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Gaspar Barrens  
Oliver  
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The Venn-like paired circles of a Steel Viper Star Commander were mounted on the left side of Ivan Grain’s command console. The green enamel was chipped on the left side. The right was discolored, smudged brown. It had been red—blood red—but the heat when it was encased in the clear acetate had burned it ochre. Grain looked at it often when he was sitting alone in the Cauldron-Born’s cockpit, waiting. The vibrations that shuffled up his command couch’s thick pylon seat post were different from the heavier, coarser growl that he’d felt for nineteen years in his old Marauder. Something else to hate the Clans for; their engines were smoother.  

“Hauptmann Grain?”  

Grain blinked. His heads-up display was still clear, no red icons. The small yellow icon flashing in the lower right corner of the display reminded him of some damage to the Cauldron-Born’s armor, but that was neither news nor important. He’d taken most of it driving the Marik infantry back from the swale where the MASH was hidden, but then the kommandant had left the other end open and the wounded were captured anyway.

“I’m getting signals that look like ‘Mechs coming in,” Cadet Corkson reported. Her Dervish was five hundred meters east of him, toward where they expected the Marys to come back. If they came back before dark, anyway. And if Corkson was reading heavy metal coming at her, then they were coming back.

“Strength?” he asked. His fingers were tapping presets on his tactical board. One signal sent the rally signal to the company; a second sent the enemy-in-sight cipher; the third sent the hold-in-place command. Since the company—or what was left of it—was already rallied the first signal just meant the cadets should get up and get their ‘Mechs ready. The second told them why, and the third told them what the plan was.

Hold-in-place. Grain was tired of running from jumped-up Mary reservists. They hadn’t fought the Clans; they didn’t know what combat really was. All they knew was surprise attack and strength in numbers. They didn’t fight with the stupidly-limiting but oddly-honorable code of the Steel Vipers and the Jade Falcons. They fought like Inner Sphere soldiers, not warriors. They fought a lot like the way Grain had been trained to fight and the way he’d been training his kids to fight. There wasn’t anything wrong with the Mary strategy. Hanse Davion and the AFFS had proven in the Fourth Succession War. It worked, and in combat what worked ruled.

But it was different from how Grain had taught himself to think, these last few years. It felt less important.

It was fighting the last war.

The Cauldron-Born was an icon of the next war. The Clan war. The Com Guards may have stopped them cold at Tukayyid but they were will out there. There were still Jade Falcon and Steel Viper and Wolf flags over Federated Commonwealth worlds. Grain supposed the Mariks were thinking the same thing about Oliver, but he didn’t really care. What a Mary thought didn’t concern him much; he had much more important and dangerous enemies to think about.

He reached out and brushed the hard acrylic coating the Star Commander’s insignia.

“I think it’s a light company, or maybe two heavy lances,” Corkson reported. “The MAD is still acting up but the computer is telling me ten discrete sources.”

“Get back here.”

Ten sources. There were eight BattleMechs left in his company. Patterson and Baker had bought their farms the first day, when Baker’s leg actuator went and Patterson stood back with him. If he survived he’d write up that report as an example of why relationships shouldn’t form between lancemates. If Patterson hadn’t been so set on trying to save his bunk-buddy he wouldn’t have died with him.

Cadet-Leutenant Eric Thorne had bought his farm two days ago and paid cash. He’d been the rearguard when the whole rest of the battalion was doing the bail-out boogie after the kommandant bought it at the MASH swale. Thorne and Bearclaw had held off a whole Mary company while Grain got the rest of the battalion away. A scout had snuck in and gotten Bearclaw’s gun-camera ROMs out. Thorne would get the Diamond Sunburst or Grain would know why. His widow would, anyway.

Around the Cauldron-Born the rest of the company was quickly coming to life. One of the things Grain liked about serving with an NAIS Cadre was how close the cadets were to the academy life. They still had the muscle memory of instructors shouting them out of bed at ungodly hours of the morning. When you told a Cadre cadet to jump his head was near the ceiling before he was wholly awake. It made for hellacious good reaction times.

“All units up and green, Hauptmann,” Cadet-Leutenant Juarez reported. Her voice was still scratchy from smoke damage but her tone was solid. “The technicians managed to get Khaled’s right arm attached again, but the gun is iffy.” Cadet Khaled had lost her Enforcer’s right arm to a freak hit from a Mary Orion. They’d recovered the arm when they’d driven the Mary probe back but it hadn’t looked good.

“Good news,” Grain said. He pressed the touchscreen icon representing Corkson’s Dervish once with his finger. That touch sent a request for her computer to update the intelligence display with any new data but there wasn’t any. The Dervish was making good time back through the arrayo. She’d be with the rest of the company soon. Grain toggled his screens clear and drew in a deep breath. The OmniMech’s diagnostics reported all his energy weapons in the green and ready to fire, but he cycled the pre-heaters again just in case. The Third’s technicians still weren’t one hundred percent on how the big Clan-made ER PPCs worked, and he’d found repeating the pre-heat cut down on cyclical failures in the particle accelerators. Or so his tech said. Grain just liked to listen to the whine of the cyclers.

An amber light burned to life on his com board at the same time a click sounded in his neurohelmet speakers. “Ivan?”

“What is it, Karen?” he said quickly. “We don’t have time, honey.”

“I’m ready.”

“That’s good. Is that all you called me to say?”

“No.” Static crackled beneath the silence. Grain looked through his HUD at the squat shape of Karen’s Hunchback. He waited. “I don’t understand why they’re doing this,” she finally said. “I mean, Eric is dead. Patterson and Baker are dead. Bearclaw is missing. And for what? Some fit of pique because old man Marik’s son died?” Another pause. “This isn’t what they told us we’d be fighting for at the Institute. This isn’t what you told us it would be.”
Grain opened his mouth and closed it. To anyone else he'd have snapped something short and harsh. He didn’t—the company didn’t—have time for this. But Karen Sloane was different. Karen Sloane was Edgar Sloane’s only daughter, and Edgar Sloane had died in that same Hunchback four years ago helping Grain win the Cauldron-Born away from the Steel Vipers. He owed Edgar Sloane, and Karen was the only one left to collect. If she wanted a minute to make sense he’d give her a minute.

But only one.

“They’re just soldiers,” he said. “Like you and me.”

“They should be fighting the Clans.”

“The Clans didn’t attack Mary space.”

“That doesn’t matter. You told me they’d be fighting everyone soon enough, if we didn’t stop them.”

“That’s true.” Grain touched the Star Commander’s insignia.

“Then they shouldn’t be here.” Resolve hardened Karen’s tenor voice.

“No, they shouldn’t!” It was time to wrap this up. The Cauldron-Born’s own proximity sensors were beginning to show intermittent contacts. Corkson’s Dervish appeared from around the lip of the cliff’s edge, leaning into a run. It drew up short, feet crushing small rocks into sand. “It’s our job to show them they shouldn’t have. So we can get back to real work.”

The hardness remained in Karen’s voice. “It was real enough for Eric and the boys.”

The light flickered over the brown discoloration on the insignia. “Yes, it was. See to your ‘Mech, Karen.”

“Yessir, Hauptmann Grain, sir.”

Grain smiled absently and dialed the com channel closed. His fingers closed around the Cauldron-Born’s controls. Even after three years they still felt unfamiliar, not at all the extensions of himself he’d felt like with the Marauder. But he wouldn’t trade it the OmniMech, not for anything. He’d taken it from the invaders himself, and he’d send them back into the black with it, once they were done dealing with the Marys.

If he survived.

He toggled the company channel. “Listen up. Behind us Hauptmann Juda is trying to rally the rest of the battalion. He needs time to do that. We have to give him that time.” He eyed the other seven ‘Mechs left in the company. “I told him to keep the tanks and the foot-sloggers back with him. We don’t have room for tanks and if they push us back I don’t want us waiting for infantrymen.”

“We’re not backing up, Hauptmann,” Juarez said. “Not another meter.”

The Enforcer’s left leg now ended at the knee. The MechWarrior drove the barrel of the jury-rigged autocannon into the ground in an effort to shove the fifty-ton ‘Mech upright. The barrel bent.

Good thing he didn’t shoot. “Oskar, get the battalion moving. Their coming through. I’ll buy you what I can. I always said every day after Quarrel was a mistake, anyway.”

“Ivan—”

Grain cut the channel off. More missiles dropped among the Marik assault ‘Mechs, but the Mary pilots were good. They trusted in their behemoths’ armor, absorbing the incidental missile fire to blast at the close-in ‘Mechs picking at their armor. He cut the Cauldron-Born forward a few steps and angled it toward the Cerberus. It was the largest target, and the newest. Green icons signaled the large pulse lasers’ recharge. He sighted and squeezed.

Each of the Cauldron-Born’s arms mounted a large pulse laser and an ER PPC. Comparable weapons had appeared on Inner Sphere equipment in the last decade or so but the Clans, like so much else, had perfected them. Each of Grain’s peepers hit as hard as the Cerberus’ Gauss rifles. He held the bead of his targeting on-target as his weapons cycled, flooding his cockpit in searing waste heat. He barely noticed. Grain’s attention was on the Cerberus.

The coruscating hellfire of the PPCs chewed on the thick armor protecting the Cerberus’ heart, but failed to penetrate. The green machine gun-like spray of laser light from his pulse lasers scattered burn marks across the rest of the assault ‘Mech’s torso, but the refractory armor just drank the energy in. Blue-white light cast instant-long shadows as Simenon fired as he’d been ordered to. The Cerberus staggered under the paired PPC hits, but didn’t go down.

“Damn it,” Grain whispered. The officer in him hoped he’d spoken quietly enough not to trigger his microphone, but the raging angry part of him that slammed the Cauldron-Born’s controls to the side didn’t particularly care. The Marik Awesome was moving forward, its weapons questing toward the struggling shape of Khaled’s Enforcer. Karen Sloane’s Hunchback darted in from the side.

“Karen!”

The big Kali Yama cannon on the Hunchback’s shoulder spat fire, great long gouts of flame that flickered and hid the storm of depleted uranium death crushing the eighty-ton Marik ‘Mech’s armor. Laser light flashed as she added her medium lasers for good measure, but Grain knew it wouldn’t be enough. Not against an Awesome. He opened his mouth, forcing his clenched teeth apart, to order the retreat.

The Awesome twisted beneath Sloane’s barrage, letting the inertia of the shells striking its side push it around on the rotator-like waist. The Hunchback went to one knee, one broad club-shaped foot slipping on crushed rock. One of the PPCs the Awesome fired missed high, blasting a sparkling cavity out of the refractory ore in the arroyo wall. The other two struck the struggling Cadre Hunchback.

One burned away the armor protecting its left shoulder, a hard hit but a survivable one. Grain’s fingers twitched on his controls in unconscious mimicry of what he knew his dead best friend’s daughter would be doing, trying to get the ‘Mech up and back into the fight. His own battle was forgotten. He didn’t notice the sweat rolling down his back beneath his cooling vest, or the heat alarms blaring in their alien tones in the OmniMech’s cockpit. He didn’t see the icons for more heavy Marik ‘Mechs coming through behind the trio of assaults.

All he saw was the burned-out crevasse that had been the Hunchback’s cockpit before the Awesome’s third PPC had immolated it. All he saw was the pyre of the BattleMech that had claimed two generations of his friends.

All he saw was red.

The Cauldron-Born’s heat exchangers were of a class with the rest of it, the best that the ridiculously high-tech Clans could provide. The waste heat from his last broadside was already nearly gone. Grain slammed the throttles forward and pushed the sixty-five-ton ‘Mech to almost ninety kilometers per hour. Juarez and Simenon were shouting on the radio but he didn’t respond. He settled the target pipper over the Awesome’s heart and held down his triggers.

PPCs and lasers ate at the remaining armor, compounding the damage Karen’s fire had done before she died. The revenant beams ate through the right side of the Awesome’s chest and demolished the bulky shielding over the angular ‘Mech’s fusion engine. The red caret around the ‘Mech disappeared as its reactor went into automatic shutdown and the ‘Mech collapsed, but Grain’s awareness was already elsewhere.

Hobbled by the fresh wave of heat, the OmniMech stumbled. Grain kept it on its feet but the gyro was screaming for balance and a felt an instant’s feedback from the ‘Mech’s DI computer sorting the feeds from the neurohelmet. The OmniMech staggered as the Cerberus put a Gauss round into his side. Missiles from the Zeus and a newly-appeared Orion slammed into his legs.

“Hauptmann Grain!” Juarez screamed. Her voice, already smoke-damaged, sounded like a ninety-year smoker’s. “Get back here, sir!”

“More incoming!” Simenon shouted. Grain blinked as Simenon fired right past the bullet-shaped Cauldron-Born’s cockpit, hitting the Zeus with both shots. The eighty-ton ‘Mech stutter-stepped and fell, its right knee fused. A thick-bodied Tempest took its place, large pulse laser stuttering fire into the scrap of Khaled’s Enforcer.

“Get back,” Grain croaked. “Get to Juda.”

“Sir—”

“That’s an order, damn it!” He pointed his left arm at the Cerberus and fired its weapons. The PPC chewed nearly all the armor off of the ‘Mech’s left leg but the large pulse laser missed high, melting glassine scars into the rock. The stifling heat in the cockpit flared but didn’t become too much. Grain felt the canned air coming into the neurohelmet getting warm, which meant the tubes themselves were heating up. That was never a good sign.

The Cerberus turned to face him. The anti-missile system in the ‘Mech’s head chewed a flight of short-range missiles out of the air while Grain watched. The flashes highlighted the purple eagle of House Marik painted on its chest. Grain looked at the eagle, then down at the Star Commander’s insignia mounted on the console. His mind’s eye showed him the metallic Steel Viper insignia as it had been painted on his Cauldron-Born when he claimed it.

It wasn’t supposed to be here. He got the ‘Mech’s other arm around and fired those weapons, too, but they both missed. The Cerberus seemed to laugh at him. Static discharges snapped from the Gauss rifle barrels as capacitors dumped current to the propelling magnets. It was going to fire. Every day since Quarrel—

There was flash.

Then there was nothing.
In early 3053 the leaders of the Inner Sphere took a collective breath and regained their balance. The upheavals of 3050-3052 were behind them. The Clans were stopped. Hanse Davion and Romano Liao were dead. The Free Worlds League had embraced an economic renaissance that made them a threat to even the Lyran's vaunted industrial juggernaut. Theodore Kurita and his father, Coordinator Takashi, had, under the crushing pressure of the Clan invasion, found a rapprochement to end the feud that had undermined the Draconis Combine for decades. The scion of the Steiner and Davions, Prince Victor Ian Steiner-Davion, had won glory and acclaim against the Clans almost to equal ComStar’s victory over the invaders on blood-soaked Tukayyid.

It was in this hubristic period of calms that the lords of the Inner Sphere looked across old borders with avarice and loathing. It was in those first months that the seeds of the next turbulent decade were planted, and the denizens of the Inner Sphere and near Periphery suffered the growing pains of those unholy plants. It was then, just at the beginning, that the still-shocked Clans began to look at each other, instead of the Inner Sphere, as the source of their failure and continuing enmity. It was then that a chance existed, to bind both the Inner Sphere to itself and the Clans to each other. It was then that the chance was squandered.

The next ten years would see upheaval almost to equal the Fourth Succession War or the Clan invasion. On maps of the time the lines may not have changed all that much, but to the peoples of those worlds that war touched—and it touched nearly all of them—the sounds of battle and death became familiar friends. Politics, intrigue, and mutual advantage drove nearly every state into conflict. A series of bitter miscalculations drove the Federated Commonwealth, the undisputed power of the Inner Sphere, to tear itself apart. Militarily resurgent armies from the Free Worlds League and the Capellan Confederation would reclaim much of what had been lost a bare generation before. Cloak-and-dagger warfare would ignite the Periphery. Two Clans would batter each other almost to exhaustion. Legends would die, and be replaced. Loyalties would be tested and discarded.

Through it all, the omnipresent threat of the waiting Clans would color relations between centuries-old foes, but even that monolithic danger could not keep the peoples of the Inner Sphere from anger and augurs ingrained into their very genes by centuries of strife. The danger would not keep them from war, nor would the creation of a new Star League and the annihilation of one of those Clans.

Battle, it would seem, is the birthright of very occupant of the Inner Sphere.

--Mordecai Aristobulus, A Time Wasted, Galatea City Press, 3077

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Era Report: 3062 examines the overall state of the BattleTech universe in one of its most historic eras, and is designed to provide both sourcebook material and game rules to help run BattleTech and A Time of War campaigns in this period. Unlike the Historical series, which delves into the details of a single conflict, the Era Reports aim at a more generalized view of the period (though some focus may be spent on the military actions that dominated the day’s events).

This sourcebook begins with an Era Overview chapter, which discusses the general setting of the Inner Sphere from 3053 to 3062 and provides a basic timeline of events that occurred during the latter years of the Clan invasion. A 3062 Faction Rundown is then provided that describes the major players of the late Clan invasion, including their basic history and goals, as well as a selection of the iconic military commands they fielded in this time. Major Personas follows, describing the major figures of the late Clan Invasion, individuals whose actions helped shape history. The Museum Technica chapter then describes the technological state of the 3053 to 3062 period as the Inner Sphere adapted to the awesome power of Clan technology and brought their recovered manufacturing assets to bear even as the Clans, shocked by their defeat at Tukayyid, began to once-again press forward scientifically.

Following these sourcebook chapters are the Era Tracks, which provide the seeds for military scenarios set in this era of play. These Tracks use the same Chaos Campaign gameplay system featured in other sourcebooks, including the Jihad Hot Spots series and BattleTech’s PDF Turning Points series, but with modifications that will reinforce the setting’s impact on BattleTech campaigns. Additional non-Track specific rules for campaigns set within the early Clan invasion years can be found in the following chapter, Playing in the Late Clan Invasion. These rules include modifications to existing rules found in the core rulebooks, including the Total Warfare basic war game rules and the role-playing rules described in A Time of War.
TIMELINE OF EVENTS: 3053-3062

3053
[Jan] Precentor Padraig O Bhaoil appointed Director of the Explorer Corps.
[Spring] Draconis Combine and ComStar engineers begin rebuilding and upgrading the Columbus facility to support the Explorer Corps’ mission to locate the Clan homeworlds.
[Mid] Clan Jade Falcon raids Blue Hole but is defeated by Sterling’s Fusiliers. Impressed, the AFFC increases the number of Northwind Highlander regiments on the Clan border to three.
[Aug] ComStar Explorer Corps Coreward Operations headquarters announces its relocation to Columbus.
[Late] University of Blake founded on Terra. Assembly of first Kyushu-class WarShip begins at Dieron.
[5 Dec] The mercenary Blue Star Irregulars fight Clan Jade Falcon on Quarrel and capture a Fredasa-class corvette. The Avatars of Painful Death regiment is destroyed.

3054
[Feb] A Jade Falcon invasion of Morges is repulsed, as is a Steel Viper raid on Crimond.
[Summer] Precentor Martial Focht arranges with Theodore Kurita to station a large contingent of Com Guards on Luthien under the joint command of Draconis Combine Mustered Soldiery.
[Late] Clan Ghost Bear votes to relocate to Inner Sphere.
[15 Sept] Takashi Kurita, Coordinator of the Draconis Combine, dies and is succeeded by his son Theodore Kurita.
[Fall] Primus Mori travels to New Avalon and agrees that ComStar will not transmit any messages that might be used to harm the Federated Commonwealth.
[7 Dec] Beaver Falls, Hyner is destroyed by Clan Smoke Jaguar in retaliation for a Kat Killer 5 attack.
[9 Dec] Fuchida’s Fusiliers, a mercenary unit that went rogue rather than face the Clans, raids Bryceland. The Fusiliers will settle on Tortuga, becoming the latest in a line of pirate lords of that Periphery world.

HISTORY AND REVIEW

The decade of conflict between 3052 and 3062 saw old hatreds flare again and new ones spawned. In many cases the breaches forced between worlds and nations in the Fourth Succession War were fought again, sometimes brother against sister, son against mother. Each of the Inner Sphere’s polities, both Successor State and Clan, felt that the short period of rebuilding and repair that followed Tukayyid gave them an advantage over the other. Two of the powerful intelligence services, House Kurita’s Internal Security Force and House Steiner’s Lyran Intelligence Corps, were focused like lasers on the Clan threat. Both realms suffered from a lack of internal dissension assisted by the lack of observation. The young regent of the Federated Suns, Victor Steiner-Davion, suffered from a lack of confidence in his abilities as a ruler, and was prone to obsession on topics that should have been handled far below his level. In the Capellan Confederation, newly-seated Chancellor Sun-Tzu Liao put into motion the Byzantine schemes he’d been concocting since adolescence. Trained in paranoia by his psychotic mother and tradecraft by his spymaster father, he was uniquely positioned to regain much of what the Confederation had lost in the Fourth Succession War.

The Clans, including the powerful Wolf and Jade Falcon Clans, stood painfully behind their enforced line at Tukayyid and began looking to the side. Reinforcements rushed forward from the distant homeworlds allowed them to consolidate their holdings, and soon JumpShips and DropShips were crossing the Occupation Zones in Trials of Possession and Grievance. The Ghost Bears and the Smoke Jaguars were dealing with insurrections and guerillas in their Occupation Zones, and the Steel Vipers and Nova Cats intent on expanding their holdings. In all cases, strife was growing.

It had to. There were no other ways to burn off the pressures being built by the Truce of Tukayyid.

AFTER TUKAYYID DÉTENTE

When the Com Guard stopped the Clans on the pastoral world of Tukayyid, the entire Inner Sphere breathed a breath of blessed peace few of them had ever hoped to dream for. Military planners in both the Draconis Combine and the Federated Commonwealth slowed the frantic pace of unsustainable buildup and reallocation and activated more thought-out plans to rebuild their losses, adapt to new technologies, and prepare for the counterassaults both realms’ peoples expected them to launch.

The fragile truce founded on Outreach in 3051 remained in effect; the Free Worlds League and, to a lesser extent, the Capellan Confederation, funneled the output of their military industries to the battered battalions of the AFFC and DCMS. The much-needed income allowed the Mariks to continue to retool their manufactories to the new standard specifications of Star League-era technologies, while the Liao used the hard currency to both purchase the Free Worlds’ surplus and arm countless guerrilla groups in the Federated Commonwealth’s Sarna March—that part of the realm that had formerly been Capellan.

The Truce of Tukayyid was a bitter shock for the invading Clans, and an even greater shock for the Clans who had not advanced as part of Operation Revival. Very quickly they fell to bickering amongst themselves, each blaming the other for the “weaknesses” that had allowed ComStar to best them. Only the Wolves, now led by two Khans either of or familiar with the Inner Sphere—Phelan Ward, son of famed mercenary leader Morgan Kell, and the Black Widow herself, Natasha Kerenksy—seemed to accept the Truce and turn themselves to emerging from it stronger than ever.