



CLASSIC BATTLETECH™

STARTERBOOK: WOLF AND BLAKE

• CATALYST GAME LABS •

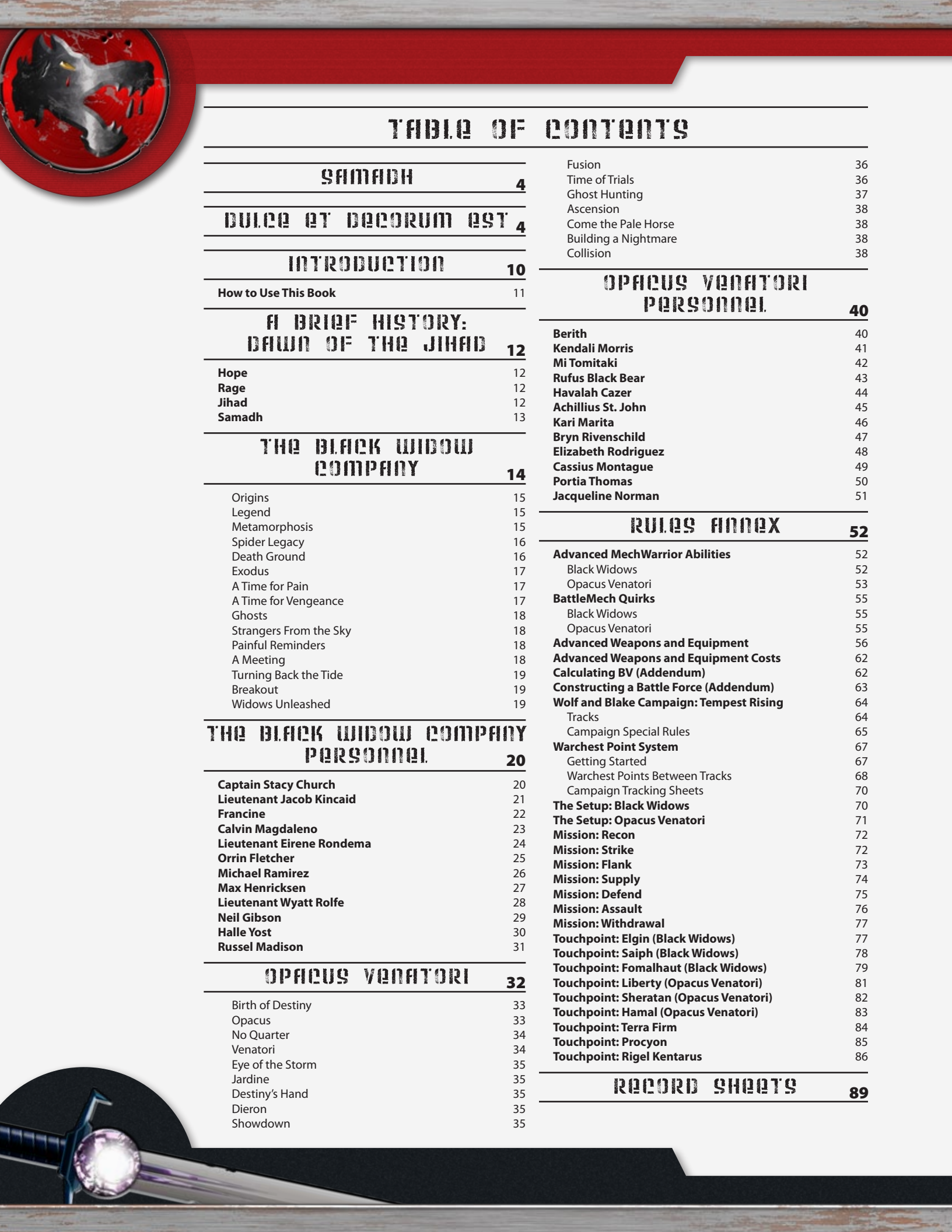


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RA/WB

For the first time half of the Black Widows fight as a cohesive force on Outreach.

SAMADH DULCE ET DECORUM EST

Berith gathers his forces on Hamal before wiping out another noble house.



WB



**Outside Harlech
Outreach
Word of Blake Protectorate
22 January 3070**

Captain Stacy Church looked up at the smoking hulk of the DropShip from the cockpit of her *Zeus* and held in the shuddering breath she felt tugging at her chest. The *Leopard* would never fly again, but she'd already seen the surviving crew escape in a skimmer. Three of her 'Mechs were already disembarked, but Barstow's *Phoenix Hawk* was jammed in the egress cradle. Eirene Rondema's *Gallowglas* twisted at the torso before firing its lasers back into the bay. There was flicker of reflected light and then a rending crash that roared out of the bay door.

"I'm free," Barstow called.

"Assemble on me," Stacy said, turning the *Zeus* to face the terrain. She shook her head. It was just like Arc-Royal. "Black Widows," she whispered. "Natasha would have killed us all by now." Barely on-world two minutes and already they'd lost a DropShip and had to shoot one of their 'Mechs free. Barstow's *Phoenix Hawk* appeared at the 'Mech bay door.

"Looks like home," he said, just before a spear of PPC fire stabbed directly into the PXH's chest.

"Contact!" Jacob Kincaid called. In her HUD, Kincaid's *Uziel* spun in place and then dashed forward, both arms coming up. The rotary cannons in each arm spun up to speed and then belched flame as they spat armor-piercing rounds at their maximum rate of fire. Stacy started the *Zeus* lumbering after him and looked to his target, a gunmetal-gray *Clint*. She zoomed in on the 'Mech's insignia and snarled.

Broadsword Legion.

"Kill it!" she spat. Her fingers brought the *Zeus*' weapons up to bear before her mind caught up with what she was driving. Her old *Mad Cat* would have ranged with no problem, but this *Zeus* wasn't a long-arm fighter. She jammed the throttle forward and gritted her teeth against the *Zeus*' heavy footfalls. A white-silver blur snapped past her as Rondema fired, and she saw Barstow's *Phoenix Hawk* leap skyward on blue-white plasma jets.

Two more gray BattleMechs stepped around the escarpment beside the *Clint*. The *Zeus*' computer pinged out identifications as soon as the icons appeared on her HUD. Stacy glanced at them from the corner of her eye—*Initiate* and *Buccaneer*, familiar Word of Blake machines—but kept watching the range counter come down.

"We can't get trapped here against the DropShip," Kincaid said. The buzz-saw roar of his rotaries cut back as he scaled back the rate of

**Hagia Sophia, Istanbul
Terra, Word of Blake Protectorate
10 January 3070**

Precentor Benjamin Emory stared at the *mihrab* in front of him. He admired the intricate artwork and mosaic that covered the false doorway; he longed to rise from his chair, reach out with his hand and caress the marble, feel the ages worn into the stone.

Instead, his fleshy hand fingered the seam of his simple robe, tied tight around his waist.

Once he crossed that threshold, everything would change.

He hesitated again, feeling the weight of his prosthetic pulling at his shoulder. He remembered in the past, when Ri would massage the aches in his neck and shoulders when he had furlough. Benjamin closed his eye briefly, savoring the memory. He could almost feel her delicate fingers running through his scalp, caressing.

The memory triggered an involuntary shudder, causing him to convulse briefly. His prosthetic swung slightly, tapping his thigh. He bowed his head in remembrance of his late wife.

Blinking back the threatening tears, he focused again on the *mihrab*. Lost himself in the depths of the ancient art, painted so long ago by Muslim artisans, then restored with loving care shortly after Jerome Blake had seized Terra to safeguard it.

Slowly, carefully, like pulling strands of yarn from a tapestry, he began to take the memories of his life and examine them. Mistakes made. Moral choices gone awry. Lives taken. So much bloodshed, violence, war. His responsibilities training elite soldiers to conduct missions that are never discussed, never mentioned.

In his mind, he laid these all out in the open. The horror of it all was there. Naked, for his soul and mind to examine. Repulsed by his own actions, he shuddered again, the spasm driving him to his knees.

Finally, the silence. It thundered around him, there in the apse. The millennia of mankind's work silently mocked him; his life was but dust, compared to the art and magnificence that surrounded him. Created in an age when man was planetbound, worshipping God and Devil, suborning himself to the presence of higher powers.

He remembered his studies at Sandhurst, the "Age of Expansion" that occurred when man finally spread to space. Religion had a rough time of it then, attempting to reconcile spiritual faith and the stars. But when it came down to it, faith still won out. It was a core component of the human machine. To kill faith, killed the man.

In that moment, his choice became crystallized. No longer was he subjected to the whims of man, the wiles of the flesh. He glanced down at the prosthetic limb again, feeling the weight of it and savoring it. His flesh hand came up and touched the



fire, but he didn't stop. The *Uziel* was dancing, juking from side to side, but the streams of yellow-white tracers never came off the newly-arrived *Initiate*.

"We won't," Stacy said. She cut left around a boulder kicked loose when the *Leopard* came down and then tracked back right, toward the trio of Broadsword 'Mechs. Rondema's *Gallowglas* kept pace with her, while Barstow sprinted forward to support Kincaid. "We'll cut through these bastards and get free."

"Three mediums against a heavy lance?" Kincaid's voice was flat, cold. Stacy recognized the tone, the same she'd heard on the Trial fields on Arc-Royal when the odds were against him. He was furious. "There's something else coming, Captain. Not even Broadswords are this stupid."

"You don't know them," Stacy murmured. Her weapons console pinged, and she brought the *Zeus'* right arm up to bear. The *Zeus* staggered as its foot sunk a half-meter into a sinkhole. Pain lanced through her jaw as Stacy's teeth clacked together, and for a rage-and-pain filled second she was back in Harlech three years ago... she saw Marita's *Thug*, saw Grape's cockpit... heard the scream...

Her finger convulsed on the trigger, and the fearsome heavy PPC in the *Zeus'* right gauntlet erupted in cyan-tinged vengeance. The

Clint fell, its torso shattered, blue-white sparks and static tracers coiling around its torso like feather-light fingers.

"More 'Mechs!" Kincaid called. His swift-footed *Uziel* had circled the DropShip's hulk, showing him what the mass of metal hid from Stacy's scanners. "It's a full Level II, Stacy! We need to break out of here, now."

"Unity!" Stacy swore. She stomped the *Zeus* forward, watching the heavy PPC recharge indicator and eyeing the range indicator for the Disintegrator cannon. The *Buccaneer* started walking backward, its energy weapon still firing. Rondema's *Gallowglas* took a slug of ions in the right chest, staggering it a bit, but the 'Mech steadied quickly and replied with a barrage of laserfire.

"All right," she said, clamping down on her rage. "Let's go through these bastards, then. We'll make for the Ridges. If the resistance groups Wolfnet told us about are still active, that's where they'll be." She came up next to the downed *Clint* and paused. "We'll be here for a while, after all." Through the polarized cockpit canopy Stacy saw movement. A quick check of her sensors told her the *Clint* was dead. Dead like the Wolf Spiders. Dead like the regiments. Dead like her Trinary. Dead like the Wolf.

"And now so are you," she whispered to the pilot, and lowered the PPC.

mechanical eye, another replacement resulting from the failure of his body.

He looked up, his one eye hardening. *These are the times that try men's souls*, the ancient saying went. *My soul is tested by the constant failing of my flesh. It is time I finally accept that I cannot continue as I am. I need to be more, in order to save others from my former fate.*

"I am Manei Domini," Benjamin whispered. The simple statement echoed around him, fading to a sibilant sigh. He was a hand of the Master. He was more than human.

He had to be.

It was all he had left.

Ahead of him, an ornate door silently swung open. Softly, so quiet he nearly missed it, came one word. It rolled into the room, enveloping the columns on the edge of the apse.

"Filii."

It was *his* voice. Calling him in the tongue of the Order. *Son*.

In one fluid motion, Benjamin stood and with measured, determined steps, approached the open door. Nothing could be seen through the doorway, but he could hear the soft chant swell with each step.

"Apolluon, Baselius Oteilon Trismakar Despotu..."

Apollyon, Prince of Scars, thrice-blessed of the Master... The translation came unbidden to his mind.

Benjamin stepped to the threshold and stopped. He

stared straight ahead, letting his eye adjust. He became very aware at that moment of the extreme heaviness of his prosthetics. None of them were powered—it had been forbidden, for the ceremony. He felt incomplete. Ashamed.

Weak.

"Despotu Sunkoloi Onomainomen."

...with limbs united we call on you by name. He quietly mouthed the rest of the invocation, dropping his gaze to the floor.

Silence.

Gradually, his eye adjusted to the dimness. He could see several Manei Domini—the Ascended—flanking the rose-colored marble path in front of him. At the end, upon a raised dais and flanked by two shimmering Purifier battle armor, Him. Precentor of the Manei Domini. Magister of the Dominus Order.

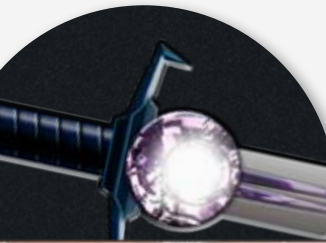
"Blake, *eleison!*" The cloaked figure standing on the dais announced.

"Blake, *eleison!*" The rows of Manei Domini responded in perfect unison.

"Terra, *eleison!*"

"Mea culpa, Terra!" came the unified reply.

The response echoed in the sanctuary, bouncing off each pendentive as if in some spiritual symphony.



* * *

"They're still behind us," Barstow reported. His *Phoenix Hawk* was stuck in the rear of the small column, ground-bound after a Broadsword Gauss round took out its jump jets. "Four 'Mechs and what I think is a Manticore."

Stacy looked around at the jutting peaks. This section of the Ridges had been a wilderness preserve, a tourist attraction and frequent recreation spot for off-duty Dragoons. She'd skied here at least six times in the last ten years. Eirene Rondema's *Gallowglas* was breaking trail, twisting at the torso first left, then right, keeping the advance covered. Stacy followed closely behind, letting Kincaid and his *Uziel* range between the rearguard and the main body.

"They're not catching up, either," Stacy said. She looked at her tactical display again, trying to match her memories of the terrain to the offset elevation lines on the map. "We can lose them in the foothills. Set a good ambush, I think."

"They'll catch us before that," Jacob Kincaid said, his voice as flat as Stacy had ever heard it.

"Then I guess we'll just have to kill them, won't we?" Stacy snapped.

She felt a vibration in her controls, a discomfort through the thin fabric of her gloves. She let go of the targeting yokes and flexed her fingers, but now she felt the dull thrum of the oscillation through her command couch. It was a different frequency from the now-

familiar shiver of the *Zeus*' fusion engine. Clutching her controls again, Stacy checked her screens.

There was a new blip on the strategic display.

"DropShips coming in," Rondema called. Ahead of her, through her HUD, Stacy watched the *Gallowglas* cant its torso back and fire a burst from its lasers. The arrowhead shapes of two DropShips flashed overhead, plasma from their drives distorting the atmosphere around them, and then the tactical display sprouted a cluster of new red blips.

"Reinforcements," Stacy whispered. "Unity."

"Are we sticking with the 'kill them all' plan, then?" Barstow asked. The false humor in his voice cut through the dread in Stacy's chest, replacing it with a coolness, a hard, solid clarity of what must be done.

"We are," she said. "Pivot in place and engage the stragglers."

She brought the *Zeus* around and brought her throttle up, trusting Rondema to keep pace in her lighter 'Mech. The PPC was already hot, the pulse lasers in the eighty-ton assault 'Mech's torso pre-heated, the medium lasers in the eighty-ton assault 'Mech's torso pre-heated, and the Disintegrator cannon already loaded with cluster-shot mayhem.

"We're Dragoons," she said as she cleared a copse of evergreens and spotted the first of the Broadsword 'Mechs already trading fire

Each Ascended Manei Domini turned towards him, their eyes full of hate. For some, their fists and claws clenched and unclenched. Taloned toes tapped softly. If the Precentor wished it, they would tear him from limb to limb in a heartbeat.

Benjamin withered under their malevolent gazes. It was clear—they could see his weaknesses, his frailty. They saw through his fragile, stained soul. And they were disgusted.

One by one, they turned their backs to him. Forsaking his presence.

He shivered, the tremors threatening to drop him where he stood. He forced his flesh to obey—surely, if he fell, he would die. They wouldn't let him live, after such a human display of emotion.

Slowly, two lamp stands lit up, their small flames casting fire and shadow across the dais. It bathed the cloaked figure in light, while casting the rest in darkness.

"Approach," came the voice again.

Knowing what was required, Benjamin undid his robe and stepped onto the rose marble path, devoid of everything, save his corrupted flesh.

As he passed each pair of Ascended warriors, a new chant began. Quietly, it increased in tempo and volume until the sound of it crashed around them all.

"Benedictus Blake. Benedictum Nomen Sanctum eius.

Blessed be Blake. Blessed be his holy name.

"Benedictus Toyama Conrad, verus homo, et in Sanctis.

Blessed be Conrad Toyama, true man and saint.

"Benedictus Terra, homo cunabula.

Blessed be Terra, cradle of man.

"Benedictus technologies, homo artificiosus.

Blessed be technology, works of man.

"Benedictus manei, praesul presul Terra.

Blessed be the Hands, protectors of Terra.

"Benedictus sanctus Apollyon, ianitor illac."

Blessed be Apollyon, keeper of the path.

"Benedictus Dominus! Magister Cor eius Decretum!"

Blessed be the Master! Master of the Sacred Order!

Benjamin found himself propelled by the crescendo of praises, halting as the last one thundered. His skin prickled as the sweat that coated him began to cool. He kept his gaze locked on the first step of the dais, not daring to look up.

He did not want to corrupt his lord and master with the insolence of his organic eye.

"Why are you here?"

The question came from one of the battle armor troopers. His left, he thought, though his ears were Frail—the new implant there was also powered off.

"I am Manei Domini."

"What does that mean?" The other trooper, this time.



with Barstow. It was a heavy machine, a gray-painted *Excalibur*. She saw the silver flash of the Gauss rifle round that caved in Barstow's cockpit, shearing the *Phoenix Hawk's* head clean off even as the *Hawk's* lasers stitched emerald light across the *Excalibur's* torso. Stacy snarled a wolf's smile and squeezed her triggers.

The LB 10-X autocannon in the *Zeus'* left forearm belched fire and kicked, the recoil momentarily swinging the *Zeus'* torso out of alignment. Stacy fought her controls and brought the *Zeus'* other weapons to bear even as the cannon fire tore at the *Excalibur's* chest. The heavy PPC erupted to life, cutting at the *Excalibur's* shattered armor and exploding through it. White-hot ravening particles ate at the 'Mech's inner structure, tearing at the protection around its fusion engine. A flare on the *Zeus's* infrared monitors told her she denuded the engine of protection, and it automatically shut down to prevent a rupture. The *Excalibur* collapsed backward, smoking, as Stacy slowed the *Zeus* near the wreckage of Barstow's *Phoenix Hawk*.

Two more heavy Broadsword 'Mechs stepped forward past the downed *Excalibur*, weapons flashing. Despite the pecking of Kincaid's light autocannons, both Broadwords hit, shaking the *Zeus* with PPC and laser fire. A brace of missiles streaked past

Stacy's cockpit canopy close enough to rattle her console with their exhaust. She let go of her targeting yokes and clutched in the *Zeus'* gyro, fighting to keep the eighty-ton 'Mech on its feet.

"A company behind us," Rondema panted. Static cut through her transmission as she opened fire on the new arrivals. "I count twelve 'Mechs and several tanks," she said. Stacy noted that she didn't ask for orders or complain about the odds. She just started shooting.

"Surrounded," Stacy whispered, getting the *Zeus* under balance. The Broadwords split, the *Grasshopper* turning away to harass Kincaid's running *Uziel*. The *Grand Dragon* stalked forward, counting on the *Zeus'* disorientation to protect it from the Dagoon's big guns. She grinned, feeling as though she were detached from her own perceptions, and moved her crosshairs.

"We're the Black Widows, you shithead" she said. The PPC took the *Grand Dragon* in the right arm, tearing at the armor there, while the Disintegrator blasted at the armor over the sixty-ton 'Mech's left leg. The *Grand Dragon* spun and collapsed without firing a shot, but it was still moving.

Kincaid's *Uziel* was sprinting, twisting at the waist to keep the *Grasshopper* under a constant barrage of fire. When Stacy looked up from the *Grand Dragon* she saw the medium 'Mech cut inward for an instant to unleash a volley of short-range missiles and lasers. The

"I am the Master's Hand. His will is my will."

"And what, Frail One, is the will of the one who is?" That voice—that was Apollyon. He recognized the gentle tone; a father, speaking to a son.

"To guide Man into the Destiny foretold by Blake and his Blessed Saints. To protect man from themselves. To prepare a path, for those to follow."

He felt the blow coming—his years of training in ROM's Light of Mankind had honed his instincts. Yet, he did not flinch when a sharp jab raked down his spine.

Benjamin dropped to his knees, his hands before him.

"Frail is the flesh. Weak is the soul encased within. Manei Domini are but a step. Who are you to suppose more?" The voice was familiar. *Avitue, perhaps? Or Lamashti?*

"I am nothing. Flesh binds me, entraps me. Its corruption has poisoned the way, dimmed the light of the Blessed Blake," he managed to recite the response, pushing the pain away. The pressure on his spine increased.

"Blake, *eleison!*" Benjamin cried out. His back was on fire, the flesh burning, the sins of his past bearing him to the ground.

"Mercy is for those who know the truth." Apollyon.

"Confiteor! Confiteor, Sanctis Apollyon, omnibus Sanctis! Et vobis, fratres: quia peccavi nimis cotitatione, verbo et opere!" Confess! Confess

to Apollyon and all the Saints!

The flames ripped across his legs, encircled his torso. *To all whom I have sinned exceedingly in thought, word, and deed!* His eye squeezed shut, driving the pain from his mind, and failing.

He raised his flesh hand and struck the ground three times. "Mea culpa! Mea culpa! MEA MAXIMA CULPA!" *My fault! My fault! My most grievous fault!*

The heat instantly ceased. The pain lessened, receded.

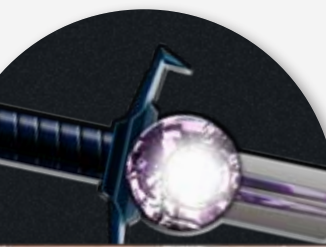
Apollyon spoke. His voice was strong, decisive. It resonated throughout the sanctuary. *"Misereatur tui Blake, et, dimissis peccatis tuis, perducat te ad vitam aeternam."*

May Blake have mercy upon you, your faults forgiven, your life now everlasting.

Benjamin pulled himself into a kneeling crouch. His tears flowed freely, the joy of his forgiveness overwhelming him. He raised his hand—his prosthetic, true hand!—to his face, marveling. All of his cybernetics were active, triggered no doubt by his confession of failure and weakness.

Now, the perfection of the machine was master.

No longer would his flesh fail him and those around him. No longer would he be trapped by the limitations of weak human flesh. Finally, he had control. The sanctifying purity of the machine placed him higher than the Frails around him.



Grasshopper twisted beneath the fire but came shooting, tearing at the *Uziel*'s lighter armor with lasers.

"I can't hold them for long," Rondema called. In Stacy's HUD her *Gallowglas* was being boxed in by a lance's worth of light Broadswords, while the heavier 'Mechs closed slowly, respectful of the *Dragoon*'s accuracy with her PPC.

The *Grand Dragon* shifted on the ground and fired, burning the soil between the *Zeus*' legs to ash with its Lord's Light PPC. Stacy grunted and shifted her aim, holding back her Gauss Rifle in favor of the paired medium lasers and the autocannon. The *Grand Dragon* shuddered and died beneath the onslaught, its already-weakened torso eaten away.

"Come back this way," she ordered. "We'll cut our way out."

"There are more behind this one," Kincaid said. The *Uziel* streaked past the *Grasshopper*, delivering an armor-shattering kick as it did. The *Grasshopper*'s return stroke missed and dumped the seventy-ton 'Mech on its back.

Stacy brought the *Zeus* around and triggered her lasers, burning at the *Grasshopper*'s armor as it lay on the ground. The heat in her cockpit was stifling, and she needed a moment to let the big 'Mech's heat sinks work. Without the *Grasshopper* they'd have a moment's breather. Eirene Rondema's *Gallowglas* charged past, long-range missiles tearing at the ground behind it.

"We may not get out," Kincaid said.

"Then we remind these turncoats why people still talk about Misery," Stacy said. She twisted the heat-burdened *Zeus* around to face the approaching Broadswords. A half-white, half-gray *Lightray* darted in to paint her armor with its lasers. She ignored it.

Black-painted 'Mechs appeared in the trees around them, stepping from crevasses and chasms. Green icons popped to life on Stacy's tactical display. She stared at them—*Dragoons*?—and then looked up at the *Griffin* leading them. It wore a rampant red wolf's head. Four—six, no—*Unity*, eight 'Mechs appeared. The Broadswords hesitated, and Stacy swore and slapped her console. There were still—they were *all*—*Dragoons*!

"Black Widows, attack!"

"Arise," spoke Apollyon. The flames from the lamp stands flared brighter as Benjamin rose.

"No longer are you Benjamin Emory, for that past has been burned into the ash of time. No longer will you succumb to the sin and frailty of the flesh. No longer are you simply Manei Domini.

"From this moment forward, you are Berith. Master over death, adjudicator of the unjust, and protector of the frail."

A cloak was placed around Berith's shoulders, enfolding him in crimson. He could feel the individual fibers of the cloth, the exquisite stitching on the back. Without thinking, he knew it was a crest only recently he had come to know.

"Children. Welcome your brother," gestured the Precentor of the Manei Domini. Gently, he took Berith's shoulder and turned him to face the rest of the Ascended. It was a larger group than he had noticed on his entrance. No doubt, the failings of his normal eye. With his true eyesight restored, he could see clearly his new brethren.

Astaroth, Lamashti. Azrael. Others, whom he did not recognize. Yet. And some he knew were absent, attending business elsewhere.

His brethren. His...family.

They looked upon him with equal coolness. And something more—respect.

"*Benedictus Specter Omicron Berith, Imperator Opacus Venatori!*"

Berith's eye widened slightly at the unexpected pronouncement. *Imperator?*

With no hesitation, he bowed as he contemplated Apollyon's words. *Imperator*. The word rolled around his head as he savored each syllable. Then he stopped short.

If I am named high commander, then...

Berith glanced at Apollyon next to him. As if reading his *fili*'s mind, the Precentor of the Manei Domini nodded. What that one gesture meant was obvious. Nihjo was no longer among the living. Berith was now third in command, behind Astaroth. Truly, a formidable honor...

There was time later to process it, however. The Ascended were moving together, falling into ranks. Berith moved to the side, as he knew was proper. The new triple-core processor had already been downloaded with etiquette and protocol procedures for his new position.

Apollyon stood before them, surveying them. Nodding silently. Then, slowly, he raised his hands above his head, encompassing them all.

"*Benedictus Ascendi Sanctus! Manei Domini, sanguis eius pretiosissimus!*"

Blessed be the Ascended Saints! Hands of the Master, his most precious blood!

Their reply thundered through the sanctuary, threatening to drop the roof of the ancient temple upon them. "*Benedictus Apollyon, Basileus Oteilon Trismakar Despotou Skopos Oimou!*"

Blessed be Apollyon, Prince of Scars, Thrice-blessed of the Master, Guardian of the Path!

Berith smiled. Now, *I am worthy...*



RA/WB

A Dragoon scouting force stumbles across a Blakist flanking unit.

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the second in a brand new series: the *Starterbook*. Once players have tried their hands at *BattleTech*, they can jump into the further excitement of the *Classic BattleTech* universe through a *Starterbook*.

Starterbook: Wolf and Blake is a companion volume to the *Classic BattleTech Total Warfare* core rulebook, allowing players to participate in the current raging conflict known as the Jihad (see p. 11, *Total Warfare*).

In addition to *Total Warfare*, *Technical Readout: 3050 Upgrade* is recommended for use with this product.

Standard vs. Advanced Rules

As detailed in *Total Warfare* (see p. 10, *TW*), that rulebook details the Standard Rules of *Classic BattleTech* play. However, there are a plethora of additional rules—such as new units, terrain and weather conditions, advanced movement and combat options and so on—that allow players to further tailor almost any aspect of *Classic BattleTech* play to their liking, increasing their enjoyment of the game.

However, while such rules bring a legion of fun and possibilities to a game, they also bring additional complexity, which is why the core books beyond *Total Warfare* (and *TechManual*) are considered Advanced Rules. While *Starterbook: Wolf and Blake* is a companion volume to the *Total Warfare* core rulebook, it also acts as a bridge to the Advanced Rules presented in *Tactical Operations*; the *Rules Annex* (see p. 52)

introduces some advanced weather and terrain conditions for play, as well as some advanced weaponry and equipment. A “sneak peak” of all that *Tactical Operations* has to offer.

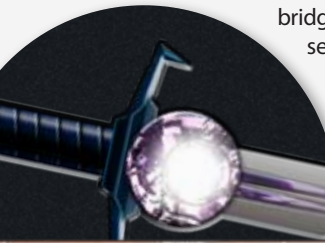
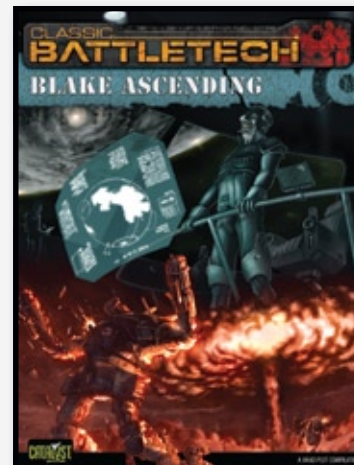
The Jihad

In addition to bridging from Standard Rules to the Advanced Rules of *Tactical Operations*, *Starterbook: Wolf and Blake* acts as a bridge between the 3067 setting of *Total Warfare* and the current Jihad story arc, as noted above. However, while the *Dawn of the Jihad* (or *Blake Ascending: A Jihad Compilation*) sourcebook is a fantastic fictional companion to *Starterbook: Wolf and Blake* and provides much needed context for the information found in this book, it is not needed from a game standpoint.

Wolf and Blake ‘MechPacks

While players can feel free to use miniatures from the *Classic BattleTech Introductory Box Set*—if they own said box set—or other miniatures as proxies for the ‘Mechs found in this book, Iron Wind Metals produces three ‘MechPacks in support of *Starterbook: Wolf and Blake*. *Wolf and Blake ‘MechPack: Wolf’s Dragoons* contains four ‘Mechs, while *Wolf and Blake ‘MechPack: Word of Blake 1* and *Wolf and Blake ‘MechPack: Word of Blake 2* each contain three ‘Mechs. All of the miniatures are unique ‘Mech variants, to be used in conjunction with the corresponding unique ‘Mech variants found in this volume.

Ask your local retailer about the *Wolf and Blake ‘MechPacks*, or visit www.ironwindmetals.com.





RULES ANNEX

The *Rules Annex* provides a wealth of rules that allow players to take the information presented in the previous sections of *Starterbook: Wolf and Blake* and apply them to *Classic BattleTech* games. This includes unique MechWarrior abilities and 'Mech quirks, as well as an *Advanced Weapons and Equipment* section detailing more advanced equipment found on ten of the 'Mechs in this product.

Finally, the *Rules Annex* contains the *Wolf and Blake Campaign: Tempest Rising*, a unique campaign system that allows players to directly involve themselves in the battles of these two elite 'Mech commands. The open-ended nature of the system also means players can revisit the campaign again and again, with each game providing a different experience and outcome.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

The following provides a quick overview of each section of *Starterbook: Wolf and Blake*.

A BRIEF HISTORY

This section builds off of the information presented in *A Brief History of the Inner Sphere* in the *Inner Sphere at a Glance* book found in the *Classic BattleTech Introductory Box Set* (players without access to this product can download the *Inner Sphere at a Glance* book for free at www.classicbattletech.com/leap), as well as the information found on pages 14–19 of *Classic BattleTech Total Warfare*. Focusing specifically on the details that lead to the Jihad and the first year or so of that conflict provides a foundation for the rest of the book.

BLACK WIDOW COMPANY

The Black Widow Company catalogs the rebirth of this seminal Wolf's Dragoon independent command, while placing it in context against the original.

BLACK WIDOW COMPANY PERSONNEL

Dossier write-ups (and illustrations) of each MechWarrior—along with a history of their specific 'Mechs—convey the unique aspects of each warrior and what makes them tick.

OPACUS VENATORI: SHADOW HUNTERS

This section conveys the birth and recent history of this elite Manei Domini Word of Blake hunter-seeker unit.

OPACUS VENATORI PERSONNEL

Extravagant illustrations and informative dossiers convey all the particulars of the MechWarriors—and their 'Mechs—that constitute this deadly combat command.

Note that the named Word of Blake OmniMechs in this product represent highly customized configurations which affect the base chassis design.

RECORD SHEETS

The final part of the book includes thirty-four pre-generated record sheets for the 'Mechs detailed in The Black Widow Company Personnel and Opacus Venatori Personnel sections. Any weapons and equipment found on the record sheets that are unfamiliar from either the Weapons and Equipment Tables (see pp. 303–304, *TW*) or the *Other Weapons and Equipment* (see pp. 129–143, *TW*) sections of the *Classic BattleTech Total Warfare* are detailed in the *Rules Annex* section of this book (see *Standard vs. Advanced* below for the exception).

Illustrations: The illustrations on each record sheet do not necessarily represent the exact variant of the 'Mech detailed. Instead, those illustrations are from various Technical Readouts and represent the stock design of the 'Mech in question (i.e., while weapons and equipment may change, the basic look of a given 'Mech always stays the same).

Note that this also applies to the photos in the Black Widow and Opacus Venatori Personnel sections. When available, the miniature that exactly matches the 'Mech stats is used. When a specific variant is not available in miniature form, however, a "stock variant" miniature is used; as with the illustration, the basic look remains the same, even if some weapons may be different.

Standard vs. Advanced

Fourteen of the record sheets mount weapons and equipment found in *Classic BattleTech Total Warfare*. Ten of the record sheets (representing the command lance/Level II of each force) include advanced technology; the word "advanced" appears under the Tech Base in the 'Mech Data section of those record sheets (rules for the use of that technology is found in the *Rules Annex*, p. 52).

Note: In addition to those advanced variants, Standard Rules variants are provided for the advanced variants, which allow players to use those miniatures in standard tournament play.



A BRIEF HISTORY

Dawn of the Jihad

We failed.

Because we got so caught up looking for the grand plot and the evil axis, we missed the signs right in front of us. Noketsuna tried to tell me, to warn me that the slaughter of Wolfnet agents throughout the Chaos March in 3067 meant more than an up-ante in the battle between the Allied Mercenary Command and the Word of Blake. We lost operatives and sources, and information disappeared before we knew it existed. I spent the last five years putting together the pieces, dragging leads and netting data and hooking sources across the Inner Sphere. The data does not lie: we failed, plain and simple.

And from our failure came Jihad.

—former Wolfnet analyst Margaret Tulliver, Arc-Royal, 3072

HOPE

On the first day of November 3067 citizens across the Inner Sphere expected a true month of thanksgiving. The end of the Federated Commonwealth Civil War meant an end to active warfare after seven long years. The Clans had been contained inside their occupation zones, and while dozens of worlds still suffered beneath the invaders' banner, hope was beginning to spread that the nascent Star League would finally deal with the Clan threat once and for all. Economies boomed as manufacturing turned away from wartime waste and back to civilian capacities. Families were reunited; wounds were healed; children were born. In the last days of November the leaders of the Inner Sphere and nearby Periphery gathered on Tharkad in the Lyran Alliance to choose a new First Lord of the Star League and begin the next new term of peace.



The Wolf's Dragoons are the first to feel the Word of Blake's fury.

And then the Star League dissolved, brought down by the same nationalistic idealism that caused the downfall of its predecessor, spreading a shadow across the Inner Sphere.

RAGE

"You will pay..."

Those were the last recorded words of Cameron St. Jamais, Precentor Martial of the Word of Blake, before he left Tharkad for the security of an orbiting Blakist WarShip. A relic of Lyran history, the ancient *Tharkad*-class battlecruiser *Invincible* unleashed the first burst of the Word's tantrum against the Inner Sphere by bombarding Tharkad City. No one can say for certain whether or not they specifically targeted the city's fusion power supply, but the whole Sphere knows what happened: a mushroom cloud of fire and death that swept across known space.

In the span of a week the Word of Blake revealed a fearsome capability by bombarding Tharkad and New Avalon. Intelligence agencies around the Sphere froze in cockeyed wonder, shocked that they'd missed the signs, that they'd not known in advance about the ships and the plans. They thawed quickly, but not quickly enough.

As for we Dragoons, we suffered. We dared to prod the sleeping tiger, and we paid for our temerity. Discredited mercenaries and shadow-bought sellswords attacked our homes in the cover of night, killed our families, slaughtered our children. We were so busy looking outward that we ignored the dangers at home. Outreach paid the price for our hubris and died beneath nuclear fires.

Jaime Wolf paid it with his life.

We knew about Gabriel. We knew the Word had found the Ruins, knew they'd salvaged WarShips and JumpShips and Unity only knows what else, but we should've realized more. The clues were all there, all the way back to 3057. Where had they gotten the engines for the *Impavidos*? Where were all the DropShips and the JumpShips and the WarShips coming from? We should have looked harder, but we didn't. We looked in the wrong places, sent Dragoons to the wrong places, and they died there. Hall. New Canton. Epsilon Eridani.

Mars.

JIHAD

The Word of Blake touched every nerve in the Inner Sphere across the next five years, igniting a new wave of hatred and warfare that made the Fourth Succession War look like a training exercise. Borders erupted into open warfare, with provincial leaders taking the reins of self-determinacy and simmering tensions boiling over.

The Federated Suns, still nursing the gaping wounds of the Civil War, fell into disarray when the Word of Blake bombardment of New Avalon turned into a Word of Blake invasion. Princess-Regent Yvonne Steiner-Davion was missing and feared lost during her journey back from Tharkad. Along the Draconis Combine border