere lacked. Through bushido, samurai of the Draconis Combine expunge such weakness, which has crippled The Republic. We may suffer at times under the predatory eye of the yellow bird, but the Dragon remains eternal!"

Reacting severely to this failure of The Republic, Exarch Levin then ordered drastic steps to ensure his own protection and safeguard his rule—pulling back the borders of The Republic to include only Prefecture X and a few other key worlds. Military forces previously engaged against heroes of the Draconis Combine (and others) have been recalled. All communication and transport has ceased from these affected worlds. In his own words:

*These commands, by design and effect, do hereby constitute a New Republic Territory, under the direct and complete aegis of Terra.*

*And formally dissolves The Republic of the Sphere.*

Our office was fortunate enough to have contacts within The Republic seek commentary from Senator Hwrang Onataki. Senator Onataki is a native and the direct representative of Ashio, a former prefecture capital of the Combine's lost Dieron Military District.

"I had never thought to disparage Jonah Levin's service to The Republic or Devlin Stone's legacy. But this latest... It is an opportunistic, and some might say cowardly, course of action. This is the man the paladins believed could right what went so very wrong? A warrior with delusions of grandeur and a persecution complex so deeply ingrained that he has sundered The Republic in pursuit of his own paranoia and political ends? I welcome the return of House Kurita! These people deserve stability and an example of true leadership."

So, what does the future hold now? Only the Dragon may look so far ahead. It is clear from Levin's own address, however, that he, perhaps not surprisingly, is at a loss:

*But there is nothing more we can do, for now, except to pray that we may yet persevere and preserve the light which has guided us for so long; to hold onto the faith that has carried us so far.*

*The Republic was more than a dream of utopia. It was an ideal. One which we were challenged to live up to each and every day.*

Duchess Katana Tormark, also formerly of The Republic and now a hero of the Draconis Combine for her unselfish actions in returning so many worlds to the coils of the Dragon, was asked for final comments.

"What do I say? In response to Levin's insipid musings on a failed experiment? Without question, I'd say that the wyrm has turned.

"Forward the Dragon!"

## Letters From Home -- Week 07

3136-0310

Margery,

I'm coming home. I'm so damned sick of this whole mess, and I don't think I can take it anymore. I joined Bannson Security exactly so I wouldn't have to be a House tool, and now Bannson himself is seeing how far he can get his nose between Daoshen Liao's cheeks. My unit's had to "interface" with at least half a dozen Capellan units, working as OpFor on training exercises and helping get them ready to push further into The Republic. I didn't sign up for this; if I wanted to join the army, I would have joined the Republic Armed Forces. The money's still good, but with the Liao forces closing in on Aldebaran, I just can't make myself help them out anymore. I don't know how the boss'll take this, so I don't want to send it through his channels. I hope passing it along through unofficial channels will make it a little less likely to end up in my file.

I'll be giving my two-week notice in a day or two, and I'll do everything I can to get out from behind the front lines and back home to you, but it's likely to take a while. If you don't hear from me for a little bit, don't worry too much—I'm probably just on my way home. Maybe while I'm on my way, you can talk to your brother and see if they need some additional security at the plant or just an Industrial 'Mech pilot. I know I told you I didn't ever want to drive a dump truck on legs, but if it'll keep me off the front lines but still let me do my part . . . I'm willing to try just about anything now.

I'll see you when I get out of here.

—Soren

—:—

Alice,

Glad to hear from you; it's been a while since Sandhurst, hasn't it? Funny thing, you being over on Alphard. I'm actually over on Elgin, just a couple jumps away from you. Just like you, I got cut out of Fortress Republic, but unlike you, I didn't have a whole RCT to back me up. My company got cut to pieces trying to hold off some raiders. I don't even remember who they were fighting for, just that they wanted onto Elgin, and the people didn't want them there. We fought them off, but there weren't enough of us left to fold into the militia—and the legate hired some mercs—so I'm not really doing much of anything right now.

It might take a bit of time for me to get over to Alphard, but I'll start heading over that way. I figured that it'd be faster to send a note along through LinkNet, and probably better for you that I don't just show up out of the black one day. I highly doubt the legate'll let me get off-planet with a 'Mech, so it'll just be me traveling as a passenger. I hope that'll speed up the trip a bit, even if it doesn't get you another 'Mech.

If you hear anything else from any of the other Sandhurst class, let me know. It'd be great to see Janice, Crash, or Freddy again. Who knew that the class of '32 would be so spread out already? It'll be great to see you again too, Alice. I know that you said you were putting out an all-call, but I'm really glad you thought of me, especially after the way we left things.

Well, if I'm going to save any cash for the trip, I'd better cut this short. I'll see you on Alphard as soon as I can get there.

—Bendy

## Saffel Simmers as DCMS, RAF Vie for Control

3136-0310

Saffel [ISAP] — A new wave of low-level fighting erupted across Saffel this week, with no fewer than four separate engagements between elements of the Republic Armed Forces and those of the Draconis Combine and Clan Nova Cat. Although casualties on all sides were light—with only 16 confirmed deaths among the active military forces—the skirmishes may signify renewed efforts by the invading Kurita forces to finally oust the last vestiges of The Republic of the Sphere and secure the embattled planet.

Near the city of Radjik, home of the Saffel Medical Institute, the worst of the fighting broke out with a predawn strike by a lance of Kuritan BattleMechs against an isolated force of mixed Republic and local militia 'Mech forces. Three of the DCMS 'Mechs—including an older model *Panther*, a *Spider*, and a *Valiant*—were reportedly destroyed during the exchange, at the cost of two militia Hunter support tanks, a *Firestarter*, and a badly damaged *Jupiter* assault 'Mech. During a postbattle press conference, Lieutenant Marko van Dier of the RAF described the action as an "act of Drac desperation."

"The [Combine forces] didn't seem to have a plan here—beyond killing everything in their path, that is. There was no sense of tactics in their approach, no effort to flank or maximize their abilities. Some of their machines even came into the firefight with signs of evident battle damage. It was like a death-or-glory charge."

According to Van Dier, all three of the downed DCMS MechWarriors died in the battle, but some sources claim that at least one may have killed himself later, presumably to avoid capture and interrogation. Van Dier declined to comment on these reports, but he did add that the allegedly poor condition of the invading 'Mechs suggested a supply problem among the Combine ranks, similar to the one plaguing RAF forces since Exarch Levin's decree in October of last year, which formally disbanded The Republic of the Sphere.

"Maybe Katana Tormark's masters have given up on her already," Van Dier bitterly commented, referring to the former Republic prefect who formed and led the now-defunct Dragon's Fury pirate group soon after the collapse of the HPG network in 3132. Tormark's invasion forces—which recently added "contracted" elements of the Combine's Clan Nova Cat population—have seen few victories since her alleged recall to the Combine capital last year, leaving the DCMS invasion of former Republic territories all but leaderless.

# TECH WATCH: The New Scourge of the Battlefield

## 3136-0310

It's been making the rounds in at least half of the Inner Sphere, and it won't be long before it's spotted in the rest. It's the Scourge, and its name is an apt description of its combat style. After some significant researching, we tracked down the manufacturer of this new design: Kaiser Systems. Though we were unable to solicit any comments directly from a Kaiser representative, we were able to obtain marketing information for this model.

At 65 tons, this heavy-class BattleMech accommodates a relatively modest weapons loadout: a Gauss rifle accentuated with four extended-range medium lasers and one medium pulse laser. Eleven double heat sinks help with the overwhelming energy output of this design. Because the bulk of its weapons welcome a closer style of fighting, this 'Mech carries the maximum amount of armor on its endo-steel frame. Speaking of armor, the layered look of the armor plates on the legs of this unit led us to believe that the armor might have been specialized. We were surprised to discover, however, that the Scourge sports light ferro-fibrous armor in its basic configuration, though another variation is available with simple standard armor.

At this point we can only speculate about other Scourge variations, but we all seem to agree that the Gauss arm of this unit doesn't look like it started out there. Kaiser can't hide forever, and once they poke their heads out we'll be there.

### THE BREAKDOWN

<b>BattleMech:</b>	Scourge SCG-WF1-H
<b>Mass:</b>	65 tons
<b>Chassis:</b>	Endo Steel
<b>Power Plant:</b>	325 VOX XL Fusion
<b>Walking Speed:</b>	54.0 km/h
<b>Maximum Speed:</b>	86.4 km/h
<b>Jump Jets:</b>	Dynamo Jump Jets
<b>Jump Capacity:</b>	120 meters
<b>Armor Type:</b>	Light Ferro-Fibrous
<b>Armament:</b>	1 Diverse Optics Medium Pulse Laser 1 Eisen Gauss Rifle 4 Diverse Optics Extended-Range Medium Lasers
<b>Cost:</b>	18,080,000 C-bills



## Dear Dieron, Get a Grip

3136-0317

Geez, Gibbert, grow a spine. Did you notice how the entire Republic seems to be falling apart? How it looks like there's war on at least four fronts? And all you can do is sit on your currently peaceful planet and whine how you didn't get taken into the Fortress, where you could be all safe and snug and have the big boys look out for you.

Well, I've got news for you—time to buy yourself a jockstrap and suit up to join the real universe. You sit around waiting for someone to save you, you're going to be sitting for a long time. Things are falling apart all around us, and maybe instead of whining you should look for a way to help put the pieces back together. You want to be safe? You want The Republic to still exist in a few years? Then you better be ready to do some work, boy, and you better to be ready to put your back into it.

Styx is a great example of what I'm talking about. There were a bunch of military units heading there when the curtain dropped, and some of them acted just like Gibbert here, just looking out for themselves. They figured high command couldn't keep an eye on them anymore, so they just scarpered. Ran out on The Republic, as if they weren't needed anymore. Gutless. I even heard rumors about an attempted coup, some soldiers wanting to take over an entire JumpShip and take it somewhere safe, away from the fighting. Luckily that attempt failed.

But then there's the other soldiers, who knew what they needed to do even if they didn't have clear-cut orders telling them to do it. They resisted the coup, continued on to Styx, and rallied themselves against the Combine. Just think about what they're doing there. They've got no hope of reinforcements from central command. They can't count on shipments of supplies, of ammo arriving, except for whatever what's left of the government of Prefecture II can dig up for them. They're understocked, undermanned, and dammit, they're still there. I don't have the most reliable information on them in the world, but last I heard, they're holding on.

So stop whining about how you didn't get to be in the Fortress, Gibbert—you and everyone like you—and start thinking about what you can do with the rest of us working to stay free on the outside. Because you're not going to stay safe forever. You want to know why Dieron was locked out of the Fortress? The best guess I've heard says it was a bargaining chip—it's a planet the Combine really wants, and maybe letting them have it will finally make them lay off the rest of the prefecture, or what's left of it. So if I was you, I'd either get to work, or I'd be looking forward to seeing the forces of the Dragon at your front door in short order.

JustKauz  
Radjjik, Saffel  
Prefecture II

## Letters From Home -- Week 08

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**3136-0317**

*An Open Letter to LinkNet*

Allow me to introduce myself. I am Elliott Grimm, a native of the planet Kessel. I am many things... but first and foremost, I am a patron of the arts.

Why is that important?

We seem to be living in most interesting times, do we not? By now, many have heard about the collapse of the old Republic into itself. Old wounds are now open to the atmosphere, and old grudges are calling out to be settled.

Well. Exarch Levin may have abandoned you, but I have not.

It is my goal, in this strange moment in history, to remind all who will listen that we are much more than pawns. We are all warriors of a sort. It is in the arts and the performance that this warrior soul best finds its voice. And on every planet in the Inner Sphere, on any given night of the week, warriors of the instrument, voice, and stage are waging battles against the darkness. For when we lose the war against these philistines who say that art has slipped into irrelevance, we are a sadder people indeed.

Dear reader, do not take my recital and concert reviews as trivia. Excellence and expression **MUST** continue! As fortune would have it, Kessel is blessed to be one of the few remaining planets with a functional HPG. And I will scour the performance houses of Kessel (and hopefully beyond) to bring you stories and appraisals of the warrior poets of our times. And if I am harsh in my critique, it is because my standards are high and I fervently believe in the power of humanity to overcome this season of uncertainty.

Desperate times call for desperate measures, do they not?

## Message from Saffel

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3136-0317

Nessa,

I don't know what the newsvids are telling you about the situation here, but I'm willing to bet that some politico like van Dier is exaggerating it greatly, probably making it look like the Republic is valiantly holding on to the planet in Levin's name or some such bunk.

I can tell you with absolute certainty that the only reason this hellhole is not already in Tormark's hands is because her troops are just as starved for supplies and good news as we are. I don't know what the hell's going on in their heads, but I've seen these Clanner/Snake combo lances taking runs at us that would've been suicidal just weeks ago, because they're out of ammunition, or low on parts or some such. And the only reason we can't quite oblige them is that we're also out of supplies.

I've heard stories of how it was in the Jihad when the toaster-worshippers started nuking factories and salting farmlands, of whole commands going cannibal or living off rats and bugs while dosing up on anti-rads because they'd been forced into a hot zone just to avoid a reeducation camp roundup. Rumor says even some of the Blakies wound up like that over time, after they lost Terra and made for the Periphery or other parts unknown. I don't know how true those tales are, but given the last week here, I'm starting to see how they could be.

Three days ago, I fired the last bolt of slugs in my *Legionnaire* to keep a Snake Maxim out of laser range. I missed the sucker, and it was only because I was able to close in and boot the guy that I came out of that with a 'Mech to speak of. Today, the techs finally found enough sheet metal to cover up the holes.

The Nova Cats have been shoring up the Drac lines, their more efficient Clanner tech making it possible for them to last longer, though they still rush us from time to time. The supply drain has led them to blockade those of us guarding the smaller towns, while they occasionally try to force their way into the bigger cities for a crack at the local grocery and equipment stores, raiding civilian sectors to get the screws and bolts they need to keep in the game!

I tell you, Nessa, it's nuts. Both sides have started looking and acting more like bandits—only the Snakes seem intent on dying before they're forced to sink that low. I hear there's been deserters on both sides, too.

So, no matter what they tell you in the newsvids, don't buy it.

We're all starving out here.

Love,  
Svetlana

## Review of *Requiem for 3 Planets*, Coyote Bay Collective

3136-0317

Classical music has an undeniable pull for all of discerning ear. One need not be an old fuddy-duddy with a tin ear and a hesitance toward anything written after 2800; one must merely be open minded. Consequently, the capacity crowd at the Plantagenet Theatre last Thursday night was a continuum of artistic-minded humanity, from young people in jeans to long-time patrons in tuxedos.

The stars of the evening were the Coyote Bay Collective, a classical music ensemble with an eighty-year history of excellence and controversy. Their reputation stems from not only technical ability, but their willingness to reinterpret music to be relevant to today. I, for one, am not convinced of their ascendancy; it seems presumptuous for musicians of our day and age to inform the composers of days past of their intentions. Nonetheless, they put on a consistent show, and there are certainly more wasteful ways one can spend a rainy winter evening on Kessel than enjoying the Collective.

As is usual, the Collective did not announce beforehand what selections they would perform for the evening. Whispers and conjectures of what they'd play flew around the room in a buzz of electric anticipation. The excitement in the air was palpable by the time the house lights dimmed and the spots came up on the members of the Coyote Bay Collective. Collective indeed; while their identical black silk trousers and shirts spoke of unified purpose, each member bore their distinction like a royal mantle. Violist and leader of the Collective, the dignified Gray Olan, spoke a few words of introduction in his usual efficient manner.

And then, the Collective's penchant for controversy took a step up, as the first stanza of Stanislov Kulicks' *Requiem For Three Planets* took shape. Indeed, I missed the first several measures of the first movement due to the loudly whispered interjections, both approving and outraged, around me.

As all civilized people know, *Requiem For Three Planets* is an ancient piece of classical music, dating back some 900 years to the dawn of space travel. Not only did Kulick write a technically challenging piece, but a chamber quintet must ALSO capture the range of emotions the piece demands. Fear, loneliness, anticipation, loss, joy, and boredom must all mingle in equal measure, building toward the final triumph of the first binary sunrise seen by the composer in the fourth and final movement. Indeed, there are both longer and more intricate concertos, but few quintets even attempt the *Requiem* in rehearsal, let alone on the stage.

For nearly 200 years, the mystique of the *Requiem* has also been enhanced by a heated debate – that being the pervasive question as to whether Stanislov Kulick intended percussion to be played during the third movement. Some claim that the piece is incomplete without it and that the true power of the *Requiem* cannot be felt in its absence. Perhaps I am a traditionalist, but I cannot disagree more. The classical quintet has long comprised two violins, viola, cello, and Chapman Stick. To imply that Kulick did not understand the percussive nature of the Chapman Stick as the rhythmic backbone of the third movement, interwoven with the melodies and counter melodies of the stringed instruments, is a grave injustice. No, the piece does NOT need additional percussion, and I for one was glad that the Collective chose the more traditional interpretation of the piece.

However, I am afraid that I left the concert feeling unsatisfied. While the musical prowess of the Coyote Bay Collective is without question, I did not feel the emotion inherent and vital to *Requiem For Three Planets*. Their performance was almost clinical, with little of the zeitgeist needed to build properly toward the climax in the fourth movement. True, the violins did properly capture the lilting feel of early space travel, and Victor Bonilla, youngest member of the Collective and Chapman Stick player, did an admirable job in the third movement, even generating a round of spontaneous applause after one particularly complex sequence. But I for one am unable to accept technical proficiency as a replacement for lazy interpretation. If one is going to attempt the *Requiem*, one should at least UNDERSTAND the *Requiem*. The Coyote Bay Collective is not there yet.

Still, the crowd seemed to enjoy the audaciousness of the selection. And enough attendees were able to invest in the piece to generate a standing ovation at its conclusion. Even though I walked home unsatisfied through the rain-stained streets of Sverdlovsk, I still have to give the Coyote Bay Collective credit for their bold, unapologetic choice. These are strange times. Perhaps it is good that artists make their own courageous stands.

Elliot Grimm  
Sverdlovsk, Kessel

## ANSWERING THE CALL

**3136-0324**

Nolan O'Shea, we're with you. My name is Genevieve Bauer, impromptu leader of a similar militia movement here on Lyons. I gotta say, the only thing we disagree with you on is whether or not it's gonna be Levin coming for us. Us here, we got our money bet on Stone himself.

Anyway, your info came at a good time. Not long after we heard from you, we faced a recon force of that apelike battle armor. With a little preparation we were able to dispatch them with minimal losses. We found out the name of the armor type, too; Simian. It fits the primate-like design, so we figured it must be right.

Anyway, we also found some other battle armor that's a little out of the ordinary, but it's done wonders for us here. We're still trying to scare up ammo for the artillery units we've managed to liberate, and for now we're forced to make do with mortar rounds that we managed to find in more plentiful supply. But that same force with the Simians also brought us something else; Centaur Battle Armor.

Like those Simians you saw, Centaurs are pretty distinctive, though the distinction isn't obvious until their main weapon is deployed. Mounted in a backpack is a portable artillery unit that allows the carrier to put out some crucial fire to help clear hiding infantry, like our own boys and girls, or even light vehicles. When the unit is ready to fire, the user bends the battle armor knees to deploy two stabilizing "legs" that come from the backpack. The trooper can then fire a round, straighten up, and move to the next target area. The ammo magazine holds eight shots, but the bad news is that the ammo is specialized. We were able to seize a hoard of it from our unwelcome guests, but once we run out, it's out. Some of the more technical-minded among us are trying to see if we can jury-rig our own mortars to work in this system, but the process is kinda slow. We already blew one armor with an "experiment," so we're kinda loath to try again without giving the problem some more thought. Since the launcher is more "gun" than "lobber," we can't just follow the battle armor around carrying the ammo to drop in.

The secondary weapon is a small laser on the arm, basically enough firepower to keep the operator safe. We've also found that the backpack can be jettisoned if necessary to allow for a quick pull-out. We'll be doing our best to keep everything we've got, and if anyone figures out alternate ammo, we'd love to hear about it. Stay free.

## APB from Alrakis

3136-0324

**To:** All Legitimate Law Enforcement, Mercenary, or Bounty Hunting Agencies in the vicinity of Alrakis

**From:** Office of Planetary Security, Alrakis (Prefecture I)

**Date:** 21 March 3136

**Subject:** Wanted (Retrieve for Questioning)

The Alrakis Office of Planetary Security has issued an all-points bulletin to all licensed law enforcement, mercenary, or bounty hunting operatives within sixty (60) light years of Alrakis. Be on the lookout for two (2) suspects currently wanted on charges of conspiracy, disturbing the peace, weapons possession, assault on Alrakis law enforcement officers, and damage of Alrakis government property. Suspect descriptions and identities to follow. Both appear to be combat trained, with one a qualified shuttle pilot, and the other a demonstrated MechWarrior. Suspects are armed and considered dangerous. However, the Alrakis planetary government insists on the capture of both alive and without serious injury before disbursing payment for either.

**Suspect #1:** Polnach, Mikhail (Alias, "Michael Mitternacht")-Male, Caucasian (fair-tone, Lyran-Germanic accent), estimated age: 44-55 years, approximately 1.7 meters tall, medium build, w/ black hair, green eyes. Suspected bionic enhancement (optical or vocal transceiver implants). Last seen wearing black synthleather jacket, camouflage fatigue pants, military-issue combat boots (apparent pre-Jihad Lyran design) and a short goatee. Also known to have carried at least two slug-thrower pistols (Gunther MP-20 or MP-24) at the time of his escape from Tarowena civilian spaceport, used to wound two spaceport security guards when confronted.

**Suspect #2:** Berwyn, Johann (No known alias)-Male, Caucasian (Mediterranean features, Skye-Gaelic accent), estimated age: 30-35 years, approximately 1.6 meters tall, slender build, w/ brown hair, brown eyes. Possible reliance on glasses to read. Last seen wearing brown overcoat over nondescript military-style sweater (olive), gray trousers, and black casual shoes. No facial hair. Carried no apparent weapons at time of incident, but was alleged to have overpowered a shuttle pilot using an improvised club after which he commandeered and piloted ST-64C-class DropShuttle used in escape from spaceport.

Both suspects departed Alrakis airspace after a confrontation with local authorities in downtown Tarowena and managed to avoid interdiction by local air patrol craft. Stolen ST-64C DropShuttle (registered with Alrak Aerospace Tours) was recovered adrift at a lunar K-5 orbit. Alrakis authorities suspect both men rendezvoused with an unidentified *Scout*-class JumpShip at that time to flee the system space.

The reward for their capture (alive and reasonably unharmed) is presently posted at 50,000 stones per suspect, payable upon verification at Alrakis Tarowena City Hall.

## Letters From Home -- Week 09

3136-0324

Hello Mom and Dad,

This is my next letter from Camp Granada.

I guess things are going a little better. It has stopped raining, so now all the fun things we are doing we don't get so wet. Except for swimming, of course.

I am still working in the kitchen, which is okay since the other choice is still cleaning the bathrooms, which the same kids have been doing for two weeks now. Boy are they sick of it.

The other good thing about being in the kitchen is that the counselors all hang around in the pantry and listen to the local radio. They are listening to a real exciting story about some battle somewhere with lots of explosions and stuff. The counselors don't seem too happy about the way the story is going right now.

Did you send more cookies? Because if you did, I never got them.

I guess for a summer camp, this is not too bad. My favorite thing to do so far is learning to tie knots. You will be very surprised at what I have learned to do with the ones I have learned. This week I think I will pick painting and horses as my new activities.

I hope this is enough of a letter for this week. Punch Troy in the arm for me, willya?

Your son Joe

—:—

Hey dad. Toni here.

I don't know why I keep sending these out. The grid has been down for a while and I really doubt that Carnwath is high on the priority list. But I do. Maybe I just hope that somehow, these messages will make it home to you.

How long has it been? Six years? We didn't part well then. You were mad at me for not joining the LAAF. I was mad at you for being so mule-headed. I drank a lot at you that day; maybe you did the same at me.

But that was six years ago. That was before the grid fell. And before the Jade Falcons went on their little military adventure. Might as well be forever.

Space is big, dad. I know you know this. And the Jade Falcons don't have endless stores of 'Mechs to bully entire planets with. Maybe they left Carnwath totally alone. Maybe the politicians made an agreement. Maybe the batchall went in your favor and you and mom and RivCarn Industries are totally safe.

But I don't know. I don't know anything. I don't even know if you're still alive. So I keep writing these messages to anyone who claims that they can access a working HPG. Because I hope that one of these will reach you and you'll know that I'm okay. And maybe I'll know that you're okay one day, too.

Dad, for what it's worth, you might be proud of me now. I just hired on with a merc unit in a long term contract to House Steiner. Good people, from what I have seen so far. Honorable unit. If a little mum about their recent past, though. Call themselves the Rock Brigade. You'd like our commander. He's a vet of the LAAF. We're on Tharkad right now training. Afraid I bruised my tailbone snowboarding last weekend while on leave. But if that's the worst that happens then I suppose that's pretty good.

Dad, I'm not very good with written words. But ... I'm sorry that we fought last time I was home. It was a stupid thing to argue over and if you're stubborn, well, I suppose it follows that I would be too. I hope you can find it in your heart to forgive me. And I hope to make it home, someday soon. I'd rather not have to fight my way through Clansmen, but I will if I have to.

We're going on deployment in about a month. I'll send more messages as I am able.

And kiss mom for me and let her know it's alright. I know she worries about these things.

Your daughter,  
T-

—:—

Honored Sir,

As per your orders, I am continuing my risk and readiness assessment. The primary and secondary analysis are now completed; you should have a good sense of what House Steiner assets are within 2 jumps of the Fortress Republic. I am now entering the tertiary analysis phase—discerning what other assets House Steiner has at its disposal, their operational capacity, and their

relative level of threat to the Republic. Note that this level of analysis is far more speculative in nature, and may not be complete.

**Unit Name:** Rock Brigade

**Affiliation:** Mercenary unit in long-term contract to House Steiner. In fact, the Rock Brigade may as well be a House unit given the terms of their contract and battle history.

**Unit Size:** They are somewhat grandiosely named. Actual assets indicate battalion-sized combined arms force.

**Unit Breakdown:**

- 1 mixed weight 'Mech company
- 1 heavy 'Mech company
- 1 mixed vehicle company, geared toward long range combat and support ops
- 2-4 platoons of mixed infantry,
- 5 medium aerospace fighters
- one Invader-class JumpShip
- 2 obsolete Union-class DropShips

**NOTE: The Rock Brigade is most unusual in that they have their own space assets.** How these expensive ships were acquired by a small mercenary outfit is unknown at this point. All space assets are thought to be at least 85 percent operational. This likely indicates some level of House support or presently unidentified resource investment.

**Home World and Dependents:** Apparently the Rock Brigade have learned from the past. Their dependents are located on several different worlds and they do not seem to have a centralized base of operations. This gives more credence to the idea that they function more as a House unit than as an independent mercenary group. However, information in this regard is sketchy and the Rock Brigade could indeed have a base of operations. Certainly their footprint is small enough to not attract much attention.

**History:** The Rock Brigade has been around for about twenty years. They were founded and are presently commanded by Eli Zondervan. Records indicate that Zondervan had a long, unremarkable career in the LAAF, earning three minor commendations as a 'Mech pilot prior to retirement. The Rock Brigade was formed three years later, beginning as a single lance of BattleMechs in contract to House Steiner. They grew steadily, achieving their present size about five years ago. It is around this time that they acquired their space assets. Their service records indicate garrison, support, and cleanup duties. While the unit has seen a fair amount of combat action, they have not been involved in a major campaign. This makes their ability to afford upkeep on a JumpShip and two DropShips even more curious.

Approximately 15 months ago, the Rock Brigade departed on a sensitive mission. Records of where they went and the nature of the task are proving difficult to find. However, it is known that they returned to Tharkad 6 months ago with high casualties.

**Present Location:** Tharkad. The Rock Brigade has spent the last several months recruiting and training new members, and are back to about 90 percent operational capacity.

**Morale:** Questionable. Almost half of their 'Mech pilots are new recruits. How well these new members will integrate into the TO is unknown. Morale was reported to be high before their last mission.

**THREAT ASSESSMENT: LOW.** Their relative small size and internal transport capacity makes them ideally suited to operations requiring stealth and flexibility. In essence, they're ideally suited for the mission that nearly destroyed them. However, with so many new members, they are unlikely to exhibit strong unit cohesion. It seems most probable that the Rock Brigade will return to garrison duties for the foreseeable future.

—:—

H-

Just want you to know everything is going well here. The department is no busier than usual. I guess it's a good thing that war doesn't automatically increase the amount of violent crime, and the civilian CSI doesn't have to address crimes from the military side.

We do have an interesting case on our table right now, and I wish you were here to give us your insight. We've got the usual components, but they just don't fit together the way they ought to.

I'll keep you in the loop as we progress. The DA isn't breathing down our necks for once, so I might be able to get your input before we have to wrap it up.

Let us know where you're at, and how soon you'll be home. Wainwright is angling pretty hard for your job; we squash him down as the opportunity arises (and trust me, he makes it arise pretty often), but we'd all feel better if we knew you were on your way back.



Lucy

## Rebellion 101

3136-0324

It's awfully tough to worry about enemies from without when you need to keep throwing suspicious glances at the enemies within. When Levin first disbanded the Senate, I was right behind him, cheering him on. It's hard to mobilize the government against its enemies when the government is one of the enemies.

Now, the day Levin withdrew into Prefecture X, leaving the rest of us on the outside, was not as much of a triumph. It was a kick in the gut. It was great that he threw all the snakes out of the garden, but it turned somewhat less great when he left a whole bunch of his people alone out here with the snakes.

But here we are. With them. I could launch on a whole diatribe on why the former senators of The Republic are bad news and why they should be treated pretty much as a viral infection and expelled (hey, that works as an image for the dissolution of the Senate-Levin's Big Sneeze), but for the moment I'll assume most of the people reading this are rational and don't need to be convinced of the obvious. Of course, now that I've said that, some raving pro-nobility loon's bound to call me to task, but that's okay-having a nutjob launch rhetorical clay pigeons so that you can blow them away with the shotgun of truth can be fun. For now, though, let's stick to the big question: the senators are still here, they're flexing their political muscles-what's an honorable but abandoned citizen of The Republic to do?

There's two basic approaches, and one's not the kind of thing we can talk about in a public forum without promptly being arrested. Those discussions will have to take place in more clandestine meetings with discreet people, some of whom will likely be wearing Guy Fawkes masks. Godspeed to all of them!

The second approach we can do in public, and that's to work at undermining the senators' power. I should warn anyone reading this that this isn't without risk. While we probably won't be committing any crimes, we'll be using the blessed power of free speech to destabilize the authority of people who really, really like to have authority, people who have shown that they don't believe the words "civil" and "rights" should ever be in the same sentence, let alone placed next to each other. So they might come after you. You get into what I'm proposing, you could find trouble.

That enough of a caveat? Good. Here's what to do: the senators, like any nobles, rule best when the public sees them as deserving to rule. They show themselves to be power-hungry autocrats, and all of the sudden the public is ready to throw them off (you fans of ancient Terran history out there, think Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette; those of you who keep your minds in the somewhat more recent past, think Amaris family). So what we need is dirt-dig up something on your local senator, spread it around, and let the stink grow until the public wakes up and smells the pig feces. After that, rebellion's a piece of cake.

I'll get started on my end right away-watch this space!

DeandraL  
Hyppo, Augustine  
Prefecture VII

## Stockwatch

**3136-0324**

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*03 March 3135*

Despite the best efforts of Legate Tortorelli, our acquisition of AllWorldComm has been accomplished. The Mirach Business Association was less than helpful in this process, though I feel credit could go to the Republic representatives for smoothing our way with the existing leadership of the corporation.

The SpanNet technology offers practically immeasurable opportunity throughout the IS, and Sanchez has a proposal on its way to you regarding implementation of optimal exploitation.

Analysis regarding current feasibility of establishing a trading post on Mirach has not changed positively.

Efforts to capture majority shares in Industrial Giants Manufacturers remain ongoing.

## Durban Cup Mid-Final Update

**3136-0331**

by Ethan Pasternack

**Staff Columnist, Canopus Intelligence**

Well, that was one hell of a fortnight. Two raucous weeks of Yahn Sun has left me breathless, emotionally drained, hung over, and mildly queasy from all the G-shifts-and I'm just in the press corps! But hey-that's all part of the fun at the Durban Cup, and I wouldn't miss this for the galaxy.

Ok, there's lots to tell after 25 matches, but before I give you the highlights, here's the stats. My editor insists I have to explain this table, but I'm ignoring him-if you know, you know. If you don't, ask someone who does.

	I (Small)	II (Durell)	III (Davis)	IV (Asahi)	V (Frankel)	VI (Loretti)	VII (Tucker)	VIII (Sakura)	IX (Jonsson)	X (Wolf)
I	10	1	5	3	2	10	9	1	10	1
II	1	10	1	8	9	1	8	1	14	13
III	12	1	10	1	1	1	14	11	9	13
IV	13	10	1	10	1	15	1	9	1	11
V	1	8	1	1	10	12	10	7	1	10
VI	11	1	1	1	5	1	1	6	10	1
VII	9	9	2	1	7	1	10	1	8	1
VIII	1	1	5	9	10	13	1	10	1	16
IX	9	4	7	1	1	8	11	1	1	1
X	1	2	3	6	6	1	1	0	1	1
	54	33	22	27	37	58	52	33	51	63

(Editor's Note: Each player's score for a given match is noted in the column below his/her name, in the row adjacent to who he/she played. For example, the score for Small(I) vs. Davis(III) was 12-5. The bottom row is the total score of all matches for that player. For instance, Small(I) has 53 points so far, and Davis(III) has 22.)

As you can see, we have really started to separate the salvage from the scrap in this tournament. The score differential between the top five and the bottom five is substantial: 14 points separate Jonsson(IX) in 5th place from Frankel(V) in 6th. In the top five, however, no one has more than a 5-point lead over their closest competitor and all are over 50 points.

Looking just at the numbers, Wolf(X) seems to have a commanding lead with 63 points, the only player in recent history to have crested the 60 mark in only five matches. However, he has yet to play any of the other top-5 competitors, so his next four matches will be much tougher (and likely much closer) than the ones he has played thus far. This is likely why the Solaris odds on him making the championship match are still so long (though not nearly as long as they were at the beginning of the tournament). That said, there is still much grinding of teeth at the prospect of a Clanner champion ...

Loretti(VI) and Small(I) are close behind Wolf, with much lower-seeded opponents yet to play. The archrivals had a spectacular match in the fourth round of play that may have jeopardized their chances of a face-off in the championship. In what may be

the most exciting single round in Yahn Sun history, Small and Loretta managed to score a total of 7 points, and earn three penalty cards between them-all in one round. Check out the play-by-play to see how it happened. Anyway, after Loretta lost against Small, he went on to earn his second (orange) penalty card in a match against Jonsson(IX). Apparently, he attacked her after a disputed measure cost him a crucial point. So with four matches left to play, both of these infamous hotheads are one snide remark away from being ejected from the tournament!

With Tucker and Jonsson trailing by only a few points, the loss of either Loretta or Small could drastically change the outcome of the tournament, so I can't tell you who I think will win this thing. The Durban Cup is still very much up in the air, which is as it should be. Two more weeks to go, and I'll be watching every minute of it. That's all for now from the Cape of Good Hope-see you on the other side!

## Letters From Home -- Week 10

3136-0331

Johann,

I hope that you are well. You do not know me, but we have a friend in common. I suggest we meet as soon as humanly possible. I'll be visiting your neck of the stellar woods next week. I presume you know where the Bidwell Tavern is in Tarowena? You'll know me when you see me.

- Mitternacht

—:—

Jenny,

I've attached an article I know you're gonna love. It's such a perfect example of the kind of dimwitted bureaucratic foolishness we've fought against for so long. Just goes to prove that the kind of underground newspaper we've run for so many years now is still needed; I think as long as human nature remains fundamentally the same, there will be a continued demand for the voice of the people to be heard.

Saffel certainly represents the macrocosm of what we're all facing here in Prefecture II. It's good to see that even the members of the various armed forces can gain enough perspective to understand the level of destruction their actions can visit on the general populace.

Oh yeah, Bill sends his love, and wants you to write back and "tell him how his favorite niece is doing."

Genevieve

### RAF Official: Truce at Radjik "Cowardice and Betrayal"

Saffel [ISAP] – An official close to the Republican Armed Forces defending Saffel today condemned a cease-fire and truce between battered remnants of the RAF command around the city of Radjik and their Combine aggressors as "an act of cowardice and betrayal." Speaking on condition of anonymity, the official claimed that Colonel Georgi Almadero, current commander of the RAF forces still fighting to hold Saffel in the name of The Republic, has demanded an explanation for the unsanctioned peace initiatives that essentially ended fighting around the historic city and opened it to traffic from both sides, but has received no word yet from the on-site commander, Captain Caspar Michaud.

Fighting in recent weeks on Saffel has grown increasingly desperate as supplies have dried up for both the defending pro-Republic troops and those of the Combine forces recently led by ex-Republican prefect Katana Tormark. Incorporating elements of the Nova Cat and former Dragon's Fury rebel group, Tormark's forces tore a swath through the worlds of Prefecture II, but remained stalled on several worlds, such as Styx and Saffel—even after Exarch Levin announced the sealing of Republic borders beyond Prefecture X earlier this year.

Since the demarcation of the New Republic Territory, many RAF troops beyond the so-called Iron Curtain and elsewhere have experienced what officials call a "horrific loss of morale," with many troops deserting or actively going rogue rather than fight for a nation perceived as having abandoned them. Notable exceptions have been Styx and Saffel, where many officers and MechWarriors have instead clung to the ideals of Devlin Stone and continued to battle their respective invaders, perhaps in the hopes of seeing relief forces from the RAF to shore up their position.

But for the residents of the city of Radjik and the troops fighting in and around the Radjik countryside, the fight apparently ended—at least for the moment—when RAF troops, under a white flag, called for a cease-fire with their ragtag Combine attackers. The terms of the cease-fire essentially opened the city to controlled visits by each side's forces, on the condition that no BattleMechs enter the city limits. Unconfirmed sources say that the enforcement of this agreement is being performed by an informal coalition of select RAF and DCMS troops who appear to have broken away from their respective sides. It is this development that most concerns the on-planet RAF commanders.

"That peace was restored [to the people of Radjik] is not the issue here," claimed one RAF spokesperson. "It is the fact that said peace is being maintained by a vigilante force comprised of deserters, whose motivations and goals can only be guessed at, that we find abhorrent."

—:—

Dear Fae,

Well, I wanted to write and update you on the situation here on Bharat. As you know, Bannson has acquired a controlling interest in Killosh Industries. What does that mean for me, you say?

Well, as a line worker here at the factory, so far all it's meant is a better quality of coffee in the break room, a cost-of-living increase in our benefits, and ... oh yeah, they fixed that toilet in the men's room that I swear has been running continuously since 3130. To be honest, I don't know if I'll be able to do my business in there without the sound of the water.

Anyhoo—the benefits thing was nice. We haven’t had a raise for a couple of years now, but the company is good people to work for and I really don’t want to move anywhere else. Management is making noises like Bannson’s going to upgrade our equipment, and they’ve already sent around a survey asking about things we’d like to see improved and what machines need to be replaced. I gotta tell ya, if Bannson really does strong-arm management into bringing the factory into the current century—well, I’d go without a raise for another year if it meant I didn’t have to recalibrate my instrumentation twice a week. You know, I have to come in early to do that before my shift starts, and I don’t get paid for it.

Well, that’s all for now. I’ll keep you posted, since you’ve always shown such an interest in me and my work.

Write and let me know if the knight-errant thing is still working out now that The Republic appears to have left you high and dry. I’ve been trying to follow what you’ve been up to, but the news service leaves something to be desired right now.

Best wishes,  
Joey

## Opinions Sharply Divided on Towne

3136-0331

Dear Editor,

In last week's article, "Kurita Invests in the Future," you failed to note that the only jobs brought to Towne that pay more than a basic cost of living are those management positions in "Uncle Chandy's Dude Ranch." The factory investments are nothing more than a rehash of the typical slave labor days of old! Why should the citizens of Towne build factories that will just strip our world of resources to fill the mighty "Samurai" nation's drive to conquer?

Truly, if you look at the people interested in our well-being you can see that the Spirit Cats and their Nova Cat allies are our best bet. The Nova Cat administration of Combine worlds during the dark days of the Blakist Jihad let those worlds weather the worst of those trying times. And now, the Nova Cats are in talks with our government to ensure the safety of Towne's people.

It's stewardship like that of the Nova Cats that we need in these trying times.

—Buzz Ola

—:—

Editor,

Why can't more people understand that the money from those companies from the Draconis Combine is just what we need? I don't care if it isn't the leftist idea of "minimum wage"; it's enough that I can put food on the table and earn an honest K-bill! That bit last week was just what I want to hear more of. I go to work everyday, and I'm glad for the factories, and proud of what I make! I say good for you, Coordinator, for encouraging investment in my family's future.

—D. Lyone

—:—

To Whom It May Concern:

The insightful work last issue regarding House Kurita's investments into the future of Towne has remained at the forefront of my thoughts each day since it ran. Our family has been developing industrial sites throughout Towne almost since the time the planet was founded, and I can attest to the principles put forth; however, one must also look to the past for guidance for the future.

History shows us that while House Kurita has been generous lately with the investments and assistance since Prefecture X has gone silent, it will likely not last. Time after time during the dark days of the succession wars, Kurita would invest only to turn around and rape our economy. House Davion has shown to be no different.

I call upon the Government to extend an invitation to the Nova Cat Warriors to come to Towne and discuss how best we can use our industry to support them and their enlightened ways in the protection of Towne from enemies foreign and domestic.

—J. Freeman-Salzberg



## Status on Styx

3136-0331

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I've seen a little chatter about what we're doing here on Styx, and as I'm on the frontlines, I thought I'd step forward and tell you what I'm seeing. My name is Charly, and I'm piloting a patched-up Panther as part of the never-ending battle here on Styx. I guess the good news is we're holding on. I've been here for months now, and we haven't given up the planet. The bad news is we haven't taken the planet either, but honestly, I'm not sure what we'd do with it if we had it. How do we reestablish a planetary government when we don't have the main body of The Republic's government to help us out with some cash or whatever else they care to offer. Our own Prefecture capital is long gone, and things here have been in disarray for a while.

But if the Combine and the Fury want to keep throwing troops at us, then I think we're more than happy to stand our ground and take them as they come. Making Styx a choke point, the part of the Prefecture that troops can't get past, is, I guess, enough of a service for now. Maybe someday the planet will emerge again with a fully functioning government and economy. But for now, we can hold it as the narrow neck of a funnel. And they're learning, I think. They're learning what we're willing to do here.

That's not to say the enemy's scared—Dracs, in general, don't scare easy. Hell, most of the time they don't scare hard. But I think we're earning a certain amount of respect. They know that if they want to come here, they'll have to claw for every inch of ground they get, and they're starting to get a little wary of entering full-pitched battles with us.

But they are, of course, still coming.

I'll tell people more about what's going on here if you want me to—just ask. Naturally, there's a few things I won't be able to divulge, but if I can help build the spirits of whoever's left in Prefecture II, I'm happy to do it.

CharlyP  
Lindon's Folly, Styx  
Prefecture II

## **TECH WATCH: The Science of R.I.S.C.**

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**3136-0331**

We have it on good authority that there's a new technology, bearing the "R.I.S.C." label, swinging the tide of battles in the Inner Sphere.

Naturally, we decided to investigate this R.I.S.C. tech, intent on bringing our readership the latest information on what might be coming to a planet near them. Unfortunately, the piece of gear we acquired provides very little information. A kind reader managed to send us salvage from a recent conflict on his planet involving the enigmatic Wolf Hunters. Judging by the stories we hear about those scuffles, Tech Watch is making a leap and assuming the salvaged gear comes from a Wolf Hunter unit.

The piece we received was labeled "R.I.S.C. Tech – Viral Decoy Jammer." The module itself seemed mostly undamaged, and, believe it or not, relatively easy to install on a 'Mech. After just a couple hours of tinkering our techs were confident that they could install it in most any BattleMech brought their way. While BattleMechs are at a premium, our old simulators aren't, and after some trial and error with various hookups our techs managed to loop them into the system. The result? Well, nothing when we first tried it. After some more puttering our techs tried again. This time? Any BattleMech simulator running decoy suddenly wouldn't anymore.

Admittedly, this didn't prove much, seeing as how our simulators are networked together. However, when another simulator off the network showed the same results, we started wondering just what this R.I.S.C. tech would do on the field of battle. We didn't wonder long, as a few minutes later the simulator connected to the R.I.S.C. module suffered a minor explosion. Tech Watch staff were uninjured, but we'll be repairing the damage for the next couple of weeks.

Our little test left us with a lot more questions than answers about this R.I.S.C. tech. What good is it to apparently jam every 'Mech's decoy gear, including your own? Is it possible to have this tech NOT affect every 'Mech on the battlefield? Was the eventual malfunction of the gear a result of our misuse, or are there more requirements than first thought to this technology? Unfortunately, as of this writing, Tech Watch isn't even sure what R.I.S.C. stands for. An admittedly limited search of the resources we have access to couldn't find a match for these initials, so we're reaching out to the readership for help. Have you found/seen any of this R.I.S.C. tech? Do you know the manufacturer? Let us know!

## Freedom for Lyons!

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**3136-0407**

There are Snakes in the grass all around us. Katana Tormak is cutting her way through Prefecture III. Behind us, the Lyrans are always waiting, watching. In Clovis' Point, we waited loyally. We listened for the sound of The Republic coming. We watched for Levin's response. The exarch shut the door in our faces.

We have a history of perseverance here on Lyons. The Terran Alliance withdrew, and we survived. The Terran Hegemony collapsed, and we survived. Even when the archon abandoned us in the 3060s, we thrived. The Combine gave us shelter, a windbreak in the Jihad, and Stone gave us peace.

Exarch Levin gave us our freedom, and we should hold on to it with both hands. What have we ever needed from the Houses? From any interstellar polity, really? We've been living on our own two feet since ten days after Lyons was settled. Aside from the trouble our participation in outside governments has brought, we've lived in peace, and held that peace ourselves. It's time that the people of Lyons stand up and announce to their leaders that we're tired of someone else's flag. We're tired of paying, in coin and labor and blood, for someone else's misdeeds.

On Lyons we have citizens of Lyons. We may have been born on worlds like Tamarind or Benjamin or even Rasalhague, but we live now on Lyons. This is our home. It has been Mankind's right since before we left Terra to do as we please in our home. So no more Republic. No more Combine. No more Commonwealth.

To Governor Carter, we say this: Remember your heritage, and that you owe your loyalty first to your people, and not to The Republic. The Republic was once our cradle in the stars. Lyons is our *home*.

## Letters From Home -- Week 11

3136-0407

*Sharky: I know these aren't the files you're looking for. It's taking me longer than I thought to find the info you need, and with all that's going on I can't take too many risks. But these are from a diary that I came across when I was looking for your material. Isn't your fiancée's brother in a merc outfit? Anyhow, just thought you might find them entertaining. Meanwhile, be patient.*

—ChemicalMage305

### **Personal Diary—Eli Zondervan** **24 March 3136**

"No, my mind is made up. I *am* going to kill her."

"That seems a rather severe penalty, doesn't it?" I said, leaning up against a crate of spare parts.

"No. It's not." Molly shook her head, brown curls flipping in annoyance. She extricated herself from the lower-leg assembly of the docked 'Mech she had recently been inspecting with no small amount of metallic banging and cursing. "I'm going to kill her. I'm going to take this wrench and thump her with it until she's a grease spot. No, better yet, I'll wait until we're in space, and I'll beat her with something equally heavy, then I'll blow her out the airlock!"

I smiled inwardly, hoping my expression betrayed no outward reflection of my personal bemusement. The hour was late; I'd been taking care of some administrative tasks until well after midnight. As I was heading to my bunk, I heard the sounds of work emanating from the 'Mech bay. It didn't come as a shock to see Molly still working. Her vehement reaction also didn't come as a shock. She's a lot like her mother.

Molly turned her grease-smeared face toward me in exasperation. Molly was not beautiful by most definitions. Her features were a little too plain, her curves a little too rounded, and her personality a little too quiet—except in matters of work. She did have, however, a gorgeous smile and an angelic singing voice, and it would have mortified her to know that speculation about her romantic side was a subject of interest and wagering among other long-term members of the Rock Brigade. Oh, and I wouldn't have anyone else as my chief tech.

I let her rant, pouring her a cup of coffee while she let off steam. If the Rock Brigade ran on any one substance, it was coffee. "Toni's done it again. She keeps disengaging the speed governors on her 'Mech. I've told her not to I don't know HOW many times, but she insists on doing it!" She accepted the steaming mug from me with unspoken thanks, and as she sipped, her anger dissipated some. "She claims that it doesn't do anything to the actuators, but she isn't the one who has to repair them after just about every training mission! Add to that, mind you, that her damn Zeus is wired eight ways to Sunday—all of 'em bad—and what you got? Go ahead. Ask. I'll tell you what you got. You got some serious overtime coming to me and my crew for keeping that beast operational!"

I laughed. But not at her; laughter is my way of expressing most emotions, and Molly knew that. "Toni may be a pain to work with, but she's no rook. She's got the chops we need and she's a pro. I'll have a talk with her, though. Can't have my tech crew ready to eradicate a new pilot." Molly nodded and exhaled a long breath.

Something wasn't quite right, though. Molly's usually more composed than this. "Molly, can I ask you something?" Molly was silent for a moment, and nodded again. "Is this really about speed governors?"

Molly's expression slowly softened, taking on an air of sadness. "I suppose not," she admitted. "It's just that dealing with her and all the other newbs is a reminder that we've lost a lot of good people recently. We've lost family." Molly's voice broke a little. "Maybe the 'Mech and tanker jocks can play that stupid game of 'they never existed' to deal with it. But I can't. They don't have to clean the blood and guts out of the cockpit. They don't have to gather up all the mementoes. 'Here you go, Ms. Godfrey. It's what's left of your husband. So sorry; war is a helluva thing, isn't it?' They don't have to . . . They're not coming home, Commander. ever. They're dead. You're never going to drink with them. You're never going to laugh with them. You're . . ." Her voice trailed off.

More silence. She gazed at me, brown eyes glimmering with seething tears. "Commander . . . Eli . . . what happened before we ended up here on Tharkad? I'm not okay with it, and I'm not over it." Her gaze left mine, focusing on the scratched, oil-stained repair bay floor. "I'm glad mom retired from the Brigade before this happened. This would have crushed her."

My response was slow in coming and devoid of laughter. "I'm not okay with it either, Molly. I'm not either. They're my family, too."

A shared pain bridged the silence between us for some time. Sometimes, all that needs to be said is best said without words. And Molly and I are too close for insincerity.

I reached out and gently took hold of Molly shoulders. I could feel the tension in her frame with just that touch, but I felt her appreciation of that small act. "Molly, we've been through a lot, you and I and the others. The Rock Brigade has taken a bad hit. But we're still around and we'll make it through this. We'll mourn our losses. We need to. Someday the newbs will know what

happened to us before this winter on Tharkad. But the time isn't right for the tale. I think we'll know when the time is." I deliberately lightened my tone, hoping to coax Molly out of her gloomy reverie. "By the way, how is your mom?"

Molly gave a small laugh and brightened somewhat. "You know her. She stayed retired for about four months and then just about drove dad up the wall." Molly smiled with the memory. "Last I knew, she was heading out to Solaris 7 to watch the games in person. Truth be told I think she's hoping to get on a crew."

I laughed again, this time with real affection for both of them. "Yep, sounds like Julia Isen." I regarded Molly for a few moments, accepting the sorrow and pride in her eyes. "Molly? Don't think me a maudlin old goat for saying this, but I am glad to have you here. I know these past months have been hell on you. But knowing that there's an Isen to fix up "Einstein" after a battle and keep him running . . . well, it's just a good thing."

She returned my compliment with a fierce hug. "Thank you." Molly's usual quiet confidence was returning; I could tell. Any lingering worries I had about her well being were removed with her next remark, "Oh, and Commander? You need a new ride. I don't care how good the squawk box is; Einstein's reactor shielding is giving me trouble and engine parts for a Cyclops aren't easy to come by."

"Yessir, Chief!" I said in good-natured acquiescence, having had at least a dozen similar conversations with Molly's mother in the past. "Now, go get some rest. We have a contract coming up soon and the Rock Brigade needs to be ready to go. I'll get the lights. You heard me. Shoo!"

Molly headed out, stopping long enough to pack up her favorite tools. "Oh, and one thing, Molly. Promise me that you won't space any of the newbs, okay?"

"Fine. No spacing. But I swear, if Toni gives me any more grief about those speed governors . . . "

"I'll have one of my famous fatherly chats with her tomorrow."

Molly grinned. I'm sure her mother has told her stories about being on the receiving end of one of my "fatherly chats." I may look like a rabbi and act like everyone's favorite grandfather most of the time, but I know how to lay down the law. "Fair enough. Good night, Commander."

"Good night, Chief." I watched her go, leaving me alone in the cavernous repair bay. I absorbed the silence for a while. I like the sense of focus it gives me. BattleMechs in various stages of repair towered overhead, sending long shadows off into the darkness. Einstein, my 250-year-old Cyclops, was somewhere in the bay. You can't miss it if you tried. I had it painted in an eclectic scheme of black with green, blue, and red stripes on the torso. I suspect that there's some planet in the Sphere where that could pass as camouflage, but I don't want to be assigned duty there. My lancemates refer to it, not so privately, as the "Gucci 'Mech." And Molly is right. I need a new ride someday soon. The comm gear is almost pristine, as is proper for a command vehicle (and no small miracle in an older model). But the reactor is getting snakey, and it's beginning to affect my ability to move at top speed for any length of time. My mates also never let me forget that. They ask if Einstein is getting arthritic, too, usually over the open channel before we go into the soup. Perhaps other commanders would bristle at this irreverence; certainly it would have gotten a Clansman called out into a Circle of Equals. But that sort of casual familiarity has seen the Rock Brigade through some dark times recently, and I have no desire to change it. Particularly not now, when I'm trying to rebuild a force that lost almost half its pilots and machines in our last campaign.

And the worst part of all? Not being able to tell the newbs what really happened. At least, not yet. Someday, though, they need to know the truth. And I would rather it be sooner.

Yep, another day in the Rock Brigade.

## **Liao Conquers the New Republic Territories!**

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**3136-0407**

Well, that's what the map says, anyway. We at Linknet are here to inform you that contrary to what you've been watching over the past several weeks, the Capellan Confederation has not taken over every planet in the former Prefecture X. That's a bit ambitious even for House Liao.

As I'm sure you've all figured out, we were having trouble wrestling the system into believing that the status quo could change. Not that we blame the system; there are plenty of people who still don't believe it, and they've got the evidence right in front of them.

We think we've got it under control now, but we'll probably still be tweaking it over the next couple of weeks—not to mention updating as news reaches us regarding the fate of the former Republic member-worlds. Thanks for your patience, and keep sending the news our way.

## Open Season Declared on Knights of the Sphere

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**3136-0407**

**By Rolcen Mollane**

Investigating rumors of suspicious intra-system jumps by a group of merchant JumpShips, garrison troops from Irian (supported by the mercenary company Steel Trap) smashed a large smuggler operation on the world of Miapladus last month. While the site of the operation was destroyed past hope of salvage, many of the smugglers escaped during a desperate charge that shattered the attacking mercenary line and left behind a ruin of armored tanks and 'Mechs.

Leading the smuggler's charge were three BattleMechs painted the familiar red, gold and black of Republic knights!

Further examination of the remains of the smuggler's base proved that the pilots in those 'Mechs were indeed knights. Knights Ian Valstone and Raphael Domistiri as well as Knight-Errant Faelyna Malena appear to have been working at the smuggler's base for at least three weeks, working hand-in-glove with the outlaws. Evidence indicates that they were working with the smugglers to channel military surplus into the nearby Marik Commonwealth.

Government leaders from Irian as well as Alphard, Nathan, and Miapladus all have taken the stage in recent weeks to condemn such interference by these knights, and all agents of the former Republic of the Sphere.

Alphard's Contessa d'Elengtre promised that "justice without mercy" would meet any further acts of aggression or criminal activity. Many have taken her words as a new rallying cry, calling for an "open season" on all representatives of the former Republic. Militant watch groups have formed for the specific purpose of hunting down any knights or knights-errant who might still be operating on worlds abandoned by The Republic. And Alphard Trading Co. (a division of Bannson Universal) has gone so far as to post bounties for the capture of any such agents provocateurs, or for information leading to their apprehension.

## Polo or Spectacle?

**3136-0407**

**by Amarise Castillo**

The cream of the Commonality's riders gathered for the annual Lesnovo Polo Cup last month. The usual favorites arrived weeks early to allow riders and mounts to acclimate to Lesnovo's gravity, as well as the thick atmosphere and heavy humidity still lingering from the recently ended monsoon season.

Those competing included Joshua Collins and Peacemaker; Zorin Jusetta and Goth Khakar II; Suzan Pearlman and Pearls; and the perennial dark horse from Astrokaszy, Jahal Shervanis and Al Azal. Horse enthusiasts and even the casual connoisseur were gifted with up-close-and-personal time with each rider during several days of "meet the public." A few of the riders—notably Suzan—even allowed some younger members of each day's crowds to approach their mounts; as usual, the dark horse made sure no one but his own servants came within a hundred paces of Al Azal, further endearing him and his mysteriousness to all present.

The "meet the public" days ended with the usual showcasing of talent through a series of exercises. All in all, another rousing success for promoter Josef Billiar. Though some still bemoan the mixing of classes surrounding what was once a royalty-only affair, I for one applaud Billiar, who—with the obvious tacit approval of Prime Minister Michael Cendar—has opened the public's interest to all things horse.

What should have been the capstone to another seminal event, however, was, in this rider's estimation, marred during the actual polo cup itself. Though degrading stunts have occurred in the past, this year's fiasco brought the entire enterprise to a new low: During the third chukker, Elis Marik was allowed onto the field for five minutes. Although her riding skills are irrefutable, she is a mediocre polo player at best, and her token appearance made a mockery of this wonderful event.

Visiting royalty or not, one can only hope this deplorable act will not occur again. What's next? A madam from a Canopian Pleasure Circus? I applaud your work, Mr. Billiar. But please, leave such shenanigans in the stalls next year.



## Give War a Chance

**3136-0414**

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Peace is overrated.

Don't get me wrong. All things being equal, I'd prefer not to have half of the people in the known universe shooting at the other half, but that's the trouble right now—all things aren't equal. Look around the Inner Sphere, and raise your hands if you'd like things left just the way they are now. Now let me count the hands—yeah, that's what I thought. Pretty much nobody.

You see, if we abruptly decided to call an end to all war right now, the raging nutters win. Seriously, look at who's been prospering lately in the wars that have sprung up everywhere, and you'll find a collection of people you don't normally see outside of maximum security psychiatric facilities. Let's run through the list of who would be running things if we declared a halt to all war efforts right now: Daoshen Liao. Caleb Davion. Michael Riktofen. Every last member of Clan Jade Falcon.

Let me put it this way: When Katana Tormark seems like the sane alternative, what does that say about your choices?

So I don't want peace. Not yet. Not on the terms that any of those people would offer me, and frankly they're pretty much the only people in position to be offering terms. We'll get peace in the long run. Someday. Once we have the Inner Sphere situated in a way that can support a peace that won't make us yearn for the good old days of all-out, open warfare.

DeandraL

Hyppo, Augustine

## Letters from Home -- Week 12

3136-0414

Yeska,

I can hear you saying "I told you so!" from here, you little freak, and you're most lucky I am not close enough to knock the smug smirk off your face.

But, as you can see, I survived because I thought the exact same thing:

Someone's on to me.

Now, who it might be is still beyond me; those most concerned with keeping this secret are supposed to be dead. But Mother did warn us that there would be those eager to keep the Worlds hidden, even today.

But would ComStar actually sabotage a DropShip full of innocents just to get at me? Or could it even be IE? I hear they've kept a low profile since the Holocaust, but never truly died.

Listen to me! Hurling out random theories like those silly black-masked men on Towne. Of course, I'm not about to dismiss the fact that my ride off this world exploded mere hours after I opted to take an alternative route, but wasting time guessing who is behind this whole thing is just . . . well, wasting time.

And that certainly will not do!

The search is on, *brata* Yeska. Grandmother was just the first clue, the proof that everything Mother told us was true. The DropShip "accident" was merely confirmation. And while I'm sure our babushka may have won her share of enemies in her travels, I am positive it is because of the Worlds that I have been marked.

I say this because I was able to find my way into the planetary archives here. Sure enough, Grandmother's records did not exist, as though she came to this world only to be buried, with no connections to speak of to any of the residents. But then I decided to run a news clip search, looking back into the pre-Holocaust records, while simultaneously running the smart countermeasure software Mother gave me.

As soon as I ran a search for "Wolverine," the warnings flashed. Someone was watching for that name. Not unusual, really. Conspiracy theorists like to see how often their favorite mysteries are investigated. The same thing happened when I searched for "Jardine" and "Gabriel." Again, nothing unusual there. For my troubles, I managed to get some local encyclopedia entries, pop culture tales, and even conspiracy links. Nothing new there, right?

So when I went for broke and used the keyphrase "Five Worlds," the warnings flashed and suddenly I got that familiar message: "A spybot has been detected on your system"—*a dozen times*. A sweep through my noteputer caught a bunch of the smart-code interlopers, so many that I'm not even sure if this program found all of them.

Counterintel at its finest?

And for it all, what did I find on the local networks?

Nothing! Not even a single local conspiracy theorist site spinning yarns about Blakist machinations and mysterious men in black DropShips. I could find references to Wolverines, Vandenberg White Wings, and even the Genecaste—some of the biggest playgrounds for the modern paranoid—but not one whack-job rumor about the Worlds in the planetary nets, and yet someone saw fit to infect my system with spybots for the effort.

Okay, so it was stupid of me to try to search for the clues by Internet, but now, at least, I know for certain that I've got an audience.

And that's all the validation I need.

With you in spirit,  
Stef

## Loretti v. Small, Durban Cup Fourth Round

### 3136-0414

This is the last round (the full-G round) of the last game in the match. Loretti and Small are tied at 7 points apiece. No strikes have been scored yet, and tension is high. Small won the last round, so Loretti has the first shot.

L - First Shot: Strike (1 point Loretti)

S - Response: Strike (1 point Small), and Shunt!

(Loretti complains of a foot fault to the referee, line judge disagrees. Loretti makes a rude gesture at Small, who is smirking, but the refs don't catch it. Small complains, Loretti is given a warning.)

L - Rebuttal Shot 1: Strike (1 point Loretti). Referee rules Small closest to center.

L - Rebuttal Shot 2: Strike (1 point Loretti), and Shunt!

(Crowd noise makes it impossible to hear what Small says to Loretti, but Loretti has to be restrained by his coach and Small earns a yellow card of his own from the referee)

S - Rebuttal Shot 1: Strike (1 point Small). Referee rules Loretti closest to center.

(Small challenges the measure, auxiliary ref checks it, sustains initial call.)

S - Rebuttal Shot 2: Strike (1 point Small), and Shunt! Small wins the round! (1 point Small)

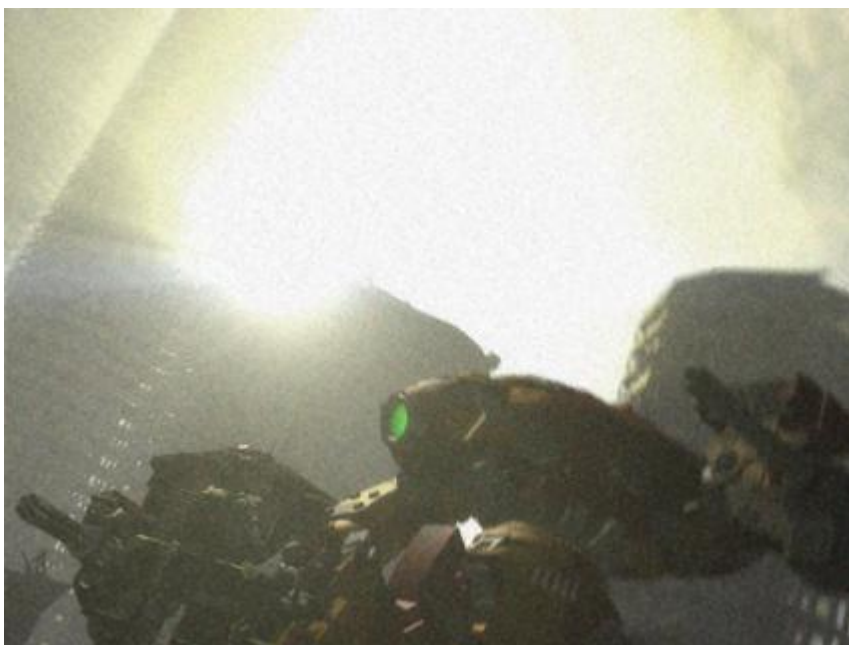
Final score: Small-11, Loretti-10.

(The crowd explodes with cheering, and the usual congratulatory crowd starts to move in on the play area. Loretti seems to snap, and he jumps on Small, bearing him to the ground. The two struggle for a few moments before they are separated by the referees. Loretti is given a yellow card, which he uses to blow a snide kiss at Small, who then launches himself at Loretti, knocking over the auxiliary referee in the process. Once separated again, Small is given an orange card and the two are escorted out of the grav-deck through different doors by security personnel.)

## TECH WATCH: They Might Be Giants . . .

3136-0414

As one of the few sources available for tech information in our wonderful former group of Prefectures I through X, we sometimes get messages from people looking for information. One recent transmission has left us scratching our heads, and so we officially appeal to whatever audience we may have out there. Read on:



"Dear Tech Watch:

I'm a photographer by trade, though most of my time lately is taken up with surviving recent invasions. The only good thing invasions do is make for great photographic opportunities, and really, I could do worse than combat photography in this day and age. Let me set up the attached photo for you. Getting the word that our local militia was fighting off an invasion on the far side, I packed up my gear and took a camping trip. I must have chosen my location wisely, because come dawn the sounds of warfare drifted on the breeze to my sparse campsite. A quick pack up and I was snapping shots to sell to the local papers. I had several good ones, and was getting ready to pull out (the fog of war was getting pretty thick) when I saw the biggest hailstorm of missile fire tear into a hapless *Hellion*. Camera at the ready, I turned around to capture the regiment that must have fired off the salvo. Imagine my surprise when there was no regiment, only a hulking behemoth accompanied by another 'Mech or two. I snapped one shot before the fighting and smoke were too thick to stick around. My question is simply this: What the &%%\$ BattleMech is this? I swear that's an *Atlas* walking alongside this monstrosity, and with Stone as my witness it had three legs if it had one. Does anyone out there know what this thing is?!? I'd be much obliged to find out. Thanks!

—Burly Intrepid Goobing Fan out on Trail"

Well, B.I.G.F.O.O.T., we have to admit you've got us stumped if for no other reason than the sheer size of the thing. At first we thought you were pulling a perspective trick on us, but that *Atlas* is in front of your behemoth. The best we can come up with is some hollow parts built on top of an existing chassis, but none of us can recall a tripedal design. And last we checked, BattleMechs just don't come that big.

So we're throwing this one out to all of you. Has anyone else seen B.I.G.F.O.O.T.'s 'Mech? Message us and let us know.

## Two Wolves for the Price of One

**3136-0414**

Oh, Charlie, it was so good to get your message, as well as the C-bills. I'd nearly saved enough to get off this terrifying planet before those pirates took Yaleston. Evacuation on Laiaka isn't as easy as all that—can't be panicked. One wrong move and you've bugged up either your suit or an airlock. That's frowned on here.

There's another thing that's sort of gotten into the air systems here, bro. Of course, with the HPGs down, news gets sort of twisted up. Confused. Remember how I told you in my last message that the Steel Wolves slapped the pirates into submission here? December 10—I remember 'cause I thought I was going to die. Sitting there worrying if there'd even be a spaceport left to board a DropShip at.

Well, two men I met just yesterday were telling me that the Wolves were there on Phecda with them on December 13, hired hands against an attempted coup against the Shiloh Alliance—whatever that is. Needless to say, I corrected him on the spot—being so full of a good beer and all, feeling puffed up after your letter of help—that the Wolves were not on Phecda but here on Laiaka. Ask anybody.

You know I've never been a big lover of Clanners, Charlie. Don't care one way or the other. But this man and his friends, they were sure of what they saw. It's sort of unnerved everyone here. The Wolves being in two places at once wasn't so unusual, but two forces of that size? Sort of scary, huh? One fellow at the bar convinced most everybody else that the Wolves had finally figured out how to divide and conquer, that they'd grown enough of themselves in those sibko things.

Makes me shiver, Charlie. The faster I get off of Laiaka and back home, the safer I'll feel.

Nikki Dark  
Bunker City, Laiaka  
3 February 3136

## **Bannson Universal Unlimited Reduced by One**

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**3136-0421**

*Footfall* - In an abrupt but not unexpected move, the Capellan Confederation today nationalized the Shuo Xin Ore Smelter, most recently owned by Bannson Universal Unlimited.

In light of recent rumors of a cooling in the relationship between Bannson and Chancellor Daoshen Liao, the loss of a key investment on a Liao-controlled world apparently comes as no surprise to Jacob Bannson, according to a BUU spokesperson.

"Mr. Bannson carefully reviews the political, military and economic considerations of every acquisition, and understands the risks inherent in investing on the far-flung and sometimes unstable worlds of the Inner Sphere. Mr. Bannson certainly regrets losing the raw materials advantages offered by his ownership of Shuo Xin, but expects no significant impact on any of his manufacturing concerns supplied by the facility on Footfall."

Ganz's Economic Minister Zhang gave this statement. "The Confederation graciously acknowledges Mr. Bannson's generous gift in returning Shuo Xin to its traditional ownership. We are confident that the workers will now return to their former level of happiness and productivity, which can only be expected to blossom under the watchful stewardship of Chancellor Liao's chosen directors."

Despite all the upheaval experienced by Footfall in the past several decades, evidence suggests that the annual output of Shuo Xin Ore Smelter continued to rise, most memorably after BUU purchased the facility and improved the working conditions, primarily by upgrading the equipment. It is a testament to Bannson's vast resources that the loss of such a lucrative and productive business is projected to have "no significant impact" on the rest of his empire.

## Cylene Winter Sports Update

**3136-0421**

*Konnichi-wa*, sports fans! The Fourth Season is about to begin here on Cylene, and the Halcyon Sporting News is ready to bring you the up-to-the-minute stats from across the ice.

This is the season you've been waiting for to come back to hockey! After their stunning Third Season loss against the Halcyon Blades, the Holland Hawks are set to challenge the upstart champions for possession of the Stone Cup. The matchup couldn't be better! The Blades' goalie is out this season with a fractured tibia. The Hawks' youngest player, Steven Angmar from Northland on Graus, is like lightning on the ice, and pundits across Absalom are predicting a high-scoring battle for the Cup.

Senator James Daugherty, owner of the Blades, is quoted as saying "Despite our exarch's tragic and ill-advised actions, the Fourth Season will open as planned on Cylene. We don't want someone else's troubles to dampen our economy and our spirits. I'm sure I speak for most of the people of Cylene when I say that another winning Blades season is just what we need."

Daugherty did not comment on the recently canceled plans to rename the Gladstone Arena the Victor Steiner-Davion Memorial Arena, in honor of the late paladin. You've made your voices heard, sports fans. If The Republic is going to abandon us, we're sure not going to honor one of its heroes!

Down south the 48th-annual Clymenestra Iditarod is nearly upon us. Champion sledder Klaus Thorssen leads the pack. Since the walls went up around Prefecture X, Thorssen commands the only team of Muphrid Huskies on Cylene. Although several other worlds in Prefecture III are known for their transplanted Huskies, none have the fearsome reputation of the Muphrid canines. Thorssen is definitely the competitor to beat.

The Iditarod route this year is one of the most arduous ever chosen. The first 40 kilometers are pretty standard, with simple hills and valleys and only two rivers. The last 60, however, are across glaciers and escarpments. It took a platoon of elite mountain troops from the Cylene militia to locate and mark all of the hidden crevasses that dot the Hadley Glacier. It seems likely that this race, like many before it, will claim its share of blood as well as glory.

That's the real dirt, sports fans. From here in Halcyon, across the ice sheets to Clymenestra and Graus, the Sporting News is your number one source for all the insider information on your favorite sports teams. So stay with us, enjoy the Fourth Season, and remember: It may be cold, but it's fun to watch!

## Letters From Home -- Week 13

3136-0421

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Hey, dad. Toni here.

Well, looks like we ship out in a few weeks. Sounds like we're headed to one of the hot borders. That really doesn't round it down too much, does it? Seems like everywhere is a hot border these days. The C&C is being pretty quiet about where we're headed, but the scuttlebutt is that we're bound for what used to be Prefecture IX. That could put us in contact with anyone—the Dominion, the Snakes, Republic stragglers, or maybe even Jade Falcon. Sounds like we'll be a second-line unit doing cleanup. Guess that's what the Rock Brigade is good at.

They're all right, after having been with them for a bit now. I'm serving in the fire lance of the company they call "Alpha Flight." I'm replacing a Marauder pilot that they were all pretty close to. Pretty big shoes to fill, I'm told. But they've been pretty cool about it and "Mercy" fits right in. My lieutenant is a woman named Jackie. She stomps around in a Warhammer2C. My other lancemates ride a Vulture and one of those newer Rifleman 'Mechs that Pedro used to make fun of. Our job is to rain holy hell down from afar on the enemy while the other folks in Alpha do the close-in lifting. We've actually gelled together pretty well, and aside from a small tiff with the Chief about Mercy's actuators, I think I'm getting into the swing of things.

I'm told that my style is a lot like the pilot they lost some months ago. That kinda creeps me out. But it helps when it comes to fieldwork, and it could be worse. The captain of Beta Flight lost most of her charges in the whatever it was they went through, and she's been having to rebuild her crew almost from the ground up. You think I have a temper, dad? I've heard Captain Carnahan go off with language that I haven't heard since I was helping out the dockloaders in RivCarn's warehouses.

But, yeah, I'm doing okay. Just wish they weren't so secretive about their past. But I guess we all have our skeletons.

I want to find out about their DropShips, though. I remember how much RivCarn spent on ours and the Brigade isn't raking in the C-bills doing second-string work.

I'm babbling. Kiss mom for me; more later when I know more about anything.

Your daughter,  
T



## Republic Protects Ruchbah

**3136-0421**

Citizens of Ruchbah! Rejoice in the news that The Republic has not forgotten you! In Rook today, Governor Marcella Slayton welcomed Knight of the Sphere Peter Harrison. Knight Harrison arrived from Prefecture V and announced his intention to remain on Ruchbah "until the end of the emergency."

With all the recent troubles coming from the South District, the arrival of Knight Harrison may mark the beginning of a return to peaceful times. Many citizens have called this news bureau with reports of military helicopters and armed bandits on the roads. Although Michaelson Heavy Industries hasn't officially produced a military airframe in this century, persistent reports tie them to these new raiders.

CEO Lawrence Michaelson, speaking from his penthouse in Rook, answered these charges calmly and succinctly. "We no longer manufacture military helicopters," he said. Several scandal-vids in Rook have criticized this statement, noting that Michaelson offers no proof that they haven't been stockpiling these vehicles since production ceased.

Knight Harrison, when asked about these allegations, simply noted that he'd be "looking into all threats to the peace on Ruchbah, wherever they may be found." He refused to elaborate further, instead returning to his DropShip to see his BattleMech disembarked. Solaris fans and military technology buffs turned out to see the 12-meter Legionnaire stride across the tarmac. There hasn't been another BattleMech on Ruchbah since the visit of Paladin David McKinnon six years ago.

Readers may remember that Peter Harrison was born on Ruchbah. His family, one of the largest ranch owners in the South District, have announced that the knight will be based at their sprawling Palmdale Ranch until suitable facilities can be constructed in or near Rook. Palmdale, with its large complement of IndustrialMechs, is the only source of maintenance parts and equipment within four hundred kilometers of Rook.

In related news, Legate Gerry Janetzke today announced a new recruitment drive for the Ruchbah militia. When speaking to a graduating class of Rook Central City High School, the legate asked them to "stand firm against tyranny in any form," and, taking a page from history, to "pledge their strength, their honor, and indeed even their very lives" to the defense of their homeworld. Because the graduation coincides with the biannual beef cattle migration past Rook, many observers expect the recruitment drive to be spectacularly successful. It appears as though Knight Harrison, whose home stands in the area threatened by raiders, can expect increased support over the coming years.

## Sticking on Styx

3136-0421

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The Dracs came at us again, like we knew they would. Ten days ago, rolling at us out of a red sunset. Most of the initial battle was at night, searchlights sweeping the field as passing lasers lit up the smoke and the rubble and the crumpled metal. It was all a blur—we'd been getting ready for them to come back, but we hadn't guessed how many there would be. Their infantry, plenty of them with armor, swarmed over the ground, running under the feet of the 'Mechs like Lilliputians pulling down dozens of Gullivers.

I didn't sleep for 48 hours, but I didn't need it. My blood was up. This is our line in the sand, and the Kuritans were trying to cross it for no better reason than they thought they could. They'd swept through most of the rest of Prefecture II easily enough—why not here? But we held. It looked dicey for a while, but our commander rallied us. He stood firm on the front lines in a 'Mech way too small to face down the hordes stampeding around him. But stand he did, and he left us no choice but to come back and fight with him. We haven't driven them off yet—every day's a new skirmish—but we haven't given a centimeter, either.

Now here's the funny thing—I couldn't tell you our commander's rank. With us, he doesn't have a title. He's our commander because of what he does. He just leads. When we lost the central government, we lost politics and all the nonsense that goes with it. We choose our own leaders now, and they're people who deserve to be in charge.

I should have the commander post here. He can probably give you more details about our defense than I can. Look for posts from him. His name's Evan Kaiple.

—CharlyP  
Styx

## TECH WATCH: R.I.S.C. Runaround

3136-0421

Thanks to an enterprising salvager, we've got another piece of infamous R.I.S.C. technology, this one stamped "R.I.S.C. Tech—Emergency Coolant System." Our benefactor couldn't give us much information other than he found this module near the carcass of a *Goshawk*. The attached note says it was specifically found near the "shredded heat sinks" of the doomed 'Mech. "It was easy to see why this 'Mech didn't get salvaged. Whether it was because of the R.I.S.C. or regular combat isn't obvious, but there was clear evidence of an explosion from the inside out."

Conclusion? Not much. There's clear evidence of some sort of coolant on the inside of this module, but the residue isn't any coolant we've encountered before. On top of that, the connectors for this particular module are pretty heavy duty; whatever is supposed to travel through them seems to do so at an intense rate. The interior of the module walls are also completely foreign looking; a great deal more wires than should really be necessary wind their way around, but without an intact module there's no telling what they're for. The more important tidbit of information that we gleaned from this module was the apparent partial symbol extrapolated to belong to Clan Sea Fox. We're still trying to track down R.I.S.C., and even after several promising leads we can't find a thing.

Speaking of wild goose chases, we got a letter from a local reader in regards to our last transmission that included a photo from reader B.I.G.F.O.O.T.:

"Dear Tech Watch,

It is with some regret that I point out the recent photo sent to your attention from B.I.G.F.O.O.T. is an obvious fabrication. First, contrary to your observation, the *Atlas* is clearly behind the BattleMech in question. Thus, the size of this "monstrosity" can quite obviously be attributed to perspective. Second, if this were indeed a tripedal design, there should be a partial leg portion visible at the bottom of the photo, behind the questionable BattleMech, and there is not. Third, I submit that this is simply a modified and updated *Black Lanner* BattleMech, though it may be in a larger class size than we're familiar with. The large circle at the front of the BattleMech's body is a giveaway. I do submit that this may be an excellent combat photo, just not one of a previously unseen BattleMech of mammoth proportions, though it is disappointing to note such. I also note that the colors that are visible despite the glare suggest orange and/or red, possibly indicating Clan Hell's Horses. Now THAT would be a surprise.

Respectfully,  
Fleeting Afterimage Kindles Empathy"

Thanks for your letter, F.A.K.E. It looks like we may have been had, though it was certainly convincing at the time.

## Bigfoot is Real!

**3136-0428**

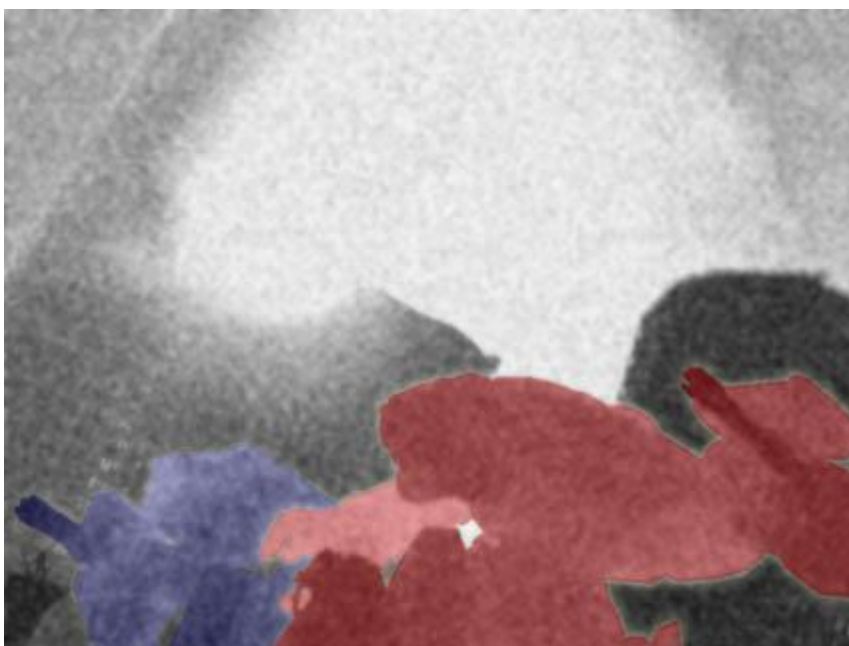
We're happy to say that here at Tech Watch, we don't do photography. If we did, it would prove only that we're pretty bad at it. Fortunately for our reader- (and viewer-) ship, it is someone else's job to analyze images, and they do it quite well. While reviewing incoming transmissions we came across the following fuel to add to the "Bigfoot" fire, and humbly reinstate our plea for more information. How about that Atlas pilot? Maybe he or she feels like talking .

### BIGFOOT Technical Photo Analysis

Performed by Dr. Ivan Kjellsdottir, Dean of the Imaging Department at the Irian Technical Training School and Division Chair of the Advanced Sensors Group of IMB, a division of Irian Technologies (IrTech)

Using advanced imaging software first used in settling the long-running dispute regarding the nature of the homme d'oiseau of Enders Cluster, Dr. Kjellsdottir and his students have analyzed the photos of "Bigfoot" recently made available on Linknet.

"After careful analysis of the provided image, it is our conclusion that the figure seen in the photo is not a Black Lanner BattleMech, but something new. As one can see in the attached Depth Buffer\* photo analysis, the Bigfoot is clearly in front of the Atlas BattleMech. From the angles of the photo, we can assume that the new BattleMech is taller, wider and heavier than the Atlas. Estimated weight ranges from 125 to 175 tons."



To purchase the full article, please contact Shelly Crown at the Imaging Department of the Irian Technical Training School.

\*Depth buffer, also known as "Z Depth," is the management of image-depth coordinates in three-dimensional images.

# Durban Cup Finals End, Championship Days Away

3136-0428  
by Ethan Pasternack

Staff columnist, Canopus Intelligencer

Well, the Durban Cup Finals bracket is officially closed, and boy is there a lot to tell. I mean, I’ve seen some interesting tournaments in my day, and some damn fine games of Yahn Sun, but never have I seen this big of a spectacle or been this surprised by the results! Read the scores, and be prepared to part with any money you had riding on this tournament:

	I (Small)	II (Durell)	III (Davis)	IV (Asahi)	V (Frankel)	VI (Loretti)	VII (Tucker)	VIII (Saturn)	IX (Jonsson)	X (Wolf)
I		6	5	3	6	10	9	7	10	9
II	10		8	8	9		8	13	14	13
III	12	9		12	12		14	11	9	13
IV	13	10	5		6	15	12	9	11	11
V	11	8	4	9		12	10	7	12	10
VI	11			1	5			6	14	
VII	9	9	2	6	7			5	8	7
VIII	11	4	5	9	10	13	12		10	16
IX	9	4	7	7	6	5	10	8		8
X	9	2	3	6	6		10	0	8	
	84	52	39	60	62		85	60	82	87

That’s right, folks: don’t adjust your datapads. That’s a red column on the Durban Cup scoreboard. It marks the first time in more than 200 years that a player has fouled out of a tournament, and it wasn’t just anyone, my fellow fanatics, it was Marcus Loretti himself! He suffered a surprising loss to Aria Jonsson in Round 6, in which he was awarded his second foul for unsportsmanlike conduct. Then in his very next game, when he was one throw away from suffering defeat at the hands of the upstart Nigel Wolf from Division X, he blew his top when the ref called him on a very obvious foot fault and threw his mark at the line judge! Whistles blew all over the court and Loretti was slapped with a red card, which he dropped at Wolf’s feet before storming out of the arena.

There’s a lot of speculation that Loretti intentionally fouled out, but nobody seems to agree on a likely motive. Some think he wanted to deny Wolf the points he had earned in that round, or perhaps that Loretti would rather foul out than lose to a Clanner (he is from Skye, after all), but I also find it suspicious that Aria Jonsson would have had a place in her second championship match if Loretti hadn’t gotten his red card.

Whatever the reasons behind Loretti’s spectacular flare-out, the results are official – Waldorf “Wally” Tucker of Division VII will face off against the first Clan member ever to make the IYSL Durban Cup Championship, Nigel Wolf. So let’s take a look at these two gentlemen, shall we?

Wally Tucker, a cargo supervisor working for BigSky Interstellar, came out of Division VII in the unenviable tenth seed and had the longest odds against him on Solaris when the roster was announced. His performance, however, has been nothing short of amazing. It’s as if the pressure of all the media attention (and possibly the month-long vacation from the cargo bay) flipped a switch in his shiny, shaved head. His threat assessment going into the tournament was a 17.43 – good for a Divisional Finalist, but not championship caliber: by his last game he’d racked up a whopping 26.97! He’s one of the most accurate throwers on the grid, committing only one Wild in all 8 games, and scoring more strikes than anyone except Aria Jonsson herself, who holds three league records and two Durban Cup records for strikes.

*Editor’s Note: As was not mentioned in the author’s game overview, if a mark misses the board completely, this shot is referred to as a Wild. If a mark hits the board but bounces off or otherwise fails to ‘stick’ on the board, it is referred to as a miss. If it strikes the board and sticks, it is called a hit. Hits, misses and wilds are all recorded by the scoring referee and used along with strike and shunt rates for statistical purposes to determine overall offensive and defensive ratings, and a player’s Threat Assessment.*

And then there’s Nigel Wolf, a K-F drive engineer aboard the Clan Wolf-in-Exile JumpShip *Invincible*. Nigel is a unique participant in the Durban Cup for several reasons: he is the first Clansman ever to play in the Durban Cup, the first Division X player to

earn a berth in the championship match in centuries, and he has just set the Durban Cup average-scoring record, earning 10.875 points per game in the finals bracket. If not for Loretta's foul-out, he would almost certainly have had the record for total score as well. Nigel Wolf is short, muscular, soft-spoken, deferential, incredibly polite, and one hell of a Yahn Sun player in all three gravity ratings. With stats even more impressive than Tucker's, one would expect the young Clanner to walk all over a 30-year-old tenth-seed from Vega, but if their match during the finals is any indication (it ended in a 10-7 victory for Tucker) this is going to be a Durban Cup Championship for the record books.

*Editor's Note: As was also not mentioned in the author's game overview, the game of Yahn Sun is played on a JumpShip's grav deck using three gravity settings, which are standard for each round of any given game. Round 1 is played in zero-G, Round 2 is played in .5-G, and Round 3 is played in the full earth-norm of 1-G.*

So there it is, folks – only three more days until the Championship Match, and I am bursting at the seams to see it! Three more days of raucous celebration aboard the *Cape of Good Hope* before we find out which man gets his name etched into that majestic sculpture, that age-old monument, that awe-inspiring symbol of excellence in sport – the Durban Cup.

## Editor's Eye on the Prefecture

3136-0428

[Text from local college intranet economics rag called EYE ON THE FUTURE: INVESTING WISELY, SELLING RICHER; 00045546 27 February 3136]

Isn't it strange that in the middle of the collapse of The Republic, the deposed senators can find time and cause for celebration? And what better place than right here on Fletcher during the build-up to Senator Carlos Wyndham's birthday party?

In a brief interview with Legate David Fouche, this seeker of rumor and innuendo learned there is a ball planned —to make happy with the senator's birthday, of course—but also to show off Fletcher's blatant support of the newly formed Senate Alliance. Legate Fouche and Governor Deli Wolfe have both shown avid support for the Alliance in recent interviews. In fact, their allegiance seems almost—paid for?

But I digress. A little.

For nearly a month senators from all over Prefecture IV have been arriving, trailed by their supporting forces. Many of the local hotels have been confiscated by imposing senators claiming eminent domain rights—which in plain-speak means those noble officials who hold vast amounts of stock in Fletcher's factories do not plan on taking care of the merchants who have made them rich and powerful.

And as I've always said: you mess with the foundation of a thing, you decay it from the inside out. It was the fathers and mothers of those merchants who worked Fletcher's factories—factories that were once known as StarCorp Industries, Yelm Weapons and Flame Tech, producing the *Highlander* BattleMech the Swift fighter, Nightshade VTOLs, and several flamer systems.

My, my, my. Do I smell a plot thickening? Can you see the rub? A rich government with factories ready-made to produce more machines of war eagerly aligning itself with a fledgling government? And what about the industrial 'Mechs already being produced? One wonders what the Senate Alliance has up their sleeve for the future of Fletcher.

Basil's investment tip of the day? 'Mech stock, boys and girls. And lots of it. Ground-floor opportunity to be found watching the senators, and watching those factories come to life once again as the Alliance braces for war.

Basil Pembroke  
Founding Editor

## Letters From Home -- Week 14

3136-0428

Dearest Mother,

Andurien is lovely this time of year. The botanical gardens of Jojoken are breathtaking, and that is really an inadequate word. I know you would appreciate the subtle ways in which the horticulturists have cultivated the gardens. They are strictly divided into flora from regions around the Inner Sphere. Substantial work, I must imagine. While the gardens are spacious and rambling, the paths separating the sections are not wide and contamination must occur on a regular basis. Which to my mind must lead to an inordinate amount of cleansing of wind-blown seedlings from each section; they refuse to allow cross-pollination. Conversely, within each region the flora is allowed to flourish as it may with very little guidance. A unique mirror of Andurien ways.

I just returned from a safari to Zahle; Charles Cunin IV's largest holdings. While I'm sure Christopher would've found the pack of nolans fascinating (apparently they are one of the safari's biggest draws), I found the brutes to be much too frightening. Even the branths—while I appreciate the work done to save them from the destruction of Lopez during the Jihad—were far too large and dirty for my taste. The lesser branths, on the other hand, were charming and lovely. Cunin even offered to include one as part of the marriage proposal. I graciously declined. You know how terrible I am with animals, and despite my delight in their antics, I have no wish to endanger even one of those wonderful creatures.

I shall be meeting with Cunin one more time about the marriage proposal before returning to discuss the matter with you and father. I so look forward to seeing you, father and Janos.

With love,  
Julietta Marik

—:—

Dion,

Good hunch, that. Mitternacht tracks right back to our Starlings through the Sleeping Beauties. Seems his old man worked with the crew that found Point J. Not surprisingly, the robes poured a little extra fire into their hunt for them, though for the life of me I can't figure out when or how dear old dad managed to get clear and find time to spawn, though some scraps I gathered scream "Loki" to me. Natch, our Lyran "friends" deny all knowledge on this one.

But that tracks, too. Even C-bills say he's not playing for any team on radar but his own—and maybe our Starlings. Chalk it up to family legacy.

Now, that travel buddy he picked up on Alrakis—He's a puzzle! Confirmed aerospace pilot of B-grade skill. No known military or paramilitary training. Educational and employment background says he worked for the Alrak Public Archives as a "Senior Periodicals Supervisor."

Yeah, you read right; he's a librarian!

But that's not all of it. Daddy Z put me in touch with a contact on Augustine and I learned something more on this tagalong. Seems his grandfather was one Sir Errol Berwyn, from the late great First Knights of the Inner Sphere. Now, how a Jihad-era fugitive managed to father heirs is beyond us, but the genetics don't lie ... And you're gonna love the rest of this: His mother was a Point J. native or my name's Kerensky. The gene records confirm that, too—at least if the boys in Analysis have done their homework right on the lovely cocktail of traits and matrilineal antibodies in his sample. Sounds like gramps must've tucked mom away with dad when they were lying low, and begat a son rather late in life who has a flair for history and data mining.

And it all comes back to Point J., First among the Five. The source of everything that's gone wrong since at least 3052 ...

Daddy Z wants to know if you'll be needing any backup?

—Art



## Whither They Go, More Will Follow

**3136-0428**

Most refuse to believe.

But that's what the likes of us are here for. To make sure the likes of you don't forget that night has fallen. And to remind you that beyond the glare of your holovids turning your windows opaque with banal messages from our leaders that all is right with the world ... monsters lurk in the darkness beyond.

I'm not talking aliens, ghosts or ghouls (that's another story for another time). I'm talking monsters that walk among us, dancing to a tune called by masters we can't comprehend.

I'm talking the Spirit Cats and their long-lost brethren, the Nova Cats.

I know what you're thinking. You're remembering that when the Jade Falcons began moving again, there were reports of them annihilating Jade Falcon enclaves within The Republic. "Tainted." I believe that was the word used. "Tainted by their long association with Spheroid ways." So you're just assuming that the Spirit Cats will behave the same way, efficiently negating their own threat to the Inner Sphere.

No! This is not the truth!

Unlike sane people, both litters of kitties listen to the voices in their heads—the voices most of us ignore. But they wallow in those messages. And that means that if a Nova Cat crosses borders and burns in-system and then faces a Spirit Cat, even if he wants to wash his hands in the other warrior's blood—if the banshees in his ear tell him they're long-lost comrades ... so be it.

Now, I know you're wondering what this has to do with anything. The Nova Cats are a quarter-thousand light years away.

Wake up!

The snakes have invaded. And where the snakes go their whipping-boy visionaries are soon to follow. If you think the Spirit Cats and their continual hunt for sanctuary have caused problems up to this point, wait until they rise up as a group and join an invading army.

Can we say zealots? Everybody with me ... z.e.a.l.o.t.s.

You have been warned.

—Sons of Starling

## Letter to Defiance Industries

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**3136-0505**

**TO:** Defiance Industries Remunerations Department  
**FROM:** Shizuka Findlay  
**SUBJECT:** Additional Remuneration for Assignment A-187277-GH2

To Whom It May Concern:

I am requesting additional payment in regards to the recent assignment A-187277-GH2 (security dispatch for recovery force 349-G2D). Despite assurances (as stated in section 52-4(f) of the contract on file) that the forces on planet were to be detained by additional forces provided by Defiance Industries, my unit was attacked and sustained damage above the standard level accorded in section 133-13(e).

Per the contract (section 91-17(b); reporting and recording) I am including an overview of damage sustained in action (see attachment 1). Note that all replacements must be provided in ClanTech format. Damage estimates are adjusted for salvage obtained per section 59-37(zf) of the contract on file.

In addition, I would like to commend the pilot of the Eisenfaust posthumously. His courage in facing Star Commander Vaughn Sender of Clan Wolf even after his Gauss ammunition ran out allowed the recovery team to evacuate with the required goods. I would ask that you keep that fact in mind when reimbursing his family for services provided to the State.

Payment should be provided to the account (attachment 2) on Solaris VII with deferments to past contracts performed per my Defiance account.

Thank you for your quick attention and payment,  
Shizuka Findlay

## Letters From Home -- Week 15

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3136-0505

Nessa,

I know what you must be thinking, and I'm sure someone from The Republic has already stopped by to visit you about what happened, but if they started slinging words like "duty", "honor" and "treason" your way, remember that they're the guys who hung me and more than a full regiment of combined-arms troops out to dry on Saffel while Levin ran and hid behind his new iron curtain. If anyone's the traitor at this stage, it's The Republic, for letting things get this bad and then leaving its own worlds stranded the minute things got ugly.

And don't blame the Dracs too much either; some of them are good friends of mine now. Well, maybe not friends, so much as colleagues.

Allow me to reintroduce myself, Nessa: You're hereby reading the words of one Lance Captain Svetlana Martika, of Cassanova's Castoffs.

Catchy name, huh?

Yeah, we've gone merc. Not Snake. Not RotSee. Merc. And we aren't hooligans, either; since flying the white banner here about a month ago, we got to realizing that both our guys and those who Katana left here are just about falling apart. The front lines are far from Radjik's city limits, and it seems that there's some kind of dissention in the ranks for both sides. Our new CO, Ikessa Donnel, mentioned that though Tormark sent in forces comprised of her own Dragon's Fury, Nova Cat, DCMS, and even Spirit Cat elements, not all of them are seeing eye to eye on how best to seize this planet. In fact, it seems like there's been a few messy honor duels that have gutted the DCMS command staff, and someone's sniping at the Cats (both of them). Meanwhile, van Dier (remember him?) has outright vanished, stole away in the night and took his *Black Hawk* with him.

Yeah, it's true we seized Radjik and declared it neutral territory, but it was the only way to secure a peace in this area that allowed both sides to live on; we've even helped mend a few of the local farmlands and cleared out some of the local gangs. The streets here are safer than they've been in a long, long time.

All it took was for both sides to abandon their heritage.

Missing you greatly, Sis...

Love,  
Svetlana

## Mercenaries Raid Moore, Plunder Cemetery

3136-0505

Moore [INN] – In one of the strangest developments in recent weeks, a cemetery on the planet Moore (Prefecture I) was raided two days ago by BattleMech and battle armor elements apparently belonging to the Kirkpatrick's Invaders mercenary battalion. Striking with no warning, perhaps slipping into the system onboard chartered civilian transports, a two-lance force of Invaders 'Mechs forced back a company of local security troops while specially equipped battle armor troops dug up a casket on the outskirts of a cemetery dedicated to victims of Moore's infamous Day of Fire.

"The gray and red scheme, the 'K'-and-starfield logo, it was [the Invaders] alright," reported Constable Garner Vidaric, of the Moore Planetwide Security Department at a press conference this morning. "There were no transmissions from the attackers throughout their assault, and they worked hard to minimize contact with our security forces, apparently in order to focus on their act of grave robbery."

Losses to the local security forces were reportedly minimal, with only two police armor squads, three APCs, and a RiotMech listed among the casualties. Indeed, sources have told INN that those units suffered primarily from disabling damage, rather than full destruction, as if the raiders took great pains to avoid a bloodbath. The exact nature of their objective, however, remained unclear until witnesses say the Invaders' battle suits emerged from the cemetery, hauling a recently unearthed casket.

"We counted a full squad of what looked to be older battlesuit designs," said Vidaric, noting that the Invaders apparently used a mix of Cavalier and Longinus suits for the attack. "[They were] carrying away a single casket, which they then loaded into a waiting hovertruck. At that time, the suits joined with one of the mercenaries' 'Mechs and withdrew in a southeasterly direction, trailing the departing truck."

The site that was robbed, curiously enough, belonged to a couple identified on their grave marker simply as "Stevens." While most of those interred within the Shizuoka National Cemetery were placed in mass graves following the Jihad-era Day of Fire holocaust, the caretakers of the facility noted that the stolen casket belonged to a pair of individuals who were not, apparently, victims of the same event. Stranger still, local records of the couple who were buried at the Stevens site were apparently purged as far back as a year before in what officials are calling a "suspicious series of computer failures."

MPSD officials refused to speculate further on what possible use the mercenaries or their employers would have found for the remains they have unearthed, and noted that the Invaders withdrew shortly thereafter without further incident, departing onboard an unregistered Mule-class DropShip. Speculation persists, however, that the mercenaries received some local support during their raid.

"There was, we believe, at least two individuals—maybe as many as four—who were already on-planet prior to the raider's attack, who may have been employed as advance scouts for their insertion. At least two individuals—one male and one female—were observed during the fight, driving what seemed to be a locally registered vehicle, and the mercenary battle troopers went straight to their objective without pause."

MPSD Commissioner Willam Randall has asked all citizens of Moore and its neighboring systems to be on the lookout for these mercenaries, and to step forward and contact the authorities if they have any information pertaining to the mercenaries or their unusual cargo.

## TECH WATCH: The Truth . . . Revealed!

3136-0505

Our recent letter from F.A.K.E. refuting B.I.G.F.O.O.T.'s claim of a super-sized BattleMech sighting seems to have been a bit premature. Dr. Ivan Kjellsdottir's analysis appears to be entirely correct. The last batch of messages received brought us this little nugget:

Dear Tech Watch,

I'm writing to say that I, too, have seen B.I.G.F.O.O.T.'s BattleMech, and it's everything that he made it out to be. I work for a local news agency in my part of the Inner Sphere, and since war is always popular (though not good) news, we went out to get some footage of the aftermath of a recent skirmish. This time it was an abandoned spaceport that had served as the backdrop for man's inhumanity to man, if you will, and the fog and wreckage of war were still fresh on the field. We were just packing up and getting ready to head out of the deserted bunker we'd been using when the ground started shaking. We all figured that that couldn't be; all the forces had already pulled out.

Well, we were wrong.

I poked my head out of the bunker to see an *Atlas* stalking by with a *Scimitar* accompaniment. That wasn't all that was with it; I swung the camera around and saw the biggest @&\*#\$^\* BattleMech I'd ever laid eyes on strolling down the tarmac like it was taking a walk in the park. I pulled back to get a better shot and got a view of it pushing the wreckage of a Zibler strike tank out of the way like it was kicking a tin can. You can see very clearly that this is a tripedal design, slow as molasses on Acamar, and definitely larger than any assault class 'Mech. It's sure as hell bigger than anything I've ever seen, and I've filmed a lot in my time. We got a little more footage before its *Atlas* buddy called us out and it started to turn around. I ran back to the *Shandra* where the rest of the crew was already waiting, and we beat feet out of there. I know it looks bad from the way things get cut off, but we managed to get out okay. And, in retrospect, I've gotta wonder if what happened out there was a skirmish so much as it was a slaughter. Things looked pretty one-sided, and the leftovers seemed to all share one color scheme.

Anyway, here's the footage. Sorry there's no sound. I don't know what this thing is called, and I don't know where it comes from (hell, I can't even tell if it's the same one that B.I.G.F.O.O.T. saw), but if there's more than one out there I think a lot of people need to start being really, really scared.

Live Free,  
Crazy Outside News Firm Insanely Recorded Mech's Executed Devastation

Thanks to C.O.N.F.I.R.M.E.D. we have some pretty exclusive footage of the beast, and even a little of it in action. We did more in-depth research this time, and it hung together; this is the real deal. And since it is the real deal, it means that war just got a lot more dangerous. We're trying to figure out if this is the same BattleMech B.I.G.F.O.O.T. saw, since we're wondering just how many of these might be out there, and we'll keep our readers informed. In the meantime, we're tossing it back to you again; have you got any news of this colossal BattleMech? Let us know! Until then, we'll be keeping an ear to the ground and our eyes toward the horizon.

## Can They Be in Three Places at Once?

3136-0512

*Point-Counterpoint talk show transcript*

*Devil's Rock*

*12 March 3136*

"... Welcome back to another day of Point-Counterpoint. I'm your host, Gayle Martin. With us today is Devil's Rock legate's aide Zack Owen and mag-rag reporter Brad Horowitz."

[Camera pans back to show full stage. Host sits center, with aide on his left, reporter on his right.]

"So, you were saying, Mr. Horowitz—about the Wolves?"

[Mr. Horowitz sets down his water.]

"Yes, yes. Sorry. What I was saying was—"

"Preposterous," interjects the aide. "Can't you see, Mr. Martin? Reporters are known to bend facts. They sell ad taps on holovids—route panic where there is none."

[Mr. Horowitz barely acknowledges the interruption. He points a long, thin finger at the floor in front of him.] "Sir, I am not routing panic. I was simply reporting the truth as it was reported to me. The Wolves were seen at Avellandeda nadir jump point—several DropShips—"

"But your dates make that impossible," the aide interrupts. "December 27? It's just another false report to add to reports of the Wolves on Laiaka on December 10, and then on Phecda on December 12. Three places within a week?" He laughs confidently. "It's just not possible, unless you believe the Clans have developed some new technology that allows them to transport between prefectures."

[Studio audience laughs nervously.]

Mr. Horowitz replies, "You haven't been listening to me. I'm—"

Gayle Martin holds up his hands. "Now, now. Mr. Horowitz—this is exactly the type of report that is causing unnecessary panic on Devil's Rock."

Mr. Horowitz shakes his head. "Unnecessary? So, you are of the opinion that with the current state of The Republic, we are no longer required to report the truth? Mark my words—there is something happening with the Wolves."

## Falling into Command

3136-0512

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Let me say this right off the bat—I'm not sure what I'm doing here. But I know I'm not leaving.

The last time I checked, I wasn't even an officer. I piloted my 'Mech, followed my orders—assuming those orders weren't totally half-assed—and did my job. The Republic had me darting around from prefecture to prefecture for most of last year, fighting then retreating, fighting then retreating.

That all changed when the exarch shut the door. Some people in the army took that as an excuse to give up, but me and the soldiers I'm with right now decided it was a good chance to hold some ground for a change and not retreat. I've been on Styx for nearly half a year, and I'm not leaving until either it's totally secured or I'm dead. No one can order me off.

Our command structure has changed since we landed here. When we first hit the ground, we were still trying to act like we always had, like a part of The Republic's army. Eventually, though, it sank in that we were on our own, and we didn't have to play by the old rules. So we kind of stopped paying attention to how much metal people wore on their shoulders and just started listening to ideas that sounded good, and following people who knew what they were doing on the battlefield. I fell into a platoon with CharlyP, who is as good on maneuvers as anyone I've seen, but for some reason she refuses to give me orders, instead telling me that I've got to make decisions. There's a lot of people like me, people who recognize Charly's skill and would like to follow her, and she's convinced them that the only way to do what she wants is to listen to me, so I'm only in charge because of her.

At least that's the way I see it. Charly keeps telling me they're following me because of me, not her, but I don't buy it. But things are the way they are, and if this platoon is really going to do what I say, that means none of us is going to give up this planet.

Evan Kaiple  
Styx

## Hellion Hughes At New Heights!

3136-0512

*Extreme Zine*

*September 3135 Issue*

*Gordon Fulson, reporter*

*Zortman* - I've never seen anything like it. Good lord. The man's nuts. Nuts!

There I was, holding on for dear life as the VTOL's getting kicked around in the late summer hurricane like it's god's own soccer ball, trying not to vomit up the timbiqui dark I'd put down on the way out from the coast—come on, how often does someone like me get a chance to ride a Lexan Oceanic Series VIII? Talk about luxury!—and wondering if perhaps my maker was calling me home. But not just calling; He was shouting at the top of his lungs. (Can you imagine Him shouting at the top of His lungs? That's what I'm talking about here, people.)

So there I was, bile coating my tongue, a prayer on my lips (hey, you'd pray too if you were riding thousand-meter vertical up-and-drafts), trying not to notice that my bladder was telling me it was about to send along a "stay safe" warming gift: and I look over at the madman who chartered this insanity and paid the pilot more money than God to forget his wits and take us into this hurricane. And Christopher Hughes is calmly checking through his gear. Well, when I say calm, I mean I couldn't see a speck o' fear in the man. But he did have a feral gleam in his eye that by comparison would make a kid in a candy store appear to not like sugar.

And then, from one moment to the next, the craft is thumping clean air and Christopher lunges for the door and pulls it open and—you all know I'm not much into God, regardless of how much I take His name in vain—but when I caught sight of the eye wall, it almost made me a believer. Good lord, the scale! Seemed as though the hurricane was a conduit, a giant hole from the ionosphere all the way to the water, and we were at the top, maximum ceiling for the luxury bird, and suddenly I'm freezing and remembering why I've got the rebreather on. Christopher gives me one final look into his eyes, and his expression is a scary marriage of feral and glee—I can't see his smile behind his own advanced rebreather—and he launches himself into the ether and falls ...

I've never seen anything like it. He fell and fell and fell and I thought, he can't take so much time or the hurricane will move on and he'll slam through the eye wall and be in God's seawater soup boiled alive. But my eyes are practically glued to the best binoculars my salary can buy and I'm watching, and at the furthest distance I can see he pulls out the parachute, then cuts it loose after he's slowed enough to not kill himself and he slams into the water and disappears.

And damned if he didn't just wait the storm out as it moved overhead, and they tell me he bobbed to the surface like a cork, right on target for the ship waiting to home in on his beacon.

Damn. Never seen anything like it before ... but I'd love to see it again!



## Letters From Home -- Week 16

3136-0512

*Sharky - I've made up my mind. I want to party with these guys. Read on.*

*ChemicalMage305*

Personal Diary – Eli Zondervan 30 April 3136

Drama makes for a good holonovel. But anyone who thinks that interpersonal spectacle is a desirable trait in the real world really needs to put down the viewer for a while.

Boring is good. Particularly when we're a few weeks away from boosting off on an extended mission. There's a million and one little details that need to be addressed beforehand. The less commotion, the better. It means everyone can focus on doing their job, and little mistakes don't happen. Like forgetting to bring spare autocannon parts, or ammo, or batteries. Heaven forbid we run out of coffee. I'd have a mutiny on my hands.

Yes, sir, I like it dull. And I really don't like anything that disrupts that daily flow of blessed tedium.

Like having two very angry, combative women in my office.

Nope, don't like that at all.

From what I could gather, Alpha Flight had just come back to the barn after a training mission. The first thing the chief does is go over to Toni's ride and start giving it the once-over. Now, I promised Molly that I'd talk to Toni about her habit of disengaging the speed governors on her machine. Toni agreed to "do what made sense." Guess I should have been a little more explicit. So, the Alphas were debriefing in the hangar like they usually do, and Molly saw something that set her off. So she stomped over and got in Toni's face about the speed governors. Depending on who you believe, it was either a polite dialogue or a full-on declaration of hostilities on Molly's part. Toni said that since this was a live-fire exercise, she was going to act like she would in a real combat situation and lose the governors. Something about preferring not to stick around and get lit up by enemy fire if she didn't have to.

Molly wouldn't have anything to do with that explanation. Now, Molly's usually pretty levelheaded most of the time, but she's got a little passive-aggressive streak that has a tendency to spin out of control when it does come out. About this time, the rest of Alpha fire lance got interested in anything that would take them away from this increasingly uncomfortable conversation. So they left the two of them in a pretty good yelling contest. Good thing Captain Tanya Carnahan was passing by and decided to keep an eye on things from behind a stack of crates. She's tougher than deck plating but she's also empathetic enough to sense when things might boil over.

Nobody really paid attention what Toni and Molly were arguing about. We're not Sunday school teachers here. People holler and swear at each other like their lives depend on it and then go drinking a few hours later. But somebody said something to the other and BAM, they were going at it. Nobody could say who threw the first punch. But it did take six people to break it up.

This wasn't one of those stylized feminine cat-fights or a mud-wrestling kink vid. This fight was as furious as a Bloodname match, so I'm told. So Tanya brings them into my office, both of them spitting mad and ready to go at it again, while she and a few other folks tell me what they saw.

I'm going to write down one of my secrets to being an effective commander. If you want to maintain order, you have to perfect The Look. Parents know The Look almost instinctually. It's the unspoken combination of body language, facial expression and bearing that will drop a charging rhino at fifty paces. It also ideally communicates deep disappointment with an implicit threat that you never, EVER want to find out about first hand. And yes, I have practiced this. Moms and dads have the advantage of being larger than their children for most of their early years; most of the members of the Rock Brigade are taller and heavier than I am. My Look makes people want to confess sins they've only thought about.

Hey, I'll take whatever advantage I can get.

After I heard all the explanations, I gave Molly and Toni The Look. It wasn't too hard to make it believable. Tanya claims that the temperature in the room dropped about 30 degrees and even the people holding onto the two of them looked like they'd been caught doing something naughty. When I was sure that Toni and Molly had bought tickets on my guilt trip and wouldn't try to kill each other in my presence, I dismissed everyone else. Tanya gave me that damn "Have fun!" grin of hers on the way out.

I glared at them in silence for a while. Toni looked a little disheveled but had regained her usual cool, confident poise. Only an occasional flash in her eyes betrayed her inner feelings. Molly was still shaking a little, and not just from anger. Toni had done quite a number on her. Molly was bleeding from at least three places, she'd have some lovely purple splotches to go with a black eye, and her shallow breathing made me wonder if she didn't have some bruised ribs or other abused internals.

I figured I'd start with Molly. In a voice that brooked no dissent (it's an outgrowth of The Look) I asked her what happened. She didn't answer me, and I could see her anger slowly beginning to drain away. She bit her lip, wiped blood from the corner of her mouth, and wrestled with saying something that she clearly didn't want to say. Quietly, slowly, with her eyes on the floor, she admitted that yes, she was upset with Toni for disengaging the speed governors, since it made more work for her. Yes, she had

gotten pretty angry about it and nothing Toni said was going to help. And yes, she had said something very insulting to Toni. She didn't say what it was. At that point in her narrative, Toni glared over at Molly with a look that could have jump-started a fusion reactor. Almost on cue, eyes still downcast, Molly said that she'd gotten scared at the look she'd seen in Toni's face, adrenaline had kicked in, and she lashed out.

I guess I understand that. You've heard the phrase "seeing red?" Well, I've been on the receiving end of that. It's not pretty, and you realize that you hit that "fight or flight" mode about fifteen minutes after the fact.

Molly wouldn't look at me. Her anger was all gone by now, replaced by shame and pain. Part of me wanted to comfort my young friend. She'd let her anger go and had gotten her clock cleaned for it. That's payback enough, most of the time. She would also be tougher on herself for this than anyone else possibly could. But I'm also her commanding officer and she had done something stupid and disruptive. Stupid can get you killed in our line of work. And I'd rather Molly hate me for a while than be dead.

I docked her a week's pay and told her to go to the infirmary. Now get the hell out of my office before I throw you out. Yes, I said that. Eyes full of tears and lower lip trembling, she saluted me stiffly and walked out of my office with a slight limp.

That left me with Toni. Have I said much about her? She's in her early 30s, medium height, whipcord lean and athletic. She's rather pretty, with an angular face and short dark hair. She's friendly in a quiet way and always has an air of focused intensity about her even when she's relaxed. When she speaks, it sounds as if she has chosen her words carefully and her slight Spanish accent adds to her air of confidence. Not arrogance, mind you ... confidence. And it's not an act; I've seen her in the cockpit. There are better pilots in the Rock Brigade, but I've seen her take out two hostiles on the training field with one PPC burst. It's like she knows where to hit the enemy in the soft spot that takes them down. That's a mighty fine skill to have, and I'm glad to have her Zeus in my fire lance. She calls the thing Mercy. She just smiles enigmatically when I ask why.

I only asked her one thing—what Molly said that got her all riled up. Toni didn't tell me directly. She only said that people could call her any manner of awful thing they wanted, but that her family was off limits. I was reminded that she was a native of Carnwath. Don't the Jade Falcons lay claim to that space now?

The fight wasn't her fault and I don't blame her for fighting back. Still, she could have shown better judgment, and she's antagonizing my chief tech. So I informed her that if Mercy's leg actuators burned out prematurely, the replacements would come out of her salary and she could install them herself. Oh, and when I give you an order, it is not a suggestion and I expect you to follow it. We will not be having this conversation again, will we?

She accepted that with a small, neutral nod. She asked me if I expected her to apologize. I told her that I expected her to work with Molly and she'd better figure out a way to make that happen before we boosted off.

She nodded again, saluted, and left my office. She's none the worse for this—I'll bet she's up tomorrow for her morning jog like nothing happened. Doc is keeping Molly overnight in the infirmary. He overreacts sometimes, but I guess Toni actually managed to break one of Molly's ribs in the fight. Remind me not to insult Toni's family.

"The Old Man blew his top." That's what the rest of the Brigade is saying. I noticed that people are avoiding eye contact with me right now. That's fine. This kind of thing happens and we'll be over it by lunchtime tomorrow. Besides, it's good every now and then for the Rock Brigade to have the fear of God put into them. It's a healthy reminder that I'm not just Papa Eli ... I'm Commander Zondervan. And I have my limits.

I'll go see Molly tomorrow morning. I don't want to let her stew too long, but I know damn well that in another outfit, she'd have been busted down to her socks for pulling a stunt like this. She's a big girl. She'll live through it.

Being at the top isn't lonely. Far from it. You're always surrounded by people you know and care about.

Just makes it that much harder when you have to come down on a friend like a ton of bricks.

There's a bottle of 21-year-old Aberlour single malt in my footlocker.

I wonder how much of it's left.

## Throwing in the Towel

3136-0512

In hindsight, it may well be that this is long overdue. Centuries overdue, in fact.

For those of you on LinkNet who care nothing of off-world events, Defeatist? Possibly, but if over 70 percent of the planet's billion-strong population—admittedly represented by a mere 63 nobles in the planetary parliament, not counting Governor Praeti and Legate Shane—agree, in the name of their constituents, that it's best to look into going their own path, then I guess "defeatist" must be this humble planet's middle name.

And it seems to be a lesson that has taken the people here all of, oh, 350 years to figure out.

For those of you who don't know the history of Van Diemen, here's a little refresher course: This world was settled ages ago, and reached the apex of its prosperity under the original Star League. Rich in natural resources, the population was packed to the gills with fuel, chemicals, and minerals, all easy to reach and able to support a powerful economy and infrastructure that being part of the Terran Hegemony made only more glorious. When the League came along, Van Diemen IV alone had enough resources to raise its own regiment for the SLDF, and was rewarded with a network of Castles Brian and factory complexes that strengthened the planet as a military, industrial, and commercial hub of the League.

Then came Amaris, and the bloodbaths began.

The planet barely caught its breath when Kerensky took the armies away, allowing the boldest experiment in human history to die with a whimper.

Then came the Mariks ... the Liaos ... then the Mariks again ... and the Tikonovians ...

The plight of a Succession Wars border world. Three hundred years of relentless fighting. No, I won't bore you with the details of each occupation. Suffice to say that each conquest was brutal. Each fall was nastier and nastier. In fact, the Tikonov invasion merely heralded the arrival of the Federated Commonwealth, which swallowed the Tikonov Free Republic and planted the Fist and Sunburst over us until 3057, when the Mariks came back for a third time. By that point, the lush agrofields were a memory—along with the factories, spaceports, fine architecture, and weather control systems of the Star League era, and over 50 percent of our Star League-era population.

The world barely had time to memorize the anthem of the Free Worlds League when the Jihad struck, and soon Van Diemen found it was part of a sham state controlled by the slime of humanity. When the zealots arrived in 3069, they crushed a people who had barely begun to rise again. Van Diemen spent a decade under the zealots' boots, working labor camps, hiding in the ruins of burned-out cities, and facing starvation as farmlands were put to the torch or its produce was shipped to off-world Blakist troops.

Then Devlin Stone arrived to turn it all around, but by then the fighting was almost over. Van Diemen was an exhausted world. And then there was the Terran Hegemony, reborn, come to welcome it back into the fold.

Now, a mere 55 years later, hero Stone is gone. And, as of just a few months ago, his successor has all but announced the death of his dream as well. Still, Van Diemen clung onto the thin strand of hope that The Republic would return, bring it back into the fold, continue to raise it from the ashes of the past.

But he's not coming back, and the wars are returning. But rather than embrace another flag, another captain-general, chancellor, primus, or exarch, the leaders of Van Diemen IV have finally accepted the end of our 350-year hope for the glory days. Breaking a cycle of false promises and stoic acceptance of fate, we have announced what we had all suspected to be true since Levin pulled back the troops in January:

Van Diemen IV is alone, and now is the time we must stand on our own.

Only took us 350 years to come up with that one....

## Choice vs Chance

3136-0519

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It is never popular to predict that one's planet is going to be conquered, but such forecasts seem less offensive when their inevitability is obvious. A simple glance at a current map of the Inner Sphere is enough to show that Baxter will not remain unvanquished for long.

As with any potential calamity, the best way to deal with a potential invasion is through preparation. There are many other sources that provide a wealth of information on emergency preparedness techniques, and I will not detail such things here. Instead, I would like to discuss something of pivotal importance—who it is that will eventually do the invading.

It would seem we have a number of suitors from which to choose, and it would behoove us to move promptly to open negotiations with the proper nation. Naturally, this is not a simple issue, and I cannot cover all the involved parties now. At the moment, I would prefer to focus of two particular parties: Clan Jade Falcon and the Rasalhague Dominion.

Many people may see this as not much of a choice, with Rasalhague's deep ties to Clan Ghost Bear. The choice, they might say, is a decision between two Clans, and no Clan is a good fit for an Inner Sphere planet.

After so many decades, though, we should have moved beyond the old myth that all Clans are alike. These two in particular present a stark contrast—Clan Jade Falcon, with its ruthless military driving all other sectors of Clan life, and Clan Ghost Bear, which has established its willingness to treat civilians with decency and even engage in rudimentary democratic governments.

To the trained observer, this is a clear choice—in favor of Jade Falcon. In times like this, there is no room for hesitation or even kindness in a ruling body. Bold, decisive action is what can best keep Baxter safe from other predatory nations, and that is what Clan Jade Falcon offers. If we are to be conquered, it should be by someone that can protect us once we are taken. I urge our planetary government to immediately approach representatives of Clan Jade Falcon about a swift and easy conquest.

—Bertrand Carpenter  
Baxter

## It Must Be A Trick

**3136-0519**

It's all a trick.

I'm telling you, this whole Prefecture X fortress thing is a joke. The exarch and his paladins are on Terra, laughing and shining their 'Mechs. Who could be crazy enough to think they could wall off an entire prefecture? What are they using for mortar?

The past few years, people have been just nibbling off bigger and bigger pieces of The Republic. The Dracs are coming for Dieron. The Liaos are running after Tikonov. The Jade Falcons are taking everything they can reach. So what does our military do?

Hide.

Sure, we've got knights still out here, running around and trying to calm people down. Sir Gibson was on the holo last night, telling us we don't need to worry about Bannson's Raiders. Those weren't really Scourge bandits that struck last month. It was freak weather.

This is what we fought the Blakists for?

I refuse to believe The Republic has fallen. Exarch Levin must have a greater plan. The paladins must be helping him. The troops and ships and 'Mechs they've stockpiled behind the borders of Prefecture X must be about ready to pour out and drive these invaders from our worlds.

It must be a trick.

I was at that raid last month. It wasn't no weather. Them 'Mechs had two-headed hatchets painted on them. Sure, they were converted IndustrialMechs, but they had guns. They had Foxes and Bellonas and even one fast Donar that kept darting around, shooting things up. There was even a BattleMech, a big fat Catapult. It just stood in the back, but it was there.

I know my granddad didn't fight the Word of Blake so my government could pull up its skirts when the going got tough. I trust the exarch. This fortress nonsense must be a trick.

It has to be.

--Fred Grande

## Letters From Home -- Week 17

3136-0519

[Warning! Unverified Source Interrupt Error Detected ... Receiving Data Feed ...Virus Check: Disabled! Code Error: 167SS90//67]  
Message begins ...

BROTHERS! BELIEVERS! THE SPIRITS OF SACRED SAINT APOLLYON, THE MASTER, AND THE BLESSED PROTÉGÉ CALL UPON YOU!

To the true and the faithful, we send this call. To the heretics who follow the ways of the crumbling dynasties, beware the heralds of your doom! The Disciples of the Trinity arise! The spirits of the Master, His Protégé, and Saint Apollyon shall be avenged!

Blessed be the spirit of the Master, who saw the dark times coming and strove to bring about the Golden Age for all! Cursed be those who stood against Him, and forced upon us the fires of war!

Blessed be the spirit of the Protégé, whose coming was foreseen by the Master, who survived the fires of Terra and Circinus and lives among us still! Woe be unto those among the infidels who sought to disgrace him.

Blessed be the spirit of Saint Apollyon, Chosen of the Master and created in His image, whose loyalty safeguarded the secret of the Five beyond death itself! Cursed be the imposter who sought to destroy him, and the infidels who struggle to undo his work today!

The survivors of the Five are endangered anew! As we speak, the soldiers of Stone's corrupted legacy and the spawn of the infidels who violated Jardine gather to uncover the most hallowed of legacies! Two remain of these Forgotten Frontiers, safe and secure against the darkness of the unbelievers!

THEY MUST BE PROTECTED AT ALL COSTS!

The Disciples of the Trinity call upon our allies—all our allies—in this time of need. To our Broadsword Brotherhood friends, we call upon your steel! To the White Hand, we call upon your swiftness! Our own Soldiers of Apollyon—how DARE the infidels label us a "cult"!—are once more at large, and will seek you out as we unite once more to crush the infidels. Thus it shall be until all stars fall.

And to the infidels themselves—the spawn of the hated Brooklyn Stevens and Tibor Mitternacht: Know that your hour has come. Death awaits you and all those who follow you. The Soldiers of Saint Apollyon, Master of Jardine, Chosen of the Master and created in His image, shall never rest until your stain is removed from the universe!

Message ends...

[Warning! Unverified Source Interrupt Error Detected ... Ending Data Feed ... Virus Check: Re-established! Checking... LinkNet Source Files Clear (No Malicious Code Detected)... Code Error: 167SS90//67 (Report Sent)]

Art,

Someone certainly has a flair for the dramatic here. Of course, if what we're all after is what it's advertised to be, I can certainly understand it.

First, that data leak is still happening. Starting to suspect Hansel, Greta, or perhaps our new player in the game is responsible. From what I've gleaned, he's definitely outside agency, and one of the coolest customers I've seen in a while, has evaded capture on three occasions without inflicting a single casualty. (Gotta love the hero types.)

Anyway, the sum-up is this: Our Starlings are getting help, probably from third-party sources with expert training. It's a personal quest for these folks, though; not some state-appointed mission. It's stirred up the remnants of the loony bin as well, so they're getting involved, and some of THEM seem to be better trained and equipped than we've ever given them credit for. I sure hope Daddy Z. has a clue about all this, and—if so—would he be so kind as to fill me in?

-Dion

## Chat Log

3136-0526

*irc server 456.555.12.3>Garden City Board of Education intranet*

::PLEASE BE ADVISED SEVEN MINUTES REMAIN ON THIS CHAT::

**BlackJackWarrior:** isn't much more to say.

**missstargazer334:** R U insane?

**BlackJackWarrior:** no kim. what else am I supposed to do? stuck here on savannah?

**missstargazer334:** But Solaris? You can barely work your dad's industrial mech. And you want to compete?

**BlackJackWarrior:** i practiced. my mind's made up—and with everything my dad's been saying about the wolves lately

**missstargazer334:** Not that again.

**BlackJackWarrior:** serious kim—but my dad says there's something up. not just rumor. and my cousin swears he's met a wolf member on solaris—competing in the games

**missstargazer334:** My mom—

**BlackJackWarrior:** you mom is nothing more than an outdated senator. the republic's gone, kim. and my dad is right if we don't do something quick the clans will be invading all of us. Not just rochelle.

::PLEASE BE ADVISED FIVE MINUTES REMAIN ON THIS CHAT::

**missstargazer334:** Wait—your cousin's seen Wolves on Solaris? When?

**BlackJackWarrior:** oh now you're interested. back during the holidays—around xmas. sent my mom a crystal about the rumors he'd been hearing.

**missstargazer334:** Which months exactly, Jeff. I need to tell my mom.

**BlackJackWarrior:** you can't tell your mom! she want to know where you get this and then my parents will find out. wait—okay? wait till i go.

[long pause]

::PLEASE BE ADVISED THIS CHAT WILL SHUT DOWN IN 2 MINUTES::

**missstargazer334:** So when is your cousin getting here?

**BlackJackWarrior:** the weekend. i'm gonna head into town for a movie. you wanna say goodbye?

**missstargazer334:** I don't know.

**BlackJackWarrior:** don't be mad

**missstargazer334:** I have to get to class.

**BlackJackWarrior:** kim ... please? i wanna see you before i go.

**missstargazer334:** Then don't go.

::THIS CHAT IS SHUTTING DOWN IN 3--

**BlackJackWarrior:** please?

2--

<MISSSTARGAZER334 HAS LEFT THE CHAT>

END OF TIME

## Letters From Home -- Week 18

3136-0526

Stefka,

Well, you were right ... again. I guess it never does hurt to go to the source. My thanks, Sister, for access to the accounts. The Invaders were everything we could have hoped for: professional, yet daring; capable, yet cautious. They minimized the collateral damage nicely during the extraction ...

But of course, you care more for what was found within the urn, don't you? Well, while I consider LinkNet a source for all kinds of data leaks, your insistence on "sharing" this data as quickly as possible (and damn the risks) leaves me few options, da?

Here it is in a nutshell, then:

Jardine is confirmed as one of the Five. *babushka* Brooklyn certainly found it on a mission for IE just before the Jihad, and for that, she and her crew—and their families—were hunted relentlessly. Only the intervention of some of the false Marik's Knights managed to save them ... temporarily. It is also true—as you surmised—that one was taken from Jardine, a woman named Alanha, while the local Manei Domini governor slaughtered her tribe.

Through the early Jihad days, it seems our grandparents and the rogue Knights led Apollyon and his disciples on a dramatic chase through the then-Lyran Alliance, hitting Donegal and a few other places. They finally "relocated" under pseudonyms to Moore, apparently based on the premise that the last place Apollyon would look for them was on a world already controlled by the Word. The gambit apparently worked (for a time, anyway).

By that time, they apparently managed to realize that Jardine was one of five hidden worlds—one in each Great House state—that vanished during the First Succession War. At the time, even ComStar was in its infancy, still working like a corporation with political aims than a religious order. There was no "Word of Blake" to speak of. Shortly thereafter, the so-called Ruins of Gabriel were identified as another of the Five (the Lyran world), leaving the Worlds for the Combine, Confederation, and Suns yet-undiscovered. Rumor has it, however, that some operation during the Jihad found at least one other—but that the various elements of Stone's alliance covered it up. Another bit in the data files suggests that one of the worlds—the Combine one, most likely—was dead long before the Jihad began, but not before some of its product had been released ...

There is way more that this, Sister, including what the Worlds did and theories as to how they came to be so hidden that even some ComStar primuses and precentors of ROM knew nothing of their existence. But it'll have to wait till a later transmit time: Major Hasseldorf is telling me we have to make another double-jump (and you know how I am about jumps ... )

I leave you with this, though: The ashes in the urn were not human remains but local wood, likely from the Day of Fire!

*babushka* Brooklyn may not be dead after all!

Yours,  
Yeska

—:—

Wayne,

It's getting pretty hard to do my job. I know, I know—you predicted this when I accepted the promotion. But even you have to admit that it was a good gig for a lot of years.

I'm just not sure when things changed so that I noticed. Even as recently as two months ago I still felt good about getting up and going to work every morning, and I was happy to put in some time on the weekends, too. Now—now, every morning I find an excuse to be late to the office, I take long lunches, and I'm barely able to be courteous to my fellow employees.

I have to believe things changed when he got married. It was his dream and his secret goal for so long, that when he finally found someone who could make it happen for him he threw all common sense—and even business sense—out the window and jumped in with both feet. And it wasn't even love! Love I could understand—love makes a fool of many men.

I'll keep plugging away for as long as I can, but I'm planning my exit strategy. And I'm afraid that, when it comes right down to it, it won't be so much a strategy as a leap off a cliff. I'll keep you posted, but you can also watch the Rumors section of LinkNet—you'll see my progress there.

Miss you lots. I'll let you know where I plan to end up, and we'll figure out how to get together.

Emmess



## Regulan Fiefs Supports Suspicious Activity in Oriente Protectorate

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3136-0526

### FIELD STATION REPORT

**DELTA CLEARANCE FROM:** Force Commander Tina Buhl

**TO:** Acting Captain-General Janos Marik

**DATE:** 1 December 3135

Hostile forces grounded on Kyeinnisan on 31 October. By hiding among the regularly scheduled tramp freighters, the DropShip was able to ground uncontested near the ore mines of Jasper. While heavy fire from the ad hoc company effectively destroyed four structures and severely damaged half a dozen more, the losses to the plant are superficial; the most important facilities are located underground.

Though I was able to engage the raiders, they fell back in good order and lifted off under their own fighter screen. Considering the lack of such assets at my disposal, I assigned a fighter lance to shadow the fleeing DropShip for some time to ensure its vector wouldn't allow it to return without a long end-over burn that would alert us to its presence.

The identity of the force remains unknown at this time; forensics could not positively identify any salvage secured from the raid, or the previous two in the last half year. While the raiders' equipment and deployment is suggestive of down-on-their-luck mercenaries or perhaps budding pirates, the ease with which they withdrew under my superior fire suggests they are more than they seem.

Meanwhile, my sources report that Fief troop movements continue unabated along the border; not enough of a connection, of course, but once again suggestive. Even more telling, latest intel from the region suggests that the Fief's troop movements are mere saber rattling; though I have requested clarification, to date my sources remain silent on this matter.

Regardless, by the first of the year you will receive a hand-delivered document containing a full operations brief of how you should deal with the increasing boldness of the Fiefs.

## Spirit Cats -- Friend Or Foe

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3136-0526

### Spirit Cats: Friend Or Foe?

by Jerome Salman  
Addicks Journal  
March 3136

Nuisance. Unstable. Troublesome. Dangerous. Spiritualists. Zealots.

Such are the terms bandied about by the governor and his toadies concerning ex-Senator Kev Rosse and his Spirit Cats. A blot on our beautiful planet. A stain on our honor. A thorn in our side. The euphemisms are as endless as the governor's excuses.

When Katana Tormark's forces attacked Addicks those long months ago, who defended the planet? Would you all prefer to be under the Combine's thumb, marching along to Black Luthien's strings? Who defended us against Bannson's Raiders? Or the half-dozen different pirate raids in the last year? And who, when Mr. Eric Sandoval-Groell and his puppet Republic March attempted to add Addicks to his fascist state, once again defended our world?

Have the Spirit Cats taken over rule of Addicks? Do they dictate how we shall govern ourselves? Have they occupied the best lands? (Have you been to their encampment on Auskel? I have, and they chose some of the most inhospitable lands on Addicks to "occupy.") Have they removed the government? (Some would say it's too bad they haven't.)

They have done none of these things and, in fact, at every turn have protected our world. A world inexorably being turned against them by the rhetoric of a governor who has done nothing for its people since Fortress Republic cast us to the solar winds. Dare I say, has done nothing of substance since the fall of the HPG network.

The Spirit Cats have done nothing to change our lives ... except save them. Perhaps it is time for us to take on that mantle. Time for us to rise up and take back our world. Not from the Spirit Cats. But from an ineffective governor who will lead us all to ruin. It is time to ignore the piper's call and make our own destiny. And if we extend a hand of friendship to the Spirit Cats, I'm sure we will be rewarded for that overture.

Let us all take a stand.

## Trouble Brewing on Fletcher

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**3136-0526**

**TO:** Paladin David McKinnon

**RE:** Fletcher, Senator Wyndham's death

**DATE:** 31 January 3136

According to his physicians, Senator Wyndham died of a coronary before midnight on the eve of his birthday. Several members of the household staff, who still believe in The Republic, I might add, tell me the senator was reminiscing these last days, talking only of his daughter Amber and of the coming fire.

My intel shows she's an accomplished areospace pilot with the Swordsworn. I estimate it will take more than a month for her to return here, though I'm afraid she might refuse to come at all. Those same staff also told me of a bitter argument between her and her twin brother, so returning might not be in her best interests.

I have a plan, sir, and I have suspicions, but let me give you a list of the guests now positioned in this house. First, there are no less than seven senators from the surrounding worlds here—though most arrived for the party, all have stayed for the reading of the will; in fact, it was almost as if they expected the old man to die. There is also a man called Taven Green, a representative of Jacob Bannson. And if nothing else, for his presence alone I'm worried. Why would the death of a simple senator—not even a governor or legate—attract one of the prefecture's most aggressive entrepreneurs? There's more here, sir, much more. And I have a bad feeling that the senator's daughter might be in danger.

I would like permission to escort Miss Wyndham home. I can't really pinpoint what I'm worried about, only that she appears to be the key to whatever it is that Senator Wyndham possessed, whether it be intel or something more substantial that would draw so many key figures to his funeral.

David Jett, KE

## Passenger DropShip Explodes Over Moore

3135-0601

SHIZUOKA [Moore News Agency] – Twenty-four crewmen and 106 passengers met a tragic fate today when the RS *Lusitania IV* exploded unexpectedly during a routine departure from Shizuoka Interplanetary Spaceport at 0915 hours, local time, today. Local aerospace search and rescue, along with orbital satellite sensor sweeps confirmed that there were no survivors from the passenger-converted *Fury*-class DropShip, whose wreckage quickly burned up in the Moore atmosphere high above the capital city.

Owned and registered to the Republic-based InterStar Travels and Shipping Company, the *Lusitania IV*, which operates out of Kaus Media, was bound to dock with the Republican *Tramp*-class JumpShip *Bristol* as part of her routine tour of the surrounding systems, a tour that has taken on added importance since the collapse of the interstellar communications network.

MAA and Shizuoka Spaceport Investigations officials said they could not immediately speculate on what caused the sudden explosion of the *Lusitania IV* to occur. Furthermore, they have pointed out that the explosion's timing would further complicate any investigation, as the vessel was destroyed just beyond the upper atmosphere, but close enough to Moore for any large debris to fall back down and burn up.

"Unfortunately, all we will have to go on is SatNet sensor logs and radio chatter leading up to the event," said SSI spokesman Lance Jiminez. "We are hoping to recover the *Lusitania*'s 'black box', but given the circumstances of the explosion, we simply cannot hold out much hope."

It is routine for all DropShips passing through the Shizuoka Spaceport to undergo safety inspections both after landing and prior to liftoff. At this time, SSI records indicate that these procedures were followed for the *Lusitania IV*, but officials still could not rule out the possibility of human error by either ground crews or the vessel crew. Nonetheless, at this hour, thirty-seven other DropShips and small craft have departed or landed at the spaceport without incident today, both before and after this tragedy.

Reporting live from Shizuoka, I'm Elanor Hunt, with MNA.

## FROM THE OFFICE OF JACOB BANNSON

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3136-0602

### THE OPEN DOOR

All things change.

Certainly the events of the past few months have shown me that the things we hold as certainties, things like peace, security, and governments, are not as certain as we'd hoped. Our abandonment by the exarch and his knights has brought a new perception to all of us.

Bannson Universal Unlimited (BUU) is the largest and most successful corporation in The Republic. We span more worlds than several interstellar polities. I employ more men and women than any other employer in known space. BUU is more than a paycheck: It's home. When the walls crumble around us, we can look to each other and to corporate and see security and safety.

The loss of the HPG network was a setback we overcame. My vision has allowed our family to grow and diversify, making us even more difficult to damage. BUU had spread to every prefecture and several of the surrounding realms. The capital spent years ago in creating BUU has paid out tenfold: Our stock is strong, our facilities secure, and our employees protected.

The growing darkness around us breeds contemptuous scaremongers devoted to warning you against your family, against BUU. They point to the nationalization of Bannson properties in the newly freed Capellan territories and shout warnings, all the while ignoring the benefits these moves offer to the employees on the ground there.

I see everything that affects this company. My facilities on Tybalt have been increased tenfold solely to ensure the continued safe and timely operation of BUU. My JumpShips carry word and comfort to us all, whichever world we may inhabit. My security forces make certain that the troubles affecting other companies, other people, do not bother us.

My first concern is you, the lifeblood of BUU. Together we can show the Sphere what hard-working common people can do when united behind a single cause.

—Jacob Bannson

## HELLION EXO-HUGHES!

**3136-0602**

*Extreme Zine*

*October 3135 Issue*

*Gordon Fulson, reporter*

*Zortman*—The smell of several thousand bodies packed tightly in an overheated warehouse; excitement a throbbing pulse that tunes the crowd's beating hearts into a single, fused moment of demand; the abrupt lull as hatches on the blood-scarred arena floor gap like broken windows to the ethereal worlds beyond; the distinctive whine of servo motors and the light electricity that strums the air and tickles arm hair; the unshielded myomer muscles stalking prey; the thunderous cacophony of the crowd exalting their gods come to blood sport for their amusement: Gods, but who doesn't love a good exoskeleton pit fight!

There I was, thinking I'd seen the last of Hellion Hughes after I gingerly shook his hand in awe over his hurricane performance weeks ago and sucking down another timbiqui dark (memories of that Lexan Oceanic Series VIII flight still plucking a smile from my lips at the oddest moments), and out of the blue I'm struck dumb as the hoary-voiced announcer peals out the name of the one-shot contender for this month: Hellion Hughes.

Is there anything he can't do! I'll reiterate. Nuts. Absonutso!

You don't need to be a Black Widow come again or been training from the crib to strap on an exoskeleton (unlike a 'Mech, where even the Industrials will give you problems without some serious training), but it's not a walk in the park. You usually need some training not to have the myomers and servo motors tear you limb from limb. And that's on the pansy loader models. When you're talking the tripped-out Gladiator suits from Solaris, most people don't got the jeans to fill it all out.

So sure, we already know Hellion's got DropShip-sized juebos, right? So no falling down limp on the job there, but where the hell does the man learn not to simply don a suit, but put up a match that had old Jack "The Butcher" Scrolli wondering if he was finally gonna lose one?

I've never seen The Butcher give another man the nod, but after that fight, Hughes got the nod. Don't care what the rest of the Inner Sphere says about the man, he's got WarShip-sized jeubos. And he can stick around our side of the universe for as long as he wants; in fact, already bought him a case of timbiqui.

Can't wait to see what he's gonna do next.

## Letters From Home -- Week 19

3136-0602

Beloved,

I never imagined the day would come when *giri* and *ninjo* would grow so far removed from one another that I might find myself among those whom our people call ronin. And yet, the time has come with this new war. A war with no direction, no purpose I can discern.

A war with no honor.

When we began this campaign, the task ahead was simple: to reclaim the Dragon's worlds into the Dragon's bosom, as the faltering Republic left our distant cousins here without protection, stability, or order. But with each world we reclaimed, it became increasingly clear to me that the worlds we have returned to may no longer be our own—changed by more than two generations under a different banner, filled with gaijin blood, gaijin ideals. Corrupted? Perhaps, but was it not the wisdom of the Dragon's father that directly resulted in such corruption?

Hai. That was the line of thought that led to this travesty, I think. And while I realize even now that questioning the Dragon amounts to treason, with each fallen world, it seems more apparent that our claim on these worlds—for better or for ill—expired long ago. What, then, is the purpose of our conquests?

Is it Sakamoto's ambition, perhaps? Iie. Though his naked dreams of glory clearly had some role, this hopeless battle has deeper meaning. As the renegade Republican took the reins, it became clearer to me that what sent us here came from the unfathomable shadows of Black Luthien herself. I do not pretend to have the answers, nor would I burden you with the theories, but what led to my decisions stemmed from the realization that all of us—Republican and Combine alike—had come to find ourselves mired on this dustbowl called Saffell, left to starve and fight for no better reason than some game of shadow politics that even now may change the face of the Dragon forever.

It was for that reason alone that I saw the bonds of my duty tested, and saw that my duty did not lie with a Dragon so inscrutable, but with the men and women under my command, who had no enemies here but a Dragon that betrayed them. And so, the choice was made, the die was cast, and we have accepted our fate as ronin.

My one regret is that I shall never look upon your sweet face again, my Beloved. Farewell—I shall wait for you in heaven.

Always,  
Ikessa

# TECH WATCH: Two, Four, Six, Eight . . . Who Do We Appreciate?

3136-0602

Now that we can all rest less peacefully with the knowledge of 100+ ton BattleMechs in the universe, we can get back to the business of less high-profile BattleMechs and technology. Ever since the arrival of the *Mad Cat Mk IV*, it was surely only a matter of time before the *Vulture Mk IV* made an appearance. Sure enough, spotted in what's been identified as Wolf Hunter colors is an unmistakable *Vulture Mk IV*.

For the young and those too busy to review history before they're doomed to repeat it, the original *Vulture* (and this one too, as far as we can tell) was an OmniMech design, meaning it sported a modular weapon system and also shared a similar chassis design with another BattleMech, the venerable *Mad Cat*. OmniMechs were "introduced" to the Inner Sphere by the Clans during their initial invasion between 3049 and 3050. Thanks to their revolutionary modular design, repairs on the battlefield were a snap and customization of a BattleMech to a pilot's strengths became routine. Their versatility made them a staple in Clan militaries, and once enough salvage had been gathered and reverse-engineered by the rest of the Inner Sphere, they began to find their way into more mundane militaries as well.

Sporting the same leg construction as the *Mad Cat IV*, the *Vulture Mk IV* seems to have made only minor design improvements. Most noticeable is the tilted hip/torso connection point, which is also placed behind a portion of the main body to shield this delicate area from frontal assaults. Another alteration places two small lasers in the center torso on a turret, which has been known to retract up into the body for protection when not in use. Other than that, this *Vulture* (also called a *Mad Dog* by Clan warriors) is fairly similar to its original ancestor.

The current configuration doesn't appear to match that of previous *Vultures* though, and we've made our best guesstimates as to the loadout of this dirty bird (office arguments about the targeting computer still abound). Are there more Mk IVs in the future? We're already waiting for a Mk V.

## THE BREAKDOWN

<b>BattleMech:</b>	Vulture Mk IV VTR-V4-H
<b>Mass:</b>	60 tons
<b>Chassis:</b>	Endo Steel
<b>Power Plant:</b>	300 XL Fusion
<b>Walking Speed:</b>	54.0 km/h
<b>Maximum Speed:</b>	86.4 km/h
<b>Jump Jets:</b>	None
<b>Armor Type:</b>	Ferro-fibrous
<b>Armament:</b>	1 Extended Range Particle Projection Cannon
	1 LB 5-X Autocannon
	4 Short Range Missile 6-packs
	2 Extended Range Small Pulse Lasers



## Weapons Create Wars

3136-0602

Seventy years ago people could find Savannah on a map of the Inner Sphere. Technicron-made BattleMechs fought for our leaders, even throughout the Blakist Jihad. We supported that industry for centuries, because it was all we knew how to do. Devlin Stone showed us another way.

Yesterday in Atlanta, Governor Williams announced his intention to explore reopening the mothballed Technicron facilities in the Coastal Empire. He wants to dust off the old machinery and breathe new life into an industry that nearly cost us our lives. Already, Hinesville real estate moguls are tripping over themselves to house an influx of factory workers.

And there is much rejoicing.

All across The Republic people are beating their plowshares back into swords. IndustrialMechs are being fitted with weapons and sent to fight, like half-trained soldiers marching to the beat of a martial drum. Military recruitment is reaching plateaus unheard of since the Jihad. Reason and debate are giving way to irrationality and fiat.

And there is much rejoicing.

Like Nero playing his fiddle, we are watching ourselves spiral back down to the pits we've spent the last half-century climbing out of. The exarch's ostrich-inspired plan to hide from the growing evils of our time has left us to our own devices, and those devices are deadly.

Out here in Thunderbolt, we know the truth. They may call us hicks, but you didn't see us nicknaming a mammoth war machine "Awesome." You didn't see us glorifying war by nicknaming a 'Mech "Quickdraw." Maybe if battle was a little less awesome, we'd be a little less quick on the draw, and more of us would live the peaceful life that Stone fought and bled for. War is the acid that dissolved The Republic of the Sphere, and those in Atlanta would keep pouring it on. You don't throw alcohol on a fire; why throw weapons at a war?

## Letter to the Editor

3136-0609

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In your most recent article, in which you discussed the continued ramifications of Fortress Republic and which realms pose a serious threat to the former prefectures of The Republic, I was most disappointed to see that the schism states of the old Free Worlds League were practically ignored.

Anson Marik and the Stewart-Marik Commonwealth have already made a bid for the world of Stewart, forestalled only by the timely intervention of a Clan Sea Fox Aimag. The concept that Anson has suddenly seen the light of day concerning capturing Stewart—much less attempting to grab more worlds for his realm—is ludicrous and short sighted in the extreme. After all, Captain-General Anson made that grab before Fortress Republic went up. Stewart and other worlds like it are, now more than ever, ripened fruit on a low-hanging branch.

Then we have Jessica Marik and her Oriente Protectorate. Her bloodline makes her loathed by both Anson and Lester Cameron-Jones of the Regular Fiefs. Yet she has not only survived, she has thrived. And there are strong rumors that forces from the Protectorate have already been sighted in former Prefecture VIII. Rumors, of course; but such rumors usually have basis in fact.

In addition, one should never let Jessica's youthful appearance make us overlook her large brood of progeny: Janos, Julietta, Elis, Christopher, and Nikol. Each is smart and potent in his or her own right; should Jessica abruptly pass away, the Protectorate is more than capable of continuing her growth, which could all too easily include the reclamation of old-school Marik worlds.

And last but not least, let us not ignore her husband, Phillip Hughes. Correct. Hughes, of Irian. And we all know how well Irian adhered to the protocols of programs like the Military Material Redemption Program. It is not so difficult to believe that if Irian defied Devlin Stone, then it could just as easily defy The Republic and be supplying the Protectorate right under our noses.

I could go on. In your next expose of "The Republic Exposed," I would appreciate a more thorough look at the old League states. Despite their relative size and apparent disharmony, they still represent a serious and grave threat to former prefecture worlds.

—James Carthol

## Letters From Home -- Week 20

3136-0609

Stefka,

One jump to go, *sistra*. These Kirkpatrick's mercenaries have certainly not been shy about pushing this vessel's L-F batteries to their limits, nor of hot-charging their drives to cut down transit times. Of course, this has only rattled my nerves all the more, as you can imagine. I have, I think, inherited too much of the travel sickness that kept our *babushka*'s dearest Tyler planet-side some of her life. I cannot wait to see you again, if only because it means a brief end to all this space travel, these stomach-wrenching double-jumps, and the metallic, purified air.

But I digress.

You wished me to transmit more of the secrets of the Five, lest we are intercepted. Major Hasseldorf seemed most annoyed with this risk, but has permitted me to do so nonetheless. He and his men have come to realize the full weight of what we have found.

It appears that the conspiracy that created the Five was a cabal that may have been formed by none other than Jerome Blake and Conrad Toyama themselves. Apparently not willing to risk having "all their eggs in one basket" in regards to their control over Terra in the unstable days of the early Succession Wars, they set out to suborn several worlds of fairly minor—yet sustainable—value, and then hide them away from the rest of the Inner Sphere by staging their demise and playing a shell game with names. In all cases but one, apparently, the worlds seized are among those systems that "died" in the First Succession War. All Five were also located a solid 250–300 light-years from Terra. The theory may have been that they would be staging grounds or hiding places for key ComStar personnel if any of the Great Houses managed to assault and seize Terra.

But to do this, they required absolute secrecy, one that Toyama's fanaticism and pseudo-mysticism was perfect for creating and maintaining. Simply put, only the most elite and devoted followers of Toyama's vision (after Blake's death) were able to know of the Worlds. Even primuses and precentors of ROM over the centuries were excluded if they were deemed a security risk by this shadow cabal that grew up around the Worlds.

And somehow, when Word of Blake formed, this cabal was in control from day one, headed by the Master himself.

While hidden away, each World and its native populace apparently pursued black projects of all sorts: cybernetics, artificial intelligence, enhanced KF theory, bio-warfare, space-based super-WMDs. Somewhere along the way—*Babushka* Brooklyn's notes suggest around the time of Primus Myndo Waterly—the most promising of these projects were put into full production. Waterly herself likely commanded this, if she were a member of the cabal.

Thus, some time around the 3030s, the Five Worlds became weapons centers. It is not clear what the cabal had in mind at the time, but when the Master took over, it seemed that a new purpose took shape. The Master's "prophecy" certainly had something in mind other than Jihad; it was more than propaganda when they ranted about creating a new age. Halas' man explained as much when he whisked our grandparents away to Moore. But would even their "final solution" have been right? I shudder at what could have been.

Oh, *sistra*! There are more notes, of course, journal entries stretching back to even before our *babushka* accepted IE's offer to rejoin their ranks and find that cursed Jardine. Maybe even a clue as to where she went after Tyler was buried.

I cannot wait until we meet again!

Yours,  
Yeska

## Wolf Sighting

3136-0609

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Oh, we've all heard it before. Any time there's a crisis somewhere in the universe, those nasty rumors arise. The Clans are on the move. They're moving in to take your world, destroy your freedoms, and crush your way of life.

The Republic of the Sphere is no longer there to be efficient against the threat of a Clan invasion. The senators now have their own club known as the Senate Alliance (ho-hum), and The Republic itself has decided to draw a line in the sand by not playing well with others.

Yet the exarch will try to bring order to chaos by putting up his and his knight's hands to pat down our fears with reassurances that such a thing will never happen. But I have to ask the wannabe leaders: What makes you so sure such a thing won't happen?

How do you know it hasn't already?

Have you not been listening? Watching? Learning? There's something happening out there, something that stretches beyond the small worlds run by nobles and influence.

What am I talking about? The Wolves! Has no one been paying attention to the stories scattering around? Reports of Wolves appearing in different places at the same time? I think maybe the Wolves have finally caught the illegitimacy of the old Clan Cry Wolf—literally. No one ever believes the Clans will come. So no one prepares.

Mark my warnings: The Wolves are splitting their forces and sneaking in the back door. And why not? No one would ever suspect. It's a perfect opportunity because the boss is looking in the wrong direction. We're here, no we're over here, and look—we're clear across the Sphere!

Be proactive in the coming year, dear readers. Beware of the wolf on the mountain. It's after your sheep.

—Jessica Burton

## Letters From Home -- Week 21

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**3136-0616**

Stefka Riviera  
18 May 3135  
Moore, Prefecture I

Brata Yeska,

I hope this message finds you well. I have been long thinking of you, and of home, since the darkness began. Relaying messages by courier is both difficult and expensive (and, I understand, hardly reliable), but such is the price if I am to tell you of this latest news:

I've found grandmother's tomb.

Nineteen years of searching since mother left us that locket, and after wandering on spaceships from home to distant Odessa, the clues led no further than Moore—our very own back yard. Leave it to our dear babushka to choose the scenic route, eh?

It's a simple site, Yeska, Spartan yet dignified. A marble block barely a half meter tall, bearing only the name "Stevens" (I knew Grandmother was not truly of Russian descent!) and no years of birth or death inscribed. The plot is one of only a dozen here that even bear names; in fact, the vast majority of this cemetery appears to have been devoted to victims of the Blakist holocaust, and a disaster here they call the Day of Fire.

I suppose it is fitting I should find our babushka in here, then, da?

Ah, but I wander again. Mother always said I am too verbose for my own good.

In any case, I must confess to crime of desecration. It was not enough to make an ultrasonic scan of the tomb, to see the urns in the coffin as I expected. (Correction: Urn, singular, for there was a body within as well.) I needed to know, and for that, I needed the DNA.

I will not tell you the details, Yeska. They are unnecessary. It is enough to say that I was able to obtain the evidence that suited me, evidence that proved—beyond all doubt—that I had indeed found our grandparents. (The remains in the urn were Grandmother's; she had been cremated just as mother said.)

In finding her, I have completed the first step of the journey she left behind in legacy.

Wish me luck, brata. I shall send to you another message when I attain the next clue.

With you in spirit,  
Stef

## **Lyrans Strike Alkaid!**

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**3136-0616**

### **Republic Garrison Under Siege; Heavy Losses Reported**

*NOBADI, Alkaid* - A small but tenacious group of mercenaries flying the mailed fist of the Lyran Commonwealth laid siege to a lightly-defended Republic garrison on the outskirts of the Nobadi Spaceport in the late hours of the night yesterday. According to as-of-yet unconfirmed reports, the siege, which is still under way, has inflicted heavy losses on both sides, including the total obliteration of the local ironium mining operation financed and maintained by the Republic of the Sphere. It is unclear as to what the motives of the rebels responsible for this reprehensible atrocity are, and their identity remains unknown. However, this media outlet has been advised by an anonymous source that a resistance cell operating under the alias 'Phoenix Technologies, Limited' is being considered as a prime suspect.

## The Hidden

3136-0616

From the Starling Files: "The Hidden"

Author: "Starling"

First Release: 3067

Revision History: 3073 (I), 3082 (II), 3098 (III), 3109 (IV), 3133 (V)

File IS in Archive. Download? Y/N

>>>Y

Standby: Initiating Secure-Link; Decryption Protocol Sigma-June-Sigma Initiated....

\* \* WARNING! DATA CORRUPTION AT SOURCE! FILE INTEGRITY COMPROMISED! \* \*

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

How They Vanish: A Case Study

So what makes a world simply disappear? Does a magician wave a magic wand, mutter an incantation, and poof—all records are expunged from history? Or is it more of an elaborate shell game, involving a conspiracy of millions to pull off? Well, dear reader, the answer to that one is a . . .

\* \* FILE CORRUPTION \* \*

. . . Jardine. We, of course, know of the world's existence from its one and only major export: the tabiranth—a cute critter that basically is a bizarre feline-dominant ecosystem's answer to the terrestrial horse. Enough of these creatures were sold to nobles across the Star League (mostly in the Free Worlds League) to ensure their survival, and yet—three hundred years later—even a dedicated archivist could not tell you with any certainty where their planet of origin went! Much less how it was lost.

That is, until recently, when Doctor Amanda Holyfield, a noted—and now, very much dead—exobiologist in the Free Worlds League stumbled upon a "new" species in the jungles of Shasta, a species she dubbed panteras ignus jardinalis. Or, less bio-babblic: "the Jardinian firecat." With genetic markers that positively tagged the critter as part of the Jardine ecosystem—and a definite cousin to the tabi itself—the fact that the species just "happened" to show up on a League world for the first time in hundreds of years spoke to one inescapable conclusion:

Someone had found one of the great Atlantises of our time . . .

\* \* FILE CORRUPTION \* \*

. . . Stevens. During the Jihad—after the Day of Fire on Moore, as it happens—they tracked the couple down there. What became of Alahni Stevens is anyone's guess, and the rumors swirl that she and Brooklyn did actually escape Apollyon's men, but they didn't surface again after that. Apollyon's subsequent return to Gibson, to remake his lost homeworld in the image of himself and his "Master," became a legend of the latter Jihad era. It's hard, in fact, to fault the Regulans for sterilizing the planet entirely, if only to rid the universe of the Manei Domini scourge forever, but . . .

\* \* FILE CORRUPTION \* \*

. . . The others? Gabriel lay in plain sight, the only one set in an inhabited system (leave it to the Steiners not to notice!), and Jardine was glassed over by '70 at least. The names of the others, though, remain whispers in the shadowy depths of the Republic's intel corps: Taussen, Obeedah, Mayadi. We do not even know if these are their actual names, or if the Cabal pulled another bait-and-switch as they had when Jardine became Herakleione and then "died."

What we do know is that THEY know, and they kept it all hidden even since the last embers of the Master's grand design fell apart on Terra, Gibson, and Circinus . . .

\* \* FILE CORRUPTION///RECORD ENDS \* \*

## WHERE IS EVERYBODY?

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**3136-0616**

**Hamal**

**Editorial**

Isn't that just nice? Everybody's gone. There's no one home here on Hamal. Legate Luis Avilez is somewhere in Prefecture III, and Governor Leki-Albano just departed for Fletcher. It was right after she received a couriered message from our illustrious Senator Rosario Perez. We here in Califa Hamal had been wondering where Rosario had disappeared to after all that noise between the Exarch, Paladins and Senators. We expected her to come straight home and let us know what happened. Did she?

Not a peep—until this message to Albano.

And of course I was successful in finding out what that missive said.

A funeral. Some Senator bit it in his sleep apparently. Now, understand, the Governor didn't even bother sending a regrets letter when Victor Davion died. And that was on Terra.

The two of them miss the opportunity to visit Terra, but they both leave for a Senator's funeral?

What is up with that? Shouldn't she be here? Worried about what happens to her world now that the Republic's gone? I know I am. We all are.

What they don't realize is that there are people here that no longer care about the republic or the Senator's little Alliance. We need to worry about us. Here. Now. Build up our industry and unite our people. We're scattered, and getting more scatter everyday.

And who's there to stop the ever encroaching Cappellans? Not the Knights, and certainly not any force we can gather together. We barely have enough industrial 'Mechs to move snow and ice about.

Something has to happen here on Hamal that'll shake the Governor, Legate and Senator into action.

Perez Montalbo



## Letters From Home -- Week 22

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3136-0623

Hey dad. Toni here.

By the time you get this, if you ever do, me and the rest of the Rock Brigade will have boosted for the next mission. We're going to be gone a while. I doubt I'll be able to fire off too many messages, but I will when I can. I hope all is well with you and mom and RivCarn. I miss you guys something fierce. I hope I can come home at some point and find Carnwath free of Falcons.

Dad... remember when we first got Mercy? I got kind of nostalgic as we were packing her into the dropship. It's a strange thing to remember, isn't it? I guess it was the look on your face when Primus Burkhard took us to the back of his warehouse and with complete sincerity said, "This is the ride for your daughter." Do you recall? I remember looking up at this scuffed up Zeus and wondering how it could stand at all without any scaffolding. It looked like it had been through all of the Succession Wars without even an oil change. We couldn't even tell what the original paint scheme had been... but now, I think Mercy was last with the Kell Hounds. I'm almost convinced of it.

And the mods! Only about half the onboard systems were regulation; the rest had been altered by someone who was either a genius or a complete nutball. Remember that crazy double cockpit, and the blending of Sphere and Clan tech? The weapons interface was completely backward, and oh, that heat control system! Whoever owned it before had completely rerouted all the pipes and conduits, altered the coolant flow from the heat sinks, and had added that manual override panel with all the dials and switches and blinky lights. Nothing was where it was supposed to be. I'm surprised old Primus didn't just scrap the thing for spare parts.

But he didn't, and I'm glad for it. Because everything just... well, it made sense. It went totally against everything I'd learned in school. But I got it. And I can't see piloting any other 'Mech now.

Don't worry, dad. I'm not in love with a machine or anything silly like that. But I can still see you shaking your head in disbelief and saying "Providence have mercy on whoever tries to pilot THIS contraption!"

Well. It's good to know the Almighty has a sense of humor, too.

Kiss mom for me. Be well.

Your daughter,  
T-

## Major Clash Reported in Augustine System!

3136-0623

AUGUSTINE [INN] — Planetary governing officials on Augustine today confirmed reports that a major clash between mercenary forces and unknown parties with suspected neo-Blakist ties has indeed erupted on Gethsemane, the uninhabited fifth planet in the Augustine system. Preliminary findings from Augustine's System Aerospace Security (SAS) forces dispatched to the scene show that the drive plumes of "numerous DropShips and an unconfirmed number of smaller craft" support a passing mining merchant's claim that a battle both in space and on the airless world's surface was waged, though the precise cause of the clash remains under investigation.

SAS vessels managed to intercept numerous scrambled transmissions from the combatant forces, and radio telescopes trained on the planet verified that at least one of the forces involved included elements of the Kirkpatrick's Invaders—a mercenary battalion formed in the mid-31st century. Opposing them was a force of indeterminate strength that sported what Augustine officials called "trademark neo-Blakist livery and organization."

"[The opposing force] employed BattleMechs and vehicles of both Star League and latter-31st century design," said Thomas Gibbs, a senior spokesperson for the Augustine SAS. "Enhanced images captured from the site showed that the 'Mechs and aerospace craft had a distinctive white paint scheme with red markings similar to those attributed to a neo-Blakist group known widely as the Cult of Apollyon."

Captain Harrow Jackson of the *Black Gold*, a renovated *Mule-II*-class ore freighter, claimed in a separate interview that the battle began in space somewhere in the vicinity of Gethsemane's largest moon, Calvary. Initially limiting their exchange between aerospace fighters, the combatants duelled until DropShips bearing the IFF and logos of Kirkpatrick's Invaders made planet fall near an abandoned mining settlement in Gethsemane's south polar region.

Jackson further added that while his vessel—departing from a routine mining operation on the planet—attempted to circle around the battle area, his sensors detected a cluster of small craft near the abandoned facility, including a converted *AstroLux* star yacht bearing Republic markings.

"Someone was still using the facility when the others came in," Jackson said. "I'm certain of that now."

SAS surveillance determined that the battle over and on Gethsemane lasted for almost two hours before the mercenary forces departed, almost as swiftly as they had arrived. A massive non-nuclear explosion at the disused mining facility apparently caught a fair number of the neo-Blakist forces in the blast, and at least one vessel bearing Apollyon cult markings was recovered—adrift but abandoned—in Gethsemane's orbit.

"We have every reason to believe this was an isolated incident," Gibbs remarked at the closing of this morning's press conference, "but rest assured we will be investigating this incident further."

At this hour, there remains no word on the whereabouts of the Invaders' mercenary force or their neo-Blakist pursuers. Officials close to the Augustine government have joined with many local residents, however, in expressing their alarm that groups like the Cult of Apollyon or the Broadsword Brotherhood actually have the means to mount a combat operation of any scale.

## TECH WATCH: What's in an *Atlas*?

3136-0623

There's been much ado lately about the recently spotted updated *Atlas*, and if you don't know what we're talking about you might go check out our Bigfoot footage from a few weeks back. Certainly members of the industry are taking notice, as evidenced by some letters we've been receiving, of which two examples follow.

**Abel K. Illonly**  
**Project Supervisor, Defiance Industries**

A daunting appearance has long been a desirable trait in a BattleMech. One need look no further than the axe wielding, fire-spewing Berserker chassis to appreciate the battlefield advantages of an intimidating machine. The "new" *Atlas*, however, takes this design philosophy to its illogical conclusion—it is a behemoth neither fearsome nor resilient.

True, the skull-like look of the cockpit has been retained, lending an air of doom to the 'Mech. It is also somewhat shorter and bulkier than the current elongated, ornamented, and almost universally reviled AS7-K2 *Atlas*. This gives an undeniable sense of solidity, which is augmented by the large-bore rotary autocannon, impressive LRM rack, and other heavy weaponry we have come to associate with assault 'Mechs. All it's missing is a hockey stick.

Utility, however, should win over aesthetic, and this is where the modern *Atlas* fails. Although it appears to have added mass, the large armor plates on the arms and legs can easily hinder joint movement when damaged. Worse, these plates can obstruct the torso-mounted missile racks even during normal locomotion. Too many of the autocannon elements are exposed, and while the heel/foot assembly of the *Atlas* is intended to look menacing, it is an easy, crippling target for opposing pilots who know what to look for.

Once these weaknesses are broadly known, any psychological benefit gained by the *Atlas* mystique will be more than offset.

**Marco Ghaly**  
**Lead Technician, Advanced Warfare Research Team, Victory Conditions Industries**  
**"No war is won without Victory Conditions."**

I think the latest *Atlas* design does an excellent job of returning the well-worn and time-tested assault-class 'Mech back to its roots, and maybe even digs a little deeper to uncover a bit more. Clearly, the newest design does an even better job of making the weapons as visible as possible, especially the rotary AC/20. I would guess that the ammo bin is reinforced with Cellular Ammunition Storage Equipment (C.A.S.E.) II, due to its high visibility. Likewise, I wouldn't be surprised if the same C.A.S.E. II were in the torso to protect the LRM 20 ammunition.

The latest *Atlas* also seems to be endowed with limited OmniMech capabilities. The torso-mounted weapons appear to be almost removable, possibly even modular, depending on the combat. Or perhaps they can even be jettisoned in hot situations to avoid explosions.

The redistributed bulk seems to be the result of a more compact design—fat replaced by muscle, so to speak. And though the independently swiveling armor plates might look like blast plates ripped off and welded on from the nearest spaceport, they are an extension of the menacing appearance the machine brandishes.

In addition to the weaponry, the additional armor is highly visible, letting the enemy see just what they have to punch through. I've heard reports of *Atlas* pilots overstepping in order to thrust a leg forward to raise those plates to protect the LRM 20 and SRM 6 in the torso, a maneuver made easier by the new leg/hip design. And getting in a shot at a shoulder actuator from the side is unheard of; the placement of the armor plates forces an opponent to either try a rear attack and risk being taken apart by support units, or face the monstrosity head-on, where you're almost guaranteed a world of pain. Lastly, if the technicians were smart, the armor plates should shear cleanly after enough damage has been sustained in order to avoid any mangled mess that could interfere with normal 'Mech operations.

Let's be honest: Parts for the older *Atlas* were scarce back in 3025. And with the technological advancements in BattleMech technology, expecting an old design to stay intact is impractical. Not even the king of the battlefield can remain king without changing with the times, and this new *Atlas* has managed to evolve while remaining as imposing as its predecessor.

## Letters from Home -- Week 23

3136-0630

Transmit Encryption: C10-Alpha-Mu-III  
 Priority: High Beta (Yellow)  
 From: Field Operative Dionysos (Mu/Delta V)  
 To: Olympus Command  
 Date: 28-05-35  
 Report follows:

1. Have confirmed the burial place of Brooklyn and Tyler Stevens on the outskirts of a mass grave on Moore near the capital city of Shizuoka.
  2. Sonar analysis of the remains positively identified the bones of Tyler Stevens and an urn fashioned in white gold presumed to contain the cremated remains of Brooklyn Stevens.
  3. Exhumation of remains and detailed study of burial site revealed another unknown party disturbed the remains as recently as two weeks prior, possibly using a portable, narrow-beam mining laser and a wire-guided probe to penetrate the joint casket of the deceased occupants. Local groundskeepers claim ignorance of any visitors to the site for at least the last several weeks.
  4. Genetic analysis of the remains further confirms the identities of Brooklyn and Tyler Stevens at the Moore burial site. Note: Fact that Tyler remains appeared largely in tact suggests that the Stevenses were not the victims of the so-called Day of Fire blaze during Blakist Jihad.
  5. Forensic analysis of Tyler remains places age of death at 50 to 55 years of age, placing date of death between 3071 and 3076, according to Tyler birth records obtained through Lyran genetic archives. This would place date of death in or near the time of Blakist capture and occupation of Moore during the Jihad. Cause of Tyler's death indeterminate.
- 5-1. Condition of Brooklyn remains makes forensic assessment of age and cause of death impossible.
6. Follow-up on unknown party mentioned in Point 3 revealed that cemetery records were queried via local internet a total of 16 times over the course of the previous two weeks, a comparatively significant increase in site traffic. Name searches most often used in this window included keywords "Stevens", "Brooke", "Tyler", "Rivers", and "Riviera", as well as birth and death years "3025", "3026", "3074", and "3075".
- 6-1. Backtrack of local internet access for above searches led to a Shizuoka spaceport hotel lobby and private room port. Hotel records showed that the room during that time was rented to an individual signed in as "Anastasia Reka". Individual in question was described as a young woman in her twenties, roughly 1.5 to 1.7 meters in height, of Caucasian features, with short black hair, brown or black eyes, and speaking with a Slavic or Russian accent. The guest has since checked out.
- 6-2. Spaceport records showed that an "A. Reka" arrived on Moore less than one month prior, aboard Republic-registered passenger vessel Lusitania IV. No record of departure could be found.
- 6-3. Republic Census Database search has found roughly 16 Republic-born individuals of the "Reka" family name, none of which match the description provided at the Moore spaceport hotel. Thus, conclusion is that the unknown party used a pseudonym, suggesting training in undercover or covert investigations.

Is there another in search of the Five? Agent Dionysos waiting further instructions.

Report ends.

—:—

*Tono,*

I hope this message finds you well. I bring you greetings from Luthien, in the name of the Dragon, and of the Cat.

We have heard much of your exploits, of the fighting to bring our ancestral worlds safely back into the Dragon's fold, to save them from the anarchy of the failing Republic. We have heard of the terrorists on Biham, the stalemate on Styx. We know how easy it is to lose heart when it appears as though politics as usual have returned our beloved lands to the days of Takashi.

But, tono, please—we beg of you—this path of the ronin, of the mercenary . . . it cannot lead you to greatness. It cannot bring you clarity. It cannot bring you peace. The blood of the Dragon flows through all our veins, but yours also carries the honor of the Cat. As does mine. Your beloved could not bear to dispute your decision. She loses hope even now.

But, my brother, I know your heart. I know your soul.

Return to your homeland, to your countrymen. Do so quickly. I swear to you that forgiveness will be yours if you do. These "Castoffs" of yours cannot restore your honor or your faith. They can only trade your soul and your life to the highest bidder.

Today that may be the people you once swore to reclaim for our brethren. Tomorrow, it could be the likes of Caleb Davion. Think on that.

And know also, my brother, the terrible price of the wrong choice. I would feel forever shamed if it were I who had to take my brother's life in the name of honor and atonement.

—Indras

## Letters from Home -- Week 24

3136-0707

Stefka Riviera

June 8, 3135

Yeska,

I can hear you saying "I told you so!" from here, you little freak, and you're most lucky I am not close enough by to knock the smug smirk off your face for it.

But, as you can see, I survived because I thought the exact same thing:

Someone's on to me.

Now, who it might be is still beyond me; those most concerned with keeping this secret are supposed to be dead. But mother did warn us that there would be those eager to keep the worlds hidden, even today.

But would ComStar actually sabotage a DropShip full of innocents just to get at me? Or could it even be IE? I hear they've kept a low profile since the holocaust, but never truly died.

Listen to me, now; hurling out random theories like those silly black-masked men on Towne. Of course, I'm not about to dismiss the fact that my ride off this world exploded mere hours after I opted to take an alternative route, but wasting time guessing who it is that's behind this whole thing is just...well, wasting time.

And that certainly will not do!

The search is on, brata Yeska. Grandmother was just the first clue, the proof that everything mother told us was true. The DropShip "accident" was merely confirmation. And while I'm sure our babushka may have won herself her share of enemies in all her travels, I am positive it is because of the Worlds that I have been marked.

I say this, because I was able to find my way into the planetary archives here. Sure enough, Grandmother's records did not exist, as though she only came to this world to be buried, with no ties to speak of with any of the residents. But then I decided to run a newscip search, looking back into the pre-holocaust records, while simultaneously running the smart countermeasure software Mother gave me. As soon as I ran a search for "Wolverine", the warnings flashed. Someone was watching for that name. Not unusual, really. Conspiracy theorists like to see how often their favorite mysteries are snooped around. The same thing happened when I searched for "Jardine" and "Gabriel". Again, nothing unusual there. For my troubles, I managed to get some local encyclopedia entries, pop culture tales, and even conspiracy links. Nothing new there, right? So when I went for broke and used the key-phrase "Five Worlds", the warnings flashed and suddenly I got that familiar message: "A spybot has been detected on your system"—a dozen times. A sweep through my noteputer caught about a bunch of the smart-code interlopers, so many that I'm not even sure if this program found all of them.

Counter-intel at its finest?

And for it all, what did I find on the local networks?

Nothing! Not even a single local conspiracy theorist site spinning yarns about Blakist machinations and mysterious men in black DropShips. I could find references to Wolverines, Vandenberg White Wings, and even the Genecaste—some of the biggest playgrounds for the modern paranoid—but not one whack-job rumor about the Worlds in the planetary nets, and yet someone saw fit to infect my system with spybots for the effort.

Okay, so it was stupid of me to try and search for the clues by internet, but now, at least, I know for certain that I've got an audience. And that's all the validation I need.

With you in spirit,  
—Stef

## **LinkNet back online**

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**3136-0707**

Well, mostly. We should maybe indicate that LinkNet is a loose affiliation of planets with MOSTLY working HPGs. After a scare on Hsien involving a certain 3-legged BattleMech, transmissions are back, and we'll be working through the backlog to start getting our readers all the news that's fit (or even not-so-fit) to see. We'll be dating articles from the time they were intended to be sent, so if you see dates from the past, that's us working through packets. We hope you'll bear with us.

## **Tsukude Government Falls! Rebels Declare World for Clan Wolf!**

**3136-0707**

TSUKUDE [INN] — In a lightning predawn blitzkrieg by local insurgent forces bearing the standards of the fractured Steel Wolves renegade faction, the planetary government of Tsukude collapsed today in what appears to be the final chapter of a months-long political crisis for the embattled world. Following the hasty withdrawal of government forces aboard three waiting DropShips, the rebel leadership wasted no time in declaring the capital city of Ogawa City—and through it, the entire world of Tsukude—a holding of Clan Wolf, inviting representatives of the chosen Clan of Kerensky to send a proper force to secure their prize.

Although sources tell INN that the pro-Republic government's retreat from Tsukude was orderly, there has been no word on the status of Planetary Governor Daniel Jaranto, nor of Takeda Fuchida, Tsukude's last appointed legate. Local emergency officials, however, described casualties from the final battle as "considerable," estimating over five hundred dead, including civilians caught in the crossfire, and nearly twice as many wounded.

Tsukude, a key world in the former Prefecture I area, has been unstable since the Sphere-wide HPG blackout began in 3132, but it wasn't until Exarch Jonah Levin's official declaration dissolving much of The Republic that the world began to teeter on the brink of political collapse. Desperate to maintain order and rejoin the shrinking Republic of the Sphere, the Tsukudan government attempted to enact several increasingly harsh measures on the local populace, many of them targeting the ownership of armaments and discouraging organized combat training beyond government-approved agencies such as police and militia forces. Naturally, these measures rankled the relatively large enclaves of ethnic Clanners, especially those who lived on the Shobenwa island continent.

Few were surprised when those Clanners rose against the government, but what shocked many was the amount of grassroots support they enjoyed as the fighting heated up, particularly after the rebels' self-appointed Star Captain Vanir proclaimed a Trial of Grievance against the Tsukudan government.

"The [planetary] government has lost faith with the Unity, and must fall into darkness," Vanir said, paraphrasing a line spoken by the Clans' founder, Nicholas Kerensky. "They have waged a war against their own people and have chosen to treat warriors as a lesser caste purely on the basis of cultural origin. It is time for the reign of the dictators to end. The people of Tsukude deserve honorable leadership and stability—the leadership of the true Wolves."

Vanir, who claims to hail from the Bloodname House of Radick, proclaimed after the victory in the capital that his forces would hold the world only until "legitimate representatives of the true Wolf Clan" come to claim it. This invitation was possibly aimed at encouraging the Wolf Clan—perennial enemies of Clan Jade Falcon—to check the potential ambitions of that Clan, which recently seized a number of Republic worlds in and around Skye. There has as yet been no word whether the Wolf Clan has accepted this invitation, or if any Wolf Clan forces are en route to formally secure the planet.



## Letters From Home -- Week 25

3136-0717

Transmit Encryption: C10-Alpha-Mu-III  
 Priority: High Beta (Yellow)  
 From: Field Operative Dionysos (Mu/Delta V)  
 To: Olympus Command  
 Date: 17-06-35  
 Report follows:

1. Following up report dated 7-06-35, have confirmed active local net searches on observed keywords, coinciding with known subjects of missions conducted by Brooklyn Stevens. Tracking programs have traced the searches to a portable, off-network system.
  2. Close-down of all local net sites detailing the Five is complete. Self-terminating virus ware has proven 100% successful.
  - 2-1. Off-net system noted in Point 1 was auto-targeted by self-terminating virus ware, in accordance with protocol directives. Effect of attack unknown.
  3. Cross-reference of off-network search queries "Jardine", "Gabriel", and "Five Worlds" confirm known correlation to archival reports on the Five. Topics thus presumed to be interrelated. Are Jardine and Gabriel among the Five?
  4. Secondary observations into ongoing investigation of *Lusitania IV* disaster reveal no conclusions by local authorities. SatNet override and subsequent orbital scans can find no evidence of black box beacons, supporting initial conclusion that flight recorder did not survive re-entry.
  - 4-1. Independent investigation on *Lusitania IV* disaster has turned up anomalies in the personal record of two spaceport service crewmen, Jacob MacKenzie and Jorge Shrebb. Discontinuities in personal records suggest falsified or manipulated identities. Possibly to cover criminal history or undercover service. Follow-up investigations remain inconclusive.
  - 4-2. Suggesting potential actions surrounding *Lusitania IV* disaster and anomalous spaceport crewmen: capture and interrogate either/both MacKenzie and Shrebb; eliminate either/both subjects; expose either/both subjects to authorities.
  5. Follow-up to unknown party first mentioned in report dated 28-05-35: Analysis of assumed identity "Reka", translated from native Russian to "river". Search of variant names has uncovered an estimated 30,461 possible matches, narrowed to 48 after factoring latest travel records booked using InterStar Travels and Shipping. Of which, only three individuals match recent transits to Moore: Daphne Fleuve, Lester River, and Stefanie Riverside. Of these three, only one—Riverside—comes up as anomalous, suggesting another pseudonym.
  - 5-1. Follow-up on Point 5 indicates Riverside first purchased a berth aboard InterStar cruise from Lyons in Prefecture IX. Search and analysis of Lyons census database recommended to determine Riverside's true identity.
  - 5-2. At the time of the disaster, Riverside was not on board the *Lusitania*, having cancelled her reservation less than three hours prior to scheduled launch time.
- This hunt grows complicated. Suspecting additional agencies may be involved, possibly including Republic elements. Agent Dionysos waiting further instructions.
- Report ends.

## The Saffel Debacle: The Dragon Indecisive

3136-0714

Anyone watching the news from the dwindling remains of Prefectures I, II, and III can see that an awful lot of red is spewing across the upper left quadrant of our crumbling Republic. Blood red. Combine red.

The Snakes of the Draconis Combine weren't necessarily the first buzzards to start circling when the HPG grid crashed, but they have certainly numbered among the most bloodthirsty. Our own former prefect couldn't form her splinter faction of Drac-backed pirates fast enough, and then her family had to get involved before too long. But as quickly as they sliced into our territories, evidently aiming straight for the heart of the Republic itself, the Dracs managed to bog down the moment Tormark left for Luthien. Nowhere is this more apparent than worlds like Saffel. It is here that maybe we got a glimpse of what's going on back home, too.

See, since their arrival on Saffel (and Styx, too, from what I hear), the Combine invasion has become a quagmire. The Republic troops facing them are in poor shape, easy prey for anyone with the firepower and determination seen when Sakamoto led the invasion, but soon after Tormark took the helm, everything just stalled.

And why? Well, in this commentator's opinion, it's because the Dragon has suddenly developed a bad case of indecisiveness. I wouldn't quite go so far as to call it a conscience, but maybe—just maybe—Tormark took a little more Republic with her when she ran home to the Kurita clan. She's reached out, according to reports, not only to her native Snake friends, but also to the Nova Cats and the Spirit Cats, and she's combined a lot of these elements with her own piratical Dragon's Fury as part of this mish-mash of troops she's been throwing at worlds like Saffel and Styx. In response to this, she's been seeing resistance—stiff resistance—from her former countrymen, the people she thought too weak to keep the ideals of a free and just Republic alive.

These combined factors make the Dragon—now personified by Tormark (whose appearance has changed radically from that of a delicate and respectable dusky-skinned Republic prefect to some spiky-haired, neo-punk in a DCMS uniform)—look for all the world like a young girl who just got cold feet at her own wedding.

Yeah, I said it, and you read it! For all intents and purposes, the Combine is facing some kind of crazy identity crisis since Tormark returned to its fold, and now that some of Tormark's own former countrymen have put up a solid fight against them—including, but not limited to, suicide bombings and city-sized infernos—maybe the Dracs are starting to realize that they don't want a piece of the Republic as much as they thought they did. Maybe even Tormark's own troops are starting to grow a conscience, and maybe the Clanners—both real and poser—are starting to realize the whole thing stinks of Black Luthien politics that have taken advantage of a grand cultural heritage to further take advantage of a hero's legacy in a moment of blind opportunism.

In short, maybe the Combine can't decide what to do because someone close to the throne has decided to go back to Byzantine politics as usual, and the folks elected to do their bidding are finally starting to realize that the whole affair may not be in the Dragon's best interest after all.

## Falcons on Gladius?

3136-0721

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Anyone traveling to or through the remains of Prefecture VIII, be advised: Clan Jade Falcon is on the move again.

According to reports from courier ships passing through the ravaged remnants of what was once the Skye Federation, Jade Falcon military JumpShips and fighters were engaged in an operation in the planetary system of Gladius. True to their hyper-aggressive nature, the Falcons hailed the *Odyssey*-class courier JumpShip *Falchion* exactly once before unleashing a Star of heavy aerospace fighters in an attempt to force her captain's surrender, ignoring a flag of neutrality.

Unfortunately for the Falcons, the *Falchion*'s captain managed to execute an emergency jump using the ship's Lithium-Fusion batteries, but not before a close fighter pass holed the vessel's aft grav deck and claimed the lives of three crew.

Though the captain's quick thinking spared the ship, the *Falchion* limped toward Lyran space without benefit of her jump sail, having lost it in the emergency jump. Upon reaching a safe port, her captain relayed his findings to LinkNet and other reputable news services, providing holovid footage that showed two Falcon JumpShips half-loaded with combat DropShips. At least two *Union*-Cs and one Broadsword were visible, backed up by an *Outpost*-class DropShip sporting obvious signs of battle damage and a *Carrier*-class DropShip. Heavy communication interference during the encounter rendered it impossible for the *Falchion* to warn the planet Gladius of its coming doom at the hands of at least a full Cluster of Falcon shock troops, and HPG contact with the world remains impossible.

LinkNet is offering a reward to any vessel crews daring enough to pass through the Gladius system and investigate these events further, but be advised that the Jade Falcon Clan's recent invasion of Republic territory has clearly demonstrated their willingness to disregard all civilized conventions of war, including the sanctity of JumpShips or the neutrality of civilians in armed conflicts. Use of non-standard jump points is therefore advised.

## Letters From Home -- Week 26

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3136-0721

June 30, 3135  
Lyons, Prefecture IX

Stef,

What have you gotten yourself into, *sistra*? Does not two generations of our family dead before their time serve as a warning enough for you and these childish dreams of adventure?

Of course not, which is why you have run off to Moore, to pursue a legacy that should have remained safely buried with Grandmother.

And I must be equally foolish, because in spite of the fact that your search will surely lead the secret-keepers back to us, I have done as you suggested, nonetheless. Attached to this message and sealed by verigraph is a result of all my research on the Worlds. Mother would be turning over in her grave to know I, of all people, would be helping you, but now I am thinking that the real aim of your madness is merely to have a family reunion in the afterlife. Well, if that is to be the case, than so be it! You dragged us into this again, *sistra*. I hope what you find enclosed herein will at least prove to be useful enough that we are not giving our lives away in vain...

Always,  
—Yeska R.

## Naked Emperors

3136-0721

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At a time when the best ruler in the entire Inner Sphere has locked himself in a hidey-hole, we're left with a vast array of would-be leaders who strut around in an attempt to look regal and win our confidence, but in truth are just as naked as the emperor in the ancient Terran story. The good news is, just because they want to lead doesn't mean you have to follow. You can hold out for something better.

Now, space does not allow me to detail the eccentricities and failures of various leaders across the Sphere, so allow me to concentrate on my favorite targets—the traitorous senators of The Republic. Their claim to power is the thinnest possible—our families have always had power, they say, so we should have power too. No matter how weak or corrupt those bloodlines are, power should stay in them because—well, just because. Because that's the way it's always been.

Are you convinced by that argument? I'm not. And it seems the Senators aren't either. Witness the rumors about their involvement in the death of Senator Hier last year, killing off a senator who wouldn't dance to their tune. What happened to their respect of bloodlines? To their claims that certain bloodlines *deserve* to rule? I guess that all flies out the window when their asses are on the line.

And that's leadership in the Inner Sphere today—no vision, just people looking for more power for themselves, more personal gain. All of you out there—don't be fooled. Don't give support to someone who doesn't deserve it. Hold out for a real leader.

Levin's gotta come out of his shell someday.

—DeandraL  
Augustine

## **LinkNet Backlog Clearing**

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**3136-0804**

Our packet sorting is nearing completion! Quite a bit of news while we were gone, and lots of Levin's List entries. And be sure to check the Letters from Home... one just might be for you.

