

A Gunslinger's Tale

This being the true and factual account of the 90th Heavy Assault Regiment during the Battle of New Home.

For L.R.; in screwing up our friendship, I realized how far I've strayed from myself.

She is my raven haired angel with the wicked smile.

In her arms I am whole, complete.

Her smile soothes the tempest of my heart.

In March of 2775 the Star League Defense Forces invaded New Home. Aided by a newly developed ECM system to shield them from the Reagan Space Defense System, the system fell quickly.

A Complete History of The Liberation of Terra, Time-Life Books, Terra 2796

Umm yeah right, it did fall quickly, then the RimJobs came to take it back.

Lieutenant Bruce Gilmour, Regimental Gunslinger 90th Heavy Assault.

Chapter 1; Out of the frying pan.

Yeah, you've been alone

I've been gone for far too long

But with all that we've been through

After all this time I'm coming home to you

Gunslinger; Avenged Sevenfold

The long line of Rim Worlds prisoners stretched off into the distance. Grimy faces lifted briefly to watch the battle scarred olive drab Marauder stalk past. A snarling tiger insignia made most look away quickly. A few shuddered at what the black feline signified.

The 90th Heavy Assault Regiment, the Black Tigers of New Vandenberg, Terran troops although not Royals. Not these, one of the prisoners reflected, Kerensky's most brutal killers have been let off the leash, and hell itself has come to town.

Four full divisions, safe behind the shield of Caspar drone warships and anti ship batteries should have held the eight divisions of Star League troops. But then the SDS went haywire. The Star League transports had made orbit. The Black Tigers had taken the space port with almost careless ease. The collection of mercenaries, Rim World regulars and Hegemony quislings hadn't been prepared for the League troop's technical and professional sophistication.

So in under a month thirty thousand Rim World troops and all their equipment were now being processed and transferred into prison camps while the League troops rested and refitted before their next assignment.

Black Tiger Cantonment, Scranton, New Home, Terran Hegemony 1130 hours 12 March 2775

I slipped out of Hussy's linear frame and let the cool air of New Home's fall caress my face. Coming in from a three day patrol left me in dire need of a shower and a shave. Gracie Liu and Scott Mackenzie were waiting at Hussy's foot while Jack Benning grabbed a six pack of Gatorade from a nearby cooler. I smiled as Gracie wrinkled her nose.

B; you stink. She grinned.

Hell Gracie you smell yourself lately. Jack chuckled as he passed out the drinks.

I took a pull off of the cold drink, Gracie and Jack could argue like school children but you couldn't ask for better lance mates. Scott had transferred in just after Acamar replacing Brian Connor. In the months following we had formed a solid team.

Grinning I sent them off to shower, and get changed. I'd filed a report on the way back but still needed to check in with Captain Matos. Felt like the same damn report I'd filed a week ago. Nothing, nada, zip, zilch. The only RimJobs not in our custody were dead. *Good, we need some down time.*

**Headquarters SLDF Task Force New Home
Milton's Point, New Home
1750 Hours 12 March 2775**

Corporal Richard Miller stretched in front of the long range sensor station. Ten minutes left until shift change and only the newly arrived resupply convoy to look at. Sipping at his coffee he sputtered at the signals coming alive on the screen. Two sets of signals one at the LaGrange point to New Home, the other hours old at light speed among the transports.

Impossible, the damn RimJobs don't have fleet assets anywhere near here.

As he called out the alert, the signals representing the SLDF transports began winking out.

**Inbound from Nadir Jump Point
New Home System, Terran Hegemony
Some hours earlier**

The massive form of a *Megladon* class battlecruiser floated through the wreckage of dozens of Star League transports. Seven more blue grey forms paced it in the distance. Fighter carrying dropships amused themselves by spearing escape pods into puffs of frozen gas. Eighteen thousand had died in seconds and the remainder, the ones who would survive for one reason or another had only a slow cold death to look forward to. Almost as bad at least for Task Force New Home was the loss of a million tons of supplies. Everything from medical supplies to ammunition lost to the void.

**SLS *Tiger Claw*
Near Orbit, New Home
1800 Hours, 12 March 2775**

The closer group will hit us at or around 2230 hours, Admiral Vincent wants to engage them just outside lunar orbit. Enemy looks like six Megladon class battlecruisers and two Texas class battleships accompanied by four Essex Class destroyers

Emily Hayes swore softly. In addition to her own *Tiger Claw* Task Force New Home had Admiral Vincent's *McKenna* class *Invincible* the *Sovietskii Soyuz* battlecruiser *Admiral Cheng-li* and the *Aegis* class heavy cruisers *Shield Bearer*, *Nike*, *Renown* and *Russell Jimenez*. The *York* class destroyers *Harrier* and *Firebrand* helped even the odds, but everything Emily knew said a hell of a fight was coming.

Dieter, prepare to break orbit. She said calmly. And set condition one.

At her orders, the *Tiger Claw*'s massive thrusters flared to life and her crew swarmed to their battle stations.

God grant us the strength to prevail, Emily thought, and we'll do the rest.

Black Tiger Cantonment

Scranton, New Home

1800 Hours, 12 March 2775

Move, move, move! I swore. All around me the troopers of the Black Tigers were racing to get to their defensive positions. Chaos, but organized with a sense of purpose. As I swarmed up *Hussy*'s ladder I saw Major Don Roberto Julio deVega y Harrington, the Regimental Gunslinger and the mentor who was responsible for the crossed pistols I now wore on my collar, look up from the cockpit of his *Wolverine; Scrapper*. He grinned rakishly and tossed me a wave.

With a whole mess of Shark WarShips inbound and Zeus knows how many ground troops and he grins

It was infectious though and I felt myself laughing as I waved back. Climbing into *Hussy*'s linear frame I felt the familiar rush as her systems came online.

Bring it on Bitches, we're the Black Tigers and you're in for a world of hurt.

Lunar Orbit,

New Home, Terran Hegemony

2310 Hours, 12 March, 2775

Port side batteries down, fires burning in turrets six and nine .if it gets to the ammo bunkers ...

Jesus Christ the Russell Jimenez ... she's just gone!

Emily Hayes pounded her fist against the arm of her command chair. The damn Aegis were too sluggish, the Amaris Megladons consistently out maneuvered them. Shield-Bearer was a burning wreck, her escape pods heading for New Home. Now the loss of the Rusty J. and all the Star League force had to show for it were two dead Essex destroyers.

As the *Tiger Claw* pulled around in support of a wing of Ahab attack fighters, Emily could see the *Invincible* slugging it out with the two Texas class battlewagons. Two of the Megladons had broken off and were heading for New Home. Running a quick check of their path, she growled.

Helm come to one five seven mark two six, maximum burn! She turned to her executive officer, Dieter Malin.

Dieter, grab those Ahabs and target those Megladons, they're gonna try to bombard our headquarters.

As four gravities worth of acceleration pressed her back into her command couch, the *Tiger Claw*'s commander snarled as she watched the numbers displayed on her holographic display. It was going to be close, but the two Amaris ships should break off to deal with her. Harrier and Firebrand were already pulling around to support her and ...

Wait. ***** it they're not turning .They're NO!!!

Comms get me General Millhouse; tell him to prepare for orbital bombardment!

Missile bays on both Amaris battlecruisers slid open. The sensor station on the *Tiger Claw* blared a warning.

Radiation warning, those RimJobs are packing nukes! The sensor technician called out sharply.

Comms warn the surface Dieter tell our fighters to target the nukes!

Coming in like an avenging angel the Tiger Claw's main batteries spat pure lightning out at the hindmost cruiser. Cutting deep into the Megladon's Drive section the particle cannons shattered one of the Amaris ship's four main drives. The return fire from the enemy ship was sparse and did little more than scour some armor plates.

Despite the fury of the Tiger Claw's attack both Amaris craft launched a combined two dozen missiles. Ignoring the Amaris fighter cover with almost suicidal focus the Star League attack fighters screamed in downing ten then twelve missiles. Then it was too late.

The dozen remaining missiles arced towards their respective targets. Reaching predetermined points the missiles split open like deadly flowers to unleash six smaller warheads each. Watching in her view screen a part of Emily Hayes cried as brilliant suns erupted across New Home's surface.

Snarling she turned her attention to the as yet undamaged Megladon. Something to take her vengeance on.

SDS Battery Eighty Two

Scranton, New Home, Terran Hegemony

2315 Hours, 12 March, 2775

Chief Warrant Officer Michael Hsu cursed furiously at his crew as they raced to repair the naval grade laser battery. With the Caspar drones so much wreckage work had begun restoring the planetary defense batteries. Despite having the antidote for the virus programs downloaded into the SDS networks by electronic warfare platforms among the Star League Fleet, the restoration of the defense system, the first time this had been done, was fraught with complications.

Incoming! Shouted the sensor operator, his voice tinged with fear, six tracks coming in from orbit and they're hot.

Time to impact? Mike growled.

One minute.

Everyone, brace for nuclear contact!

Pulling out the crucifix on his neck, Mike kissed it and said a quiet prayer.

Defensive Line West, I-65

Scranton, New Home, Terran Hegemony

2315 Hours, 12 March, 2775

One minute to nuclear detonation. The Comms tech in the hardened bunker under Scranton's city hall sounded tense, and I snorted.

You're at least under cover dickhead, try being out here.

Our infantry was dug in as best as we could, at least they could hug the dirt and their uniforms had built in safeguards against radiation. Our sensors said we were going to hit by 10kt warheads. Not huge, but well, it was a damn nuke after all.

I had *Hussy* hunkered down so if we took a close hit she wouldn't fall over.

Thirty seconds

Hussy's heavy armor and built in shielding would I knew keep me safe; but if I fell on one of the bunkers it wouldn't be pretty. Then again if we took a direct hit, none of that would matter. But then when your number's up, there's not much more to say.

Twenty seconds

Oh lord for what we are about to receive I grinned at Rat's gallows humor.

It's a shock when it comes. The blast wave forces me to dig Hussy's vambraces into the ground. Hussy's view screen darkens to save my sight and the squeal of static screams in my neurohelmet's headphones. Then it was over.

Slowly the TACNET came alive with status reports, casualty reports and cries for help.

Captain Jake Melendez formed up with the rest of his squadron at 10000 meters. The *Rapier* Aerospace Superiority Fighters had refueled from a Leopard fuel carrier after the 90th's wing received orders to interdict the inbound Rim Worlds transports.

Lieutenant Colonel Ethan Rayne's cultured voice came over the air.

We've got over a hundred heavy transports coming in, Silver and Gold squadrons will hit them with Arrows, Red and Blue clean up after. Fighters from the 63rd Infantry will be joining us for the party.

As he acknowledged the orders, Jake shook his head. The space battle raging above his head had distracted the Star League fleet just enough for the bulk of the Rim World transports to get through. Perhaps a whole damn Corps, with several hundred smaller *Leopard*, *Fury*, and assorted other transports. Already the mass of enemy ships was visible as a glow rivaling the sun.

Bernard Millhouse was not a happy camper. Secure (sort of) from the Rim Worlds orbital bombardment mission. In communication with the troops he had left in the aftermath (kinda...). The picture wasn't pretty. Half the damn 63rd ID was just gone. Bad luck was all. Wrong place wrong time. So sad, too bad, buh bye now.

The other elements of Task Force New Home were as badly hit as the Six Three. Hell the 117 Royal Hussars were down to barely a company.

One small favor, the 90th Heavy Assault Regiment, yes chilluns, those bad boys and girls were relatively unscathed. Bernie Millhouse, who'd worked with them before, breathed a sigh of relief. While nowhere near the Nazi thugs the Taurian and mainstream SLDF made them out to be, they were still the biggest baddest hammer in his tool box.

Turning to his aid his Louisiana accent coming out he ordered a channel opened to Sam Winters, the Black Tigers' top fur ball.

"Sammy brotha' got a bit of a dog's breakfast for you..."

"Yeah, I *****' know B, listen our drama queens... er I mean our flying brethren are whittling them down some, but those are Dictators comin' in, not Leo's or Furies."

I nodded unseen by Sonny Matos, our Captain.

"Yeah bossman, I know but...."

"Shut it cabron, we're gonna hit 'em where they're landing, before they reform into coherent units...comprende?" Sonny sounded amused, rather than annoyed over the private channel. (c'mon, you turtles think I'd question him openly? Really?)

"Look lil' B, I forget sometimes you've never been under assault by these mofo RimJobs...trust me some of their dudes may be real professional an' all that, they ain't us..."

"T'ain't that Bossman, cabron? Seriously? Beso mi culo..." I laughed as I pulled Hussy into a trot with the rest of the lance.

"Tigre loco, get your ass gone you punk." Sonny laughed.

"Wilco Bossman." I laughed back, calling to Gracie to reign in her Lynx to keep the point of our inverted Y formation. Once again the Tigers were going into the sharp end. And once again Charlie Co, 1st Batt. was the point of the spear.

Grinning to myself, I flicked a vambraced salute to Don Roberto's Wolverine as he waved in return.

"Hey B, what's the difference between a blowjob and a RimJob?" Don Roberto's smooth voice came over our own private channel.

"Dunno Bobby, what..." I knew this joke, bad as it was, but...

"'Bout ten bucks usually, unless you're on Taurus..."

"Cause those dumb ***** don't know which end is up." I finished the joke laughing.

Crappy joke but under the circumstances...

"...the difference between a blowjob and a RimJob..."

August Martine, late of the Taurian Concordat and newest member of SAS Team Dido, groaned at the tired old joke coming over the helm of her Nighthawk Power suit.

Thanks so much Tommy, you dumb shit. She thought bitterly. The Tigers, 90% of 'em Terrans, from some town or such called New York City (August, didn't think it was that big a place, after all the Terries were all rich as hell after all.) had been a surprise. No fanged devils these, they were just...well folks. Of course, August, (whose upbringing in the Taurian Capitol, population 2 million thank you very much!) considered herself a cultured person, and she realized in any group of people you'll have about ten percent of 'em are *****.

Take Tommy Lindon for example.

CLANG!!! "OWW, ***** Didi, what the hell?!" Said ***** whined.

"Tommy, you are such a butthole!" Staff Sergeant Didi Moran shook her head as she "gently" pulled the unarmored Tommy off to the side.

August couldn't hear the gist of it but she caught the words "crush your head like a grape." and suppressed a giggle as she checked her equipment load for the umpteenth time.

Okay maybe these Terrans weren't so bad after all...

"Yo' Di", Mike Kelso rasped from the corner of the rough bunker the team squatted in, "you know this butter bar from Charlie we're working with?"

Dido Moran shrugged casually.

"Gilmour, nah seen him around some, looks like a big bad from some late night tri vid." She paused then, thoughtfully.

"Still he was a scout with the guard for a couple...three years before he became a lace panty 'Mech Jock. Plus he's a Gunslinger, so..."

Mike nodded as if it explained a lot. Which in retrospect it did. Plenty of arrogant ***** were elite *****. But Gunslingers? The ***** never seemed to make the grade.

He grinned at his team leader and shrugged.

"Well alright then."

Don Roberto pulled *Scrapper* down the highway. The rest of his lance, all fast moving heavy or potent medium machines, paced him. The Tigers fanning out in a spearhead around him moving to hammer the Amaris forces the elite 219th Dragoons before they could consolidate.

The 219th, Hideki Amaris' command. With luck the Tigers'll bag the Fat Man's son hell of a battle honor that'd be.

A shout and the heavy thunder of a particle fusillade brought his attention to his secondary screens. The *Talons* of the Swift Claws had engaged a scatter of light and medium machines.

Contact! Two lances of light and medium machines, unknown configuration sending data feed now!

Pushing his custom *Wolverine* to its maximum speed, Don Roberto crested a small rise and watched as the Swift Claws, using their superior speed to maintain their range advantage, fenced with two different types of machines not in the war book.

The lighter machines were bipedal, looking like a larger version of an old standard issue Wasp. The cylindrical barrels of a medium laser and a flamer sprouted from each arm, another pair of lasers sprouted from each shoulder.

The larger Mechs had a wedge shaped torso with raptor shaped legs and the heavy assemblies of large lasers made up most of the arms. From the hits the Amaris machines had taken, the Tiger Gunslinger could tell they were heavily armored for their weight.

Well let's see if we can shake them up a bit.

Raising the extended range particle cannon carried in *Scrapper's* right hand, Don Roberto spat a ravaging whip of cyan lightning downrange at one of the lighter 'Mechs.

Hideki Amaris, Major of the Rim Worlds Republic, raced his silver and grey *Hecatoncheires* down the interstate towards the sounds of battle. Two lances from his light strike company were engaging a company of Terran machines. Insignia identified the olive drab 'Mechs as the 90th Heavy Assault Regiment.

A chill ran through the Amaris officer's spine. Despite the lightweight designs now facing them, Hideki knew the steel fist of Terran *Marauders* and *Devastators* wouldn't be far behind. Leaping off the entrance ramp he surprised a Terran *Talon*. Spitting out a cassette of osmium slugs Hideki cursed as the agile machine dodged the heavy slugs but still managed to tag the machine with the 8cm laser built into the *Hecatoncheires'* left arm.

As the *Talon* darted away, a non-spec *Wolverine* turned away from ravaging one of the Dragoon's *Vampire* class light Mechs. The crossed pistols on the 'Mech made the Amaris Major's eyes widen. *Their Gunslinger*, he grinned, *now a kill worth taking!* Calling out the 219th Amaris Dragoon's motto he rallied his troops.

Onward, Dragoons, into Glory ride!

**Fifty Kilometers west of Defensive Line West, I-65
New Home, Terran Hegemony
0415 Hours, 13 March, 2775**

Ace Four, pull back to grid six three you're too exposed out there, Trey Lance cover him! Sonny's voice rang out over the TACCNET.

Got it Ace Six, Gracie, Jack cover Ace Four. Rat you're with me!

Throttling *Hussy* into a run I spat particle fire over one of the new RimJob heavies we'd been running into. It responded with a wave of long range missiles, a new variant How Truly Good. I kicked out with *Hussy's* left claw sending her flying to the right. Ten of the high explosive rounds still scattered across her frame but the remaining twenty went wide.

I slammed a gauss slug into the enemy machine just missing the cockpit and hit again with both particle cannons. Rat's *T-bolt* laced it with laser and missile fire and it went down. We had been laying into them and doing damage for over an hour now. The problem was these new machines were a match for ours.

Gracie and Jack's *Lynxes* couldn't stand up to these heavies we'd tagged *Bruiser A* and *B* so having them standoff with their PPC's while Rat and I slugged it out worked.

As Ace Four's battered *Bombardier* stumbled past a wave of fire washed over us. A new *Bruiser* this one an A model led a mix of more conventional Terran made machines in a charge against our lines. This one painted in a silvery grey pattern like a great white shark. Cyan flashes and red and orange tracers

crossed and laser fire flared when it crossed the smoke from missile trails and burning wrecks.

This douche bag has got to be a major player, I thought, Gotta take him down quick

“Rat concentrate on that silver bugger take his ass down, Gracie, Jack keep his friends busy.”

The silver streak of my gauss slug cracked the Amaris commander’s engine shielding while my particle cannons slashed across his legs. Rat’s fire peppered all over the *Bruiser’s* frame one missile impacting the cockpit assembly. The pilot was superbly trained however and rode out the hits.

The Amaris commander’s left arm cannon spat out a 120mm osmium slug that cracked Rat’s center torso armor, then followed up with a salvo of 80mm free flight rockets and laser fire. The hits were precision strikes and Rat’s *T-bolt* stumbled back its chest opened like a tin can. Crashing on its back the ‘Mech shuddered once and then lay still.

“Owww.” Rat’s groan came over the intercom. Snarling I redoubled the attack. Sonny’s *Black Knight* went down in a flurry of cannon fire then.

*****, this is Trey Six to Maelstrom Six, we are outnumbered and out gunned could use the power right about now.

Trey Six, this is Maelstrom Six Actual call the shot over!

I rattled off the coordinates calling for as much improved cluster munitions as I could get. Our much abused company was holding against a full high tech battalion. As good as we were we wouldn’t last long. As if to drive the point home while I traded more fire with the Amaris commander, an *Orion* hammered me with missile and cannon fire.

About then an artillery salvo hit and the Amaris battalion began to break. Their machines taking severe damage from the blossoms of smoke and fire blooming among them. They began to fall back, still in good order.

Bruce? Sonny Motos voice came over the TACNET weakly.

Boss, you okay

Yeah, broke a couple of ribs, sssnothin. Listen take the rest of the company and head out to grid nineteen .the rest of the battalion can hold here.

What’s up?

Don Roberto’s down, get the hell over there. He coughed, don’t let the RimJobs get him.

A cold chill ran down my spine as I ordered my Gracie and Jack to move out. As we passed Rat’s *Thunderbolt* he waved from the cockpit hatch. I waved back with Hussy’s claw but my face was set.

Damn we got hammered.

I cursed angrily as we approached the burnt out meadow where Don Roberto had gone down. The seven 'Mechs left to me bits of all three Charlie company lances were as battered as Hussy and I didn't want to get into a tussle just now. The remains of three of our Talons and a battered Wolverine littered the field along with six of the medium and light designs we'd been running into lately.

"Gracie, Jack cover me, Ace and Duce Lances take up a ninety meter perimeter." I growled softly.
"Rescue One; let's go."

As the heavy hover APC converted to an ambulance glided forward I took up a position just over Scrapper's ravaged form. I could see the rescue team under Warrant Officer Victor MacClellan using their pry bars to open up Don Roberto's warped hatch. My heart was in my throat but I forced myself to wait what seemed an eternity.

It was actually only about ten maybe twelve minutes for Mackie to stabilize the Tigers' Gunslinger and begin the delicate process of transferring him into the ambulance. Other teams had retrieved Sgt. Minerva Ramos and Cpl. Ryan Martinez. Both pilots were severely wounded, but 'Nerva had been the one to radio in Don Roberto's position. The third pilot Kevin Barnes had died instantly from a big bad Bruiser's 120mm cannon.

"Trey Six, this is Rescue One-Six it's bad, but we've got him stabilized." Mackie's voice sounded coolly professional, but I knew him well enough to hear the concern in his voice.

"Gotcha Rescue One-Six; ok Ace Lance take point, Trey will provide escort on Rescue One and Duce will bring up the rear. Let's break trail Tigers!"

As I pulled Hussy into a trot my mind was filled with a black rage. We'd given as good as we'd gotten here. It might cost us our heart though.

=====

Chapter 2:

Field Headquarters 90th Heavy Assault Regiment, SLDF
New Home, Terran Hegemony
1630 Hours, 14 March, 2775

I rubbed the sleep out of my eyes, cursing as I saw the time. Nobody had woken me up....shit. Lighting the field lantern I rose and went through a quick wash up wiping my face with depilatory cream. I was changing into fresh fatigues when a burst of light from the field tent's entrance.

"Wakey, wakey bossman....!" Gracie trailed off with a grin as she saw me pulling on a tank top.
"Morning my ass, Gracie, it's almost 1700 hours." I fixed her with my best glare. She shrugged and sat on my field cot.

"Captain Matos said let you sleep in, hell all of Three Batt's offline." She said by way of reply. "The Sixty Third Infantry's taken up a defensive line along I-65." She grimaced, "Or what's left of them anyway."

I shrugged into a field jacket and buckled on the ivory handled Colt that was the symbol of a Terran Gunslinger. Gracie continued giving me a rough SITREP. We held a little under half the developed land

on New Home. The battle still raged in orbit and the RimJobs had a massive blockade of both jump points. Elements of six Rimmer Divisions and four independent regiments opposed us.

In addition to the depleted 63rd ID and our own 90th HAR, we had four of the eight original divisions that had taken part in the assault. The rest had moved on much to our chagrin and undoubtedly to the Rimmers' delight. The Alexander Division, a SLDF style infantry division built from Federated Suns volunteers, the 88th BattleMech and 103rd Mechanized Divisions held other parts of our line. The 90th along with the 23rd Royal Dragoons, Task Force Zeta (A provisional regiment formed the remains of the 117th Royal Hussars, the 208th Striker Regiment and the 84th Light Horse; all decimated by the RimJobs OrBom mission.) and lastly a volunteer regiment from the Draconis Combine, the Ryukaze were all tasked with being a mobile reserve for the units holding the line.

The thought of the last unit brought a grimace to my face. Gracie paused and cocked her head in curiosity.

"The Snakes." I said as if that explained it all. In a way it did. Terran society tries to teach us not to be bigoted, that we're all part of one big happy Star League. But the damn Snakes...well they can push anybody's buttons. Of course spending half your childhood on the capital of the Federated Suns did color my view somewhat. Some of my friends had come from old Borderlander families in the Draconis March.

You can guess what their opinions about the snakes were like.

I'd seen the Snake colonel; Isokoru Satoh a couple of times. Tall, dignified and way too young looking for his supposed fifty eight years. The last time I'd seen him our eyes had met and I'd felt....something, like a push against my brain. When I shook my head to clear it, Satoh had smiled and nodded like he'd just tested a theory and had gotten the answer he'd expected.

Field Headquarters, Ryukaze Volunteer Regiment
New Home, Terran Hegemony
1700 Hours, 14 March, 2775

Iuchi Kei and Hatchiwara Yuri also known as the Terrible Two stood braced to attention. Isokoru Satoh gazed at the pair through hooded eyes. They were, he reflected, the most...unharmonious members of his command. Damn effective MechWarriors, truth be told, but crazy as loons, the both of them. Still that craziness would lend itself well to the request from Sam Winters, the commander of the Terran unit Isokoru's Ryukaze had been seconded too.

Yuri started to fidget under her commander's gaze. Kei noticed and smacked the black haired MechWarrior upside the head.

"Stop that," the redhead whispered, "you'll get us in trouble..."

"We're already in trouble, you bimbo..." Yuri replied.

Isokoru saw the explosion waiting in Kei's face and cleared his throat. The pair snapped to attention again.

"No you're not in trouble, Samurai, but I have a job for you..." As he explained the pair began to grin. I hope, he thought, that Lieutenant Gilmour is as good as I think he is. As it is he's not going to like me much...

Kei giggled then, and looked at Yuri.

"This should be fun!" She laughed.

Actually, the Tai-sa of the Ryukaze chuckled inwardly, the poor boy's going to hate me.

Headquarters 219th Rim Worlds Dragoons.
New Home, Terran Hegemony
1700 Hours, 17 March, 2775

Hideki Amaris poured over the holographic map with his adjutant; Major Brandon Lee Wienstien. Unconsciously he fingered the gold eagles of a full colonel now pinned on his collar. The raid that had taken out Colonel Holfstein and his entire staff (including thankfully our overbearing prick of a political officer....) still was fresh in the memory of his staff. Family connections or not Hideki was the senior both in grade and combat experience and the command had fallen to him.

It would have amused him at this point if he knew that his opposite number on the Star League Defense Force side was Samuel Winters of the Black Tigers. In fact they were acting in identical roles at the moment. It was the role the 219th Dragoons (The Glory Riders) excelled at. Highly mobile and armed with the best tech available to Rim, liberally sprinkled with Terran designs, the Glory Riders also had a reputation for motivated, ruthless officers who never the less took care of their men.

His promotion also put him on equal footing with his brother; Takeo whose posting to the Amaris Huscarl Dragoons had brought their father so much pride. Although one might expect the relationship between Hideki and the heir to the Amaris Empire to be one of palace intrigues and betrayal, in truth it was more of a conventional sibling rivalry. Hideki Amaris WAS a hard ass, but three people in the world were important to him; his mother (a self absorbed dull witted beauty who'd been a runway model when she'd caught Stefan Amaris' eye, she'd still turned out to be a warm, caring mother), his sister Sinthya and his brother Takeo.

Hideki shook himself out of his reverie and brought himself back to the present. He had a campaign to plan.

"So it looks like we've got the 3rd Brigade of the 63rd Infantry Division covering the Haskell River Valley. They're shaky at best and they only have this Task Force Zeta covering them. Terrain's a bitch though..." Hideki trailed off looking over at Brandon Lee.

"Yeah, but look boss, we ain't taking infantry or armor over that ground, and on the plus side, no Tigers..." The Major shook his head and grinned ruefully. "Those pussycats are no joke."

Hideki returned the grin, the damned Black Tigers of New Vandenberg! He'd read the intelligence reports, but hadn't been prepared for the reality. Despite the skill of his troopers, the quality of their equipment and the fact that they'd outnumbered the bastards three to one, Hideki and his 1st Battalion had been driven off.

He snorted. "They don't call them Hell's Own for nothing, Bran. Still get us locked and loaded, I want all our Battalion heads together at 1900 to form a strike plan, I'm going to call General Henke and see if we can rattle the SLDF's cage.

Field Headquarters, 90th Heavy Assault
New Home, Terran Hegemony
18 March, 2775

"CAPTAIN BUUUUCE!"

I winced as Iuchi Kai's voice chased me down where I was hiding, well no not hiding exactly, just giving Hussy a full going over. Really, I wasn't...oh hell, yeah I was hiding. It's not that the Terrible Two, the Snakes detailed to us by the Ryukaze's position as a feeder regiment for the Tigers, were bad troopers, well they were crack pilots anyway, it was just, er...um...they were, screw it they were nuts.

Plus I know the Tigers don't seem to possess much in the way of military discipline (which is bullshit, we do, but we save it for what really counts), and Terrans, especially those of us in the SLDF have fairly liberal views on physical privacy, sexuality and damn few taboos about nudity (In fact I've noted we generally are more polite and have better manners than more prudish people.) But these two were pushing even my boundaries.

"Hey Loot, look out, here comes the attack of the Ninja Kurita School Girls from Hell." Said Misha Vinson, the Tigers' chief grease monkey. He chuckled at my dismay.

"C'mon Loot, you should be proud of yourself you've got your own groupies." He continued.

Grumble, growl, snarl, whimper.

"Ahh now Bruce, c'mon, they're really nice..." Misha started. He smiled angelically as my fierce glare refused to burn him down into ashes. I sighed in relief as the Terrible Two ran into Didi Moran. The short wiry SAS operator should distract them. Hell she even intimidated me...ohhh no!

"<Sure thing Iuchi Kei-sama. The Lieutenant's right over there.>" "This in perfect Japanese to boot. She added insult to injury by pointing straight at me. As the pair of very shapely Snakes, jiggling in their MechWarrior gear started towards me, Didi Moran, lean deadly SAS team leader stuck out her tongue at me. Bitch.

Like I said I'm not a prude, and the Terrible Two are about as well put together as any woman I've ever seen. But I just couldn't figure if the two Samurai Psychos were hero worshipping my Gunslinger status, or if they were trying to seduce my sorry ass, or if I was going to have to fight some kind of crazy samurai duel with them...plus you know those damn accents have gotta be fake.

Eeeeeep!

"CAPTAIN BUUUUCE, WE DONE WITH TACTICAL ANALYSIS OF THE BAD GUYS SIR!" Hatchiwara Yuri came to attention perfectly, just way too close to me, and umm jiggling....

As I opened my mouth to babble a reply the alert klaxon sounded and I snapped out orders to my lance mates to mount up.

Haskell River Valley
New Home, Terran Hegemony
1300 Hours, 18 March, 2775

MechWarrior Corporal Michael Carey dodged his Thorn around an outcropping of glacially bourn rock. The wave of long ranged missiles spent themselves in the rock instead of his battered 'mech. The first warning of the attack the veteran of the 63rd ID's recon battalion was a mass of missile fire pouring down the throat of the valley.

A full regiment of advanced tech machines in the RimJobs' blue and grey came on hell bent for leather. And they were out for blood. Cindy's Hornet had dissolved under fire from two Bruiser Heavy 'Mechs. The SLDF pickets had been brushed aside like so much toilet paper, their calls for help dampened by the Amaris forces electronic countermeasures.

David Haas's voice screamed out incoherently as his Phoenix Hawk, the heaviest of Michael's Lance mates came apart in a ball of fire. Cursing and praying, Michael ducked and weaved hoping to put some distance and terrain between his damaged machine and the Rimmers.

His dreams were shattered when a silvery grey Bruiser stalked out of the smoke and dust and cored Michael's Thorn with a 120mm osmium slug. Shaking in his command chair like a bell knocker, Michael heard two of his ribs snap. Then his auto eject kicked in and he was rammed upward through the blown out panels that made up the top of his 'Mech's head. The sudden acceleration and the roar of the wind almost knocked him out.

As his chute deployed Michael saw the big Amaris machine watching him, and his sphincter clenched as he waited for a bolt of coherent light to wipe him from existence. Instead the enemy pilot turned his machine away and stalked after its comrades. As he drifted down to the ground Michael saw Cindy Renoso, who'd survived her Hornet's demise stumbling towards his landing zone.

Hideki shook his head with a smile, that joker wasn't going anywhere. Shooting him would be a waste of time. Besides, Hideki was a realist, one never knew when you might find yourself in the same situation, right? Comms chatter from his forward companies reached a crescendo. A blocking force from Task Force Zeta had been sighted. Long range fire was turning the river valley into a miasma of shattered trees and broken rocks. The battalion combat team from the SLDF had the bit in its teeth. They had good position to punish the Glory Riders, but they were fighting with a nihilistic fury. Hideki gritted his teeth and swallowed a curse. If the damn fools would use their heads they wouldn't do as much damage to his crew but they'd live. Hideki didn't care how many of these morons he killed, just as long as he was able to hook around into the rear of the 3/63rd ID. Both the 16th Rim Worlds Mechanized ID and the 2nd Rim Worlds RCT were going to hit the 63rd Infantry Division's 3rd Brigade in a full on attack in 2 hours. It was vital that the Glory Rider's be hammering the brigade's rear.

The Zeta's were dead men walking but Hideki's men were going to be delayed, yes and one last thing...they were going to know they were kissed.

"Holy shit, Tigers, boss we've got pussy!"

Hideki froze for a moment. Ohhh *****, really? Seriously? C'mon now WTF? Then an olive drab Marauder, a pair of Lynxes a Bombardier and two....Dragons??? Hideki shook his head in amazement. He recognized that ***** Mad, ***** gunslinger. Almost ***** killed me.

It was then said Mad washed Hideki's 'Mech with a pair of particle whips crisscrossing the Heck's chest, then followed up with the silver streak of a gauss slug. Hideki slammed forward against his control console cracking his neurohelmet's faceplate. Cursing the Terrans, their Gunslingers and his own luck in general, Hideki rode his stricken machine to a rather inglorious face plant that plowed a furrow of churned up earth (newhome? Funny what your mind latches on to in times like this. But technically calling the dirt on New Home "earth" wasn't quite accurate.)

Wrestling his Hecatoncheires to its feet he took another whiplash of charged particles over his dorsal framework and a gauss slug that crippled his arm mounted 8cm laser. Tony "Fitz" Fitzpatrick in his -B model Heck sent a wave of hypervelocity 60mm warheads down range but the Mad danced away from the semi guided rounds with almost contemptuous ease. A Lynx spat a particle lash across Fitz's torso while the Dragons' peppered the Hecatoncheires-B with depleted uranium slugs and their own HVM's. The wave of fire sent Fitz stumbling back and in the fury of the exchange Hideki almost missed the Bombardier cocking its arms back to clear the massive drum shaped launchers on its shoulders as it spat thirty missiles at him.

Some days, reflected Hideki Amaris, it just doesn't pay to get out of bed.

New Home, Terran Hegemony
1405 hours, 18 March, 2775

Some days, Didi Moran reflected, it's just doesn't pay to get out of bed. Major Lal Simms' Third Battalion had crashed into the mayhem that was the Glory Riders' assault on Task Force Zeta like God's own pile driver. The Stalking Tigers' wild assault had smashed the point of Hideki Amaris' troops and shoved them bodily back on their heels.

While the confusion engendered by the engagement had enabled her team of nine powered armored troopers to slip in behind the Amaris 219th Dragoons, the same chaos led to several near mishaps. Having an overshot salvo from one of Three Batt's Bombardier Support 'Mechs hit within ten meters of the team's position hadn't been fun. Nor did Mike Kelso appreciate being stepped on by one of the new RimJob light 'Mechs. No real harm was done, the powered armored SAS veteran had been driven into the mud, and the RimJob pilot hadn't even noticed. But still...

Of course it had taken a terse order for Mike not to rip the lace panty RimJob out of his 'Mech after that, but hey they were in position. And just in time too.

Crouched in a culvert, encased in a suit of Nighthawk powered armor, she slid the muzzle of her TAG/L laser designator over the low ridge of packed soil and took sight on the massive form of an unfamiliar assault class 'mech. Checking her heads up display, she noted that the three other spotters in her team had locked up on targets.

"Archer six this is Sneak six, locking on targets now, copperheads followed by ADM over."

"Sneak six, you TAG 'em, we'll bag 'em, Archer six out."
Releasing her breath Didi took up slack on the TAG's trigger....

SLDF Firebase Axton
New Home, Terran Hegemony
1405 Hours, 18 March, 2775

CWO Jessie James (no relation.) Acknowledged the SAS team leader's call and passed the data to both A Battery 312th Support Group and Gold Squadron's Hammerheads from the Black Tiger's own Air Wing. In response six Long Tom III 203mm self propelled guns and twelve Hammerhead Attack Fighters found themselves tasked to support the SLDF forces in the Haskell River Valley. The LT3SPs' had a rate of fire of six rounds per minute firing 203mm Copperhead smart munitions. The Hammerheads each carried six Arrow IV anti armor missiles. CWO James chuckled inwardly at the amount of firepower about to be unleashed on the Rimmers' 219th Dragoons.

Haskell River Valley
New Home, Terran Hegemony
1410 hours, 18 March, 2775

Hideki:

The first warning of impending doom Hideki Amaris had was the blare of an alarm in his earphones. Cursing he called a warning for the troopers of the Glory Riders to scatter to cover. Coleen McKinney's Great White was too slow and was hammered by a full flight of six Arrow IV anti armor missiles. As the hundred ton machine came apart, Hideki's ECM equipped Vampire BattleMechs themselves came under long range guided fire, robbing the Amaris troops of their jamming capabilities.

Amaris fighters were trying to contest the Star League strike packages, but to do this they had to dump their own ordinance. This eliminated strike missions meant to distract and hamper the League troops' defenses.

Despite his wild dodging a League copperhead round slammed into Hideki's arm, robbing him of his big auto gun. Cursing Hideki stumbled, barely keeping his balance. Hitting the ejection mechanism for his remaining ammunition he surveyed the devastation around him. His troops, the finest in the Amaris Empire were holding their own, but their advance had been halted. The arrival of the 90th Heavy Assault had given the beaten Task Force Zeta troops the breather they needed to regain their balance. Instead of a suicidal attempt to take Hideki's troops with them, the Star League task force fought once again with the cool professionalism that was their normal hallmark.

Now without either of his heaviest weapons, and the rain of Star League artillery punishing his troopers brutally, Hideki knew the battle plan was untenable. With a growl he ordered the retreat.

Bruce:

I cursed as hammer blow cracked Hussy's reactor shielding sending a wave of heat to spike through her cockpit. The offending Bruiser itself was savaged by the Terrible Two, who laced it with laser, cannon and waves of corkscrewing missiles. I donated my last gauss slug into the fray, just before Yuri slammed her Dragon bodily into the big RimJob. My combat suit barely coped with the ferocious heat as I finished the machine off with a paired burst of particle bolts.

"Damn it, yo B some help here?" Didi screamed over the comms. I panned around as an Amaris light 'Mech, one of the new types, went tearing after the SAS sergeant's team. They evaded the 'Mech's fire, but that wouldn't last long. Gathering Hussy into a crouch, I leaped off the ridge I'd sheltered on. The lean Amaris machine reared up in human like surprise as it was faced with more than twice its tonnage of pissed off Marauder.

Mindful of the Hussy's heat burden I lunged forward. Back handing the RimJob, I caught it on the jaw. I heard Didi's howl of triumph as the Amaris pilot lost control and crashed down on his back.

Sam's voice came over the TACCNET;

"All Tiger elements, this is Tiger Six, the RimJobs are pulling out, Swift Six will maintain contact. We'll shadow them back to their base boys and girls, then do unto others..."

At my feet, the Amaris jock powered down in surrender.

90th Heavy Assault Cantonment
New Home, Terran Hegemony
0630 hours, 21 March, 2775

Sam Winters, Commanding Colonel of the 90th Heavy Assault Regiment, Star League Defense Force, sipped at his coffee as he watched technicians swarm around a Marauder's reactor core. Noting the buxom brunette pin up remarkably untouched despite the battering the 'Mech had received, he recognized Hussy. Sure enough out of the main reaction chamber popped the head of the Black Tigers' newest Gunslinger.

"Well it'll have to do Misha." The young officer said exhausted. "Until we get a replacement power regulator, she'll be only up around 75% power."

The 90th's chief technician nodded grimly. "Yeah, you're gonna be slowed down some, you know." He observed as Bruce climbed down slowly.

Dropping down off the ladder the Gunslinger staggered a little. He nodded, and shrugged. "It is what it is, Misha. Though I think I can machine something given a couple of hours..."

Shaking his head, Sam interrupted. "B, it can wait, you look like shit, go get eight hours, then..." Sam cut off Bruce's protest with a raised eyebrow. "Now, Lieutenant, I need you rested, stop bugging the techs."

After sending his Gunslinger off, Sam turned to Misha who grinned.

"That kid's gonna run himself into the ground if you let him, but he does know his way around a fusion engine." The smile faded. "He's not wrong though, we're starting to see some degradation from lack of spares."

Sam nodded grimly. His discussion with Bernie Millhouse, the Star League top dog, the night before had addressed the same topic. The supply convoy destroyed by the Amaris fleet was essential to the Star League task force's ability stay in the fight. Although fully topped off at the beginning of the fight, both the orbital bombardment and the ferocious fighting that followed had cut deeply into the supply

situation.

To make matters worse, Amaris naval units had sealed off both the Nadir and Zenith points with strong WarShip squadrons. While other elements constantly jockeyed with the depleted SLDF naval elements for control of the orbital approaches to New Home. HPG messages sent to Army Group Davion hadn't had time to get a reply, and the damned Megladons of the Amaris Navy kept their SLDF counterparts away from even the dangerous pirate points.

Finishing up with Misha Vinson, Sam, next went to visit with Don Roberto, the Regimental Gunslinger in the MASH unit attached to the Tigers. To his surprise the Trinity Worlder was up and zipping up a duty jumpsuit. Most wouldn't have caught the older warrior's grimace, but Sam had known the man for almost two decades.

"Should you be up and about, Rob?" Sam asked skeptically. Don Roberto looked up, his face gaunt.

"Si, Samuel, I can't sit here on my ass all day...I'll be fine." He straightened smiling.

"I wish you'd take nanotech....." Sam referred to the enhancements most Terrans took that helped combat infections, heal injuries quicker and even fight off the wear and tear of aging. It was an old argument.

"You know, I can't it's against...." Don Roberto started.

"..your religion, yeah I get it."