

INN NEWS UPDATE...

Jihad Hot Spots: 3076



TABLE OF CONTENTS

SINS OF THE FATHER	4	LATE 3075: THE TURNING TIDE	46	Belle Lee on the Move	81
INTRODUCTION	8	Collective Fury	47	The New Earth Raid	82
How to Use This Book	9	Ceбалrai Free, but at What Cost?	47	For the Greater Good	83
About the Chaos Rampant Campaign	9	Fighting on Galatea Continues	47	Martial Davion Reports	83
WAR WITHOUT BORDERS	10	Viva La Resistance!	48	Terrorist Strikes Threaten Recovery Efforts	83
On the Precipice	11	The Living Must Envy the Dead	48	Ghost Bears Advance in Protectorate	84
The Archonette Policy: Steiner's Folly?	11	Fissures of Fire	48	Massacre on Kessel	84
Odessa: How?	13	MarketWatch	50	The Protectorate Curtain: What to Expect?	85
Blame Game	14	Best-Laid Plans	50	Victory on New Hessen	85
Reconstruction Deconstruction	14	Under New Management	51	Grim Portents	86
Victor and Isis: The Truth	15	And if Billy Jumped Off the Cliff...	52	SelaSys Yards Attacked	86
Taurian WarShip Bombarbs Midale	16	Filtvelt Forces Redeploy	52	Captain-General Corrine Marik	
New Avalon Recovery: A Long Road	16	Peripheral Concerns	52	Decries Regular Treachery	87
Hell's Horses Stalled	17	Canopus Free!	52	Dyev Hit by Blakist Counterattack!	87
EARLY 3075: THE RAZOR'S EDGE	18	Association Council Bombed!	53	And In Other News...	88
Frayed at the Seams	19	Magestrix Centrella-Liao Vows Swift Return	54	Kittery Manifesto	88
Brotherhood United	19	And In Other News...	55	Black Heart Roses Dead	88
A Pirate's Life for Me	19	Northwind: The Forgotten Front	55	Disaster on New Kyoto	89
Ferihegy Capital Arcology Bombed, Thousands Dead	20	Heavens Afire	56	Styk Descending	90
Vermezzo Fighting Continues	22	Tell-Tale Heart	57	AFFS Restructuring	91
Akfata Reclaimed	23	Taming of the Bears	58	Rasalhague Rebellion	91
Actions Speak Louder	24	Chaos Overwhelming, Part 2: Late 3075	59	Chairperson Olsen Recovering, May Return Soon	92
Internal Affairs	25	Mortis Rictus	59	Chaos Overwhelming, Part 4: Late 3076	93
Protective Measures	25	Iron Giants	59	Slugger's Paradise	93
The Rim Commonality Stands Alone	25	EARLY 3076: DOMINOS FALLING	62	Starfall	94
Regular Pride	27	The Coalition Rises	62	Wave of Confusion	96
Royal Wedding	28	Galatea Secured	62	Steel City	97
The Hill	28	Into the Protectorate	62	TAKING STOCK	99
Alone Against the Universe	29	Gaia Speaks	64	Bounty Hunting Boom	100
Your Nation Stands with You!	29	Shadow Play	65	Blackwell Hit Again, Dissolution Possible	100
Snakes or Saviors?	30	ComStar Denies Use of		Behind the Wall of Stone	100
Magestrix Arrives on Andurien with Praise, Warnings	31	Nuclear Weapons on Campbelton	65	Kithrong Quits	101
Coalition-Building	32	Andurien, Mosiro Sign Defense Pact	66	Knights of St. Cameron Vanish	102
Never Again!	32	Ominous Warnings	67	The Yamato Conspiracy	103
What to Give the Freedom Fighter		The Knights' Last Stand	67	Kittery Prefecture, Three Years On	103
who has Everything?	33	Honor and Duty	68	JIHAD HOT SPOTS: 3076 RULES ANNEX	106
New Com Guard Recruitment Drive a Success	33	Clan Etiquette	68	Unconventional Weapons	107
Chain of Command	34	Raven Rumbles	69	Unwilling Allies	107
And In Other News...	35	Hellion Renegades Test Rasalhague Defense	70	Kearny-Fuchida "Super-Jump" Technology	109
Suicide Bomber	35	Diamond Sharks Expanding Influence	70	Kearny-Fuchida "Super-HPG" Technology	110
Chasing Shadows	36	Khan Marthe Pryde Slain!	71	New Vehicles	111
Rogue Bears Hit Odessa!	37	And In Other News...	71	Moltke Main Battle Tank	111
Buried Dragon	38	Democracy Now Trials Begin on Kaumberg	71	Bolla Stealth Tank	112
Lyran, League Troops Repel Circinus Invaders	38	Rogue Mercenaries Turn on Niops	72	New 'Mechs	114
Taurians Attack Brussett	39	A Victory Against Terror	73	<i>Tundra Wolf</i>	114
Chaos Overwhelming, Part 1: Early 3075	40	Remembering Uncle	73	NH-1A Rook	115
Roman Candle	40	Chaos Overwhelming, Part 3: Early 3076	77	OWR-2M <i>Ostwar</i>	116
Dante's Daydream	41	Comes the Reaper	77	New DropShips	118
Acid Rain	42	Infestation	78	<i>Interdictor</i> -class Pocket WarShip	118
Heat Lightning	44	LATE 3076: TOTAL WARFARE	80	<i>Arondight</i> -class Pocket WarShip	119
		Convergence	81	New WarShip	121
				<i>Newgrange</i> -class YardShip	121

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Special Thanks

To Randall for his ongoing support on this and every other BattleTech project I've worked on. Our esteemed playtester and fact-checker apparatus. The six "Herblets": Annie, Oscar, Merlin, Meggie, Blaze, and Logan (the lone canine). And, as it shall be until we all fall, Rebecca "Beckie" J Beas; though it's been our rockiest road yet, we're still walking it together.

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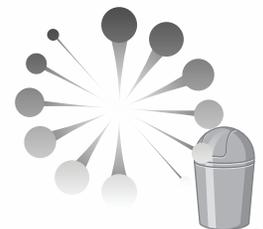
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Published by Catalyst Game Labs,
 an imprint of InMediaRes Productions, LLC
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SINS OF THE FATHER



MASTERSTON MEMORIAL SPACE PORT
REGULUS CITY, REGULUS
PRINCIPALITY OF REGULUS
4 APRIL 3076

It should have been a landing like any other, a long aerodyne DropShip coming to rest at the end of the designated runway, oblivious to the attention it drew. But the way the newly constructed air-defense towers continued to track the vessel with their gun sights—even after it had stopped—gave lie to any trappings of innocence. Large, yet sleek, and bristling with guns, the *Assault Triumph*-class DropShip was a powerful threat by itself, but what its fading scarlet to black hull represented—and whom it carried within—added an air of malevolence that amplified its threat a hundred fold. Several geysers of steam, jetting from cooling vents and pressure releases, announced the end of the craft's rolling journey, close enough for the hated image of its downturned broadsword insignia to be seen clearly from the ground.

The Word of Blake.

In perches surrounding the landing pad, fingers tightened involuntarily within their trigger guards—their owners catching themselves instants before they reached the pressure point. Despite everything that had happened, despite all the suffering, and despite the utter despair that had gripped the heart of the Regular nation since the last time that broadsword showed itself here, the soldiers held their fire. Because this vessel had landed under a flag of truce.

Colonel Michelle Cameron-Jones of the First Regular Hussars could sense the tension among the “honor guards” on the tarmac as keenly as she could within herself. Though she sat inside a heated limousine, tapping her fingers on the smooth upholstery as the vehicle passed yet another camouflaged bunker, she felt the chill in the air outside, where the infantry guardsmen stood behind plastic snowshields. Ever since the Night of Fire, the weather around the capital had been erratic; the meteorologists blamed it partly on nature, but they didn't discount the effects of the ash clouds that rose from the city on that day, and the jet black smoke that darkened the sky for hundreds of kilometers, for weeks on end.

The legacy of the Word's last visit.

The limousine was part of a long convoy that slowly snaked towards the grounded DropShip. Her husband, Prince Titus Cameron-Jones, was in a different vehicle for security reasons. And their son, Lester, was safe back at the palace, in the Hall of Serenity with his minders—along with his grandfather and *his* minders.

The thought of the former Prince of Regulus made Michelle's eyes narrow slightly as she watched the Blakist DropShip loom ever closer.

What has your arrogance cost us, Kirc?

Michelle looked over the units deployed on the tarmac, nodding her approval. The heavy Merkava tanks were not a credible threat against the Blakist DropShip, but they acted as both honor guard and local security force, drawing the casual observer's attention toward them while presenting a credible threat to the Blakists' dignitaries. The squat vehicles also shielded the convoy from the gun ports on the heat-scorched DropShip's flank. It was a small measure, but it showed her subordinate was thinking. Force Commander Hunter would replace her at the head of the First if she fell today, and the man's competence reassured Michelle that both her nation and her son were in capable hands. The Night of Fire would *not* happen again.

And just in case the Blakists violated their own truce flag, Michelle knew a hidden reinforced artillery battalion lay in wait amongst the many yellow construction vehicles scattered about the spaceport. If the Blakists started something, they wouldn't leave the planet alive.

At least we can match them here, on the ground.

Panic had gripped the planet when the former FWLS *Corinth* had appeared in orbit above the planet five days ago, escorted by a veritable swarm of fighters and combat DropShips. RSS analysis had calculated the attendant fleet could hold as many as two regiments' worth of troops, and while the growing Regular Defense Force could match those numbers, the depleted Regular fleet—which had immediately moved to intercept the Blakist flotilla—could not. General Orfelt had ordered the fleet back to a more defensive posture, and the command staff had argued on how to stop the Blakists from landing.

And then the Blakists had made their demands known.

A meeting.

Titus Cameron-Jones, Michelle's husband and erstwhile commander-in-chief of the Regular Defense Forces had invested heavily in Regulus' reconstruction, assuaging its people's fear in the wake of that Night. Fear of the Blakist reprisals, fear of persecution for real and imagined slights against the State—and by “State,” Michelle naturally thought of “Captain-General” Kirc Cameron-Jones—had deeply scarred the Regular psyche. It would take years to heal the wounds the brutal assault and the resulting crackdown had caused, and Titus believed the best policy to help encourage this healing was one of honesty between government and citizens. Telling the truth—no matter how painful.

The thought made Michelle smile wistfully.

Titus was a good man and had the potential to be a great one, but he was not a warrior. She had imposed a news blackout to prevent further panic from spreading, something that was almost impossible with the blocky shape of the *Thera*-class WarShip silhouetting itself against the bright disc of Zamzama, Regulus' moon. The more uninformed news organizations—*were there any other kind?*—had proclaimed the arrival of allied forces, ignorant of the fact Regulus stood alone.

SINS OF THE FATHER

And then Kirc had mentioned his own contingency plans. Tiger Hill. Michelle knew the thought had revolted Titus, but for the good of his people, he had been at least willing to consider it. Kirc's on-planet stockpiles were brought in, and a wing of intrepid pilots briefed on the importance of their upcoming mission. It was suicide, but every Regular knew the price of acquiescence to fear. The blackened corpses of multi-story buildings still stood on the eastern side of Regulus City as silent witnesses of the cost.

The Blakist truce flag was so out of character that everyone immediately suspected a trap. The old hands—those officers who served with Kirc (and were later pardoned for their roles in the Purge)—quickly advocated rejecting the invitation out of hand and launching the first strike. Michelle felt an impulse to agree with them; the Word used deceit time and again to hammer its foes.

But Titus had been adamant: No first strike. No treachery.

Michelle couldn't fault his logic. Every time Regulus had fought the Blakists, Regulus had lost. Since the Second Hussars had fallen on Wallis, the characteristic Regular martial swagger had slowly eroded, until it had been washed away in the brutality of Kirc's so-called "filtration" camps. The best units in League space had devolved to the point where they saw their own neighbors as enemies, and BattleMechs spent years serving as enforcers for Kirc's paranoia. Another defeat at Blakist hands would unleash a new round of Regular self-recrimination and hate.

If it didn't kill them all outright.

The limousine's sudden braking shook Michelle from her reverie, and one gloved hand slipped forward into her lap. Her old FWLM uniform was gone, too closely associated with the excesses of the Purge. She wore the new uniform now, a double-breasted jacket the same burnished orange as the units under her command, with her command ankh riding on the wide lapel. She didn't expect it to impress the Blakist delegation, but it wasn't meant to. It was a symbol of the Principality's rebirth. She knew Titus hated the phoenix metaphor, but she thought it was apt. She checked her reflection, making sure her flaxen blonde hair was tucked underneath her peaked cap. Normally, she tended not to be overly concerned with her appearance, but since little Lester had been born, Michelle had noticed a few extra grams creeping onto her normally svelte figure, and crow's feet expanding at the corners of her amber eyes. She smoothed her pants leg, picking at a piece of lint that managed to avoid her trimmed nails while she waited for a guard to open her door.

The well-insulated limousine vibrated as a bass tone sounded across the landing tarmac, and she winced in sympathy with the unprotected infantry lining the approach. This was the pre-arranged signal. The closest Merkava to the DropShip sounded off its own horn, a pathetic reply to the Blakists' blast. Michelle held her breath as the limousine door swung open. The subaltern who opened it managed to keep his posture straight, fighting

his urge to look up at the imposing spacecraft that hissed and popped as its armored shell cooled.

Michelle quickly stood, snapping off a palm-out salute at the subaltern. A quick glance down the line of vehicles showed others doing the same, polished boots hitting the ground in unison, while the more delicate wingtips of the diplomats took slightly longer. Flakes of snow were falling, but nothing heavy. The spaceport lights were dimmed to help hide the nighttime arrival from prying eyes. Only a few spotlights had been rigged up around a makeshift dais, but Michelle knew none of the attendees wanted to see their opposite number. She picked Titus out of the mass of faces exiting the sleek black vehicles, the Regular ankh emblazoned on each flag snapping to attention.

Titus wore his mask well, but she could see the unease rolling off him.

Kirc had been almost apoplectic when he'd heard about the meet, adamant it was a trap. Titus had reminded him that had the Blakists wanted him dead, they'd had plenty of other opportunities. And Michelle, despite her own reservations, was inclined to agree. Besides, with the *Corinth* and its coterie of attendants virtually blockading the planet, it was not as if Regulus had much choice. So they would greet the Blakists as diplomats and hope for the best.

The large mass of one of the DropShip's main bay doors rolled back and into the ship's upper hull with a low, droning hum. At the same time, a ramp extended from the ship's hull, gliding swiftly and quietly to rest on the tarmac. With a dull thud, the ramp locked itself down at the very moment the bay door completed its ascent. Dazzling interior lights from within the DropShip flooded the area as a few Hussar tankers slewed their turrets to face the cavernous bay, unsure what might come out.

Michelle peered intently into the DropShip's main bay, and she almost sighed audibly with relief when the lights dimmed enough to reveal empty bays. No BattleMechs or vehicles on board that she could see at this vantage point; the Blakists were holding up their end of the agreement so far. The tank gunners let their crosshairs linger on the target, but where Michelle had half-expected to see one of those infernal Blakist Celestials striding forward, she instead saw only the silhouette of a single man—a veritable giant—striding forth.

Several of the gathered Regular diplomats gasped at the sight of him, a wall of muscle clad in a form-fitting red and gray jumpsuit with a hooded cowl hanging loosely at the base of his neck. His shadowed eyes swept the audience without passion as he marched down the ramp. He acknowledged no one.

He was unarmed, so far as Michelle could see, but she'd seen enough reports about these Manei Domini cyborgs to know not to trust her eyes. The footage brought back by the surviving Hussars of the Gibson debacle was now a motivational tool for the new recruits streaming through Aitutaki's basic training program, and the RSS had dived into Kirc's coffers to accumulate

SINS OF THE FATHER



as much information about these techno-modified warriors as possible. His feet thunked heavily on the ramp, and it occurred to Michelle—who was still looking at the man's hands for any telltale sign of weapon prosthetics—that perhaps it was not his meaty fists she should be inspecting. Then another man-giant appeared at the top of the stairs. He, too, stalked down the ramp with heavy footsteps, just like his companion, but this time Michelle caught the glint of dark metal poking out the end of his left sleeve.

Which one is the subject? she wondered, as she cautiously maneuvered through the ranks of her fellow Regulans, moving to stand closer to Titus.

Without warning, both men snapped to attention and snap-turned to face the assembled Regular delegation.

"Blake Eleison!" they cried out as one.

The simultaneous bark sent a jolt of electricity through Michelle. Their deep baritones were filled with such conviction and fervor it almost made up for the fact she had no idea what they were saying. The one with the metal arm continued.

"Apollyon," he shouted, "Prince of Scars, Thrice-Blessed of the Master!"

Apollyon!

Michelle knew the name well. In the aftermath of the Night of Fire, investigators had found unsent diplomatic missives that detailed Precentor Apollyon's appointment as governor of Gibson. Apollyon had led the defense of Gibson that shattered the Fourth Hussars and had called upon the various flotsam mercs Kirc had hired to quit the field, an act that left the Fourth to its fate alone. It was a name well known in Regular military circles—and likely across the entire Inner Sphere.

She wasn't sure what the rest of his title meant—until another large figure emerged from the DropShip and started descending the ramp. This one was clearly senior to the first two, judging by the way they dipped their heads in respect. He wore a crimson facsimile of a ComStar acolyte's robe, trimmed in gold, with an embroidered cowl that hid most of his face in shadows.

But the robe failed to hide the metal limbs that emerged from under the cloak's ornate folds. The ramp trembled with each step, as if a BattleMech, not a man, walked upon it. As Michelle watched, she caught the glimpse of metallic feet that ended in vicious looking talons, sharpened tips grating slightly over the ramp's non-slip contours. But where Michelle expected to hear the whine of prosthetic servomotors, she heard only a discomforting silence and the tap of metal feet on metal ramp.

As the man reached the bottom, he raised his head, revealing a face only half-covered by cocoa-colored skin. Michelle found his face almost noble, were it not for the metal and ceramic inserts filling the space where his right eye should have been. A faint glow emanated from the deep recess, adding a spectral quality about him, but it was a glow without warmth—the electric blue of a machine within a man's body.

Apollyon, I presume?

The Blakist faced the crowd, not moving from his position at the base of the stairs.

"Leaders of Regulus," he spoke in a deep, almost reverent tone, "I greet you with Blake's Peace."

One of the diplomats began to step forward, awkwardly, but Titus moved faster.

"There is no welcome for you here Apollyon," Titus said. "You requested a meeting, and here it is."

Titus had eschewed the more martial attire of the office of Prince and wore a simple business suit instead. His voice was strong and forceful, the voice of command, but Apollyon simply looked bemused.

"Naamah told me about you, Prince Titus," he said. "I was expecting something more ... *grandiose* ... in your greeting."

The sneer he directed at her husband caused Michelle to ball her fists, but she caught herself before she took a step forward. Still, her motion didn't go unnoticed by the monster's electronic eye.

"I see your woman has a more direct approach in mind," he said.

"Enough!" Titus snapped before Michelle could respond or even move. "Say what you came to say, Precentor, then leave our realm."

The cowed Blakist nodded approvingly, a slight smile on his face suggesting a measure of respect for the Prince.

"Very well," he began, pausing just a moment to slowly sweep his gaze across the assembled throng. "I notice that the senior Cameron-Jones is not here?"

This time, Michelle answered before her husband could.

"Titus is Prince now, Blakist," she said. "Kirc's whereabouts are irrelevant."

If Apollyon noticed her reply, his expression didn't show it as his eyes swept the delegation yet again, perhaps scanning the defenses. Michelle felt her mouth go dry; the Blakists expected the honor guard, but many of her other surprises had been hidden. Could this cyborg sense them anyway?

"Oh, but his whereabouts are quite relevant, Princess," he finally said, briefly spearing Michelle with a look that could wither steel.

Apollyon's dark human eye and electric blue lens returned to Titus. "Your father's actions have not gone unnoticed, Prince Titus," he declared. "But as your wife says, *you* are the leader now. That means you are responsible for *all* your subjects, so heed my words: Should Regular forces—either by themselves, or by proxy—ever deign to interfere with matters outside your borders again, you will face the full wrath and fury of the Master.

"And when that happens, *all* of Regulus will pay the price."

His message delivered, Apollyon crossed his arms, awaiting Titus' reply. Michelle nodded slowly, as she hit the communicator stud hidden in her gloved hands.



SINS OF THE FATHER

"So that's it, huh?" Michelle asked. "Do as we're told or pay the consequences?"

Apollyon did not reply. His gaze remained fixed on Titus. Warring emotions crossed the new Prince's face, and Michelle felt a small pang of remorse for what she was about to do.

I'm sorry honey, but you're too good a man to do what's necessary ...

I, on the other hand, am a bitch.

Snapping her arm up, she barked into the tiny commlink slipped into the cuff of her sleeve. "Hunter! On Target!"

Titus blinked and spun to face her, an incredulous look on his face an instant before she tackled him to the ground.

The first whip crack of Gauss projectiles smashing the sound barrier assaulted her ears, and the staccato bark of small arms fire erupted as service manholes beneath the DropShip sprang open to reveal her commando troops. The crowd scattered as the gunfire started, with most diving for the ground amid screams of alarm.

The ricochet of metal on metal rang loud in Michelle's ears as she protectively straddled Titus, shielding him from any stray rounds.

She raised her head an instant later, only to see one of the uniformed Blakists—now standing before his master—ripped open with a sonic boom and a spray of blood.

Titus cried out from underneath her, but his voice was lost in the deafening firefight.

"Cease fire!" he screamed impotently. *"Cease fire!"*

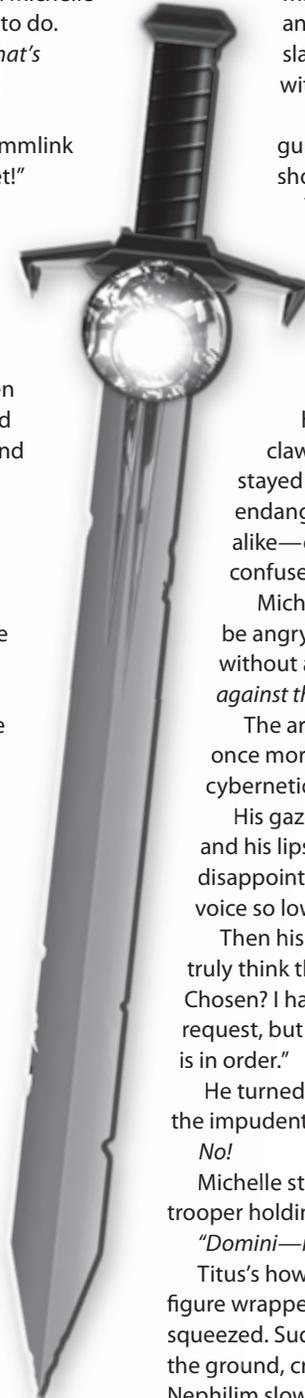
A shimmer of light suddenly appeared in front of Michelle and she felt herself thrown back, landing hard on the ferrocrete tarmac. One of the black-clad commandos, moving around behind Apollyon and up the DropShip ramp, suddenly grasped his throat before he too was lifted off the ground. Michelle shook her head to clear the image, but she felt only throbbing and pain and dizziness. As she watched, the commando's head suddenly bent to an unnatural angle and his body abruptly dropped.

Titus!

Michelle whipped around to where her husband had been, only to see him similarly lifted in the air by a hazy, dark blur. In a panic, she reached for her non-existent sidearm, cursing at Titus' insistence than none of the delegates be armed.

Titus! No!

"Domini! Desino!" Apollyon's voice boomed across the spaceport.



Resolving from insubstantial blurs to dark, metallic forms, six suits of black and red battle armor, each one demonic in appearance, revealed their presence around their master. Apollyon disappeared behind their bulk, and Michelle watched incredulously as a Gauss slug slammed into one of the suits' armored carapaces without crashing through to the trooper inside.

The shock of their appearance caused the Regularan guns to falter for a second, and this time Titus' shouted cease-fire command was heard.

The Blakist guns remained silent, but trained outwards. They had formed a cordon around their leader but had not moved to retaliate.

Michelle's four-man commando team lay dead on the tarmac, their black-clad bodies twisted and broken.

"Cease fire!" Titus repeated at the top of his lungs, even as he remained held aloft in the claw of one of the Blakist troopers. The Regularan guns stayed quiet, unsure how to proceed with their Prince endangered. Several of the officials—military and civil alike—climbed slowly to their feet, looking around at the confused scene.

Michelle felt the fire in her cheeks, knowing Titus would be angry, but more upset that her ambush had failed—and without a single Blakist shot fired. *Yet another debacle against the Word.*

The armored bodies parted, allowing Apollyon to emerge once more, his fury evident in the burning red fire of his cybernetic eye.

His gaze found Michelle, even as she struggled to rise, and his lips writhed into cruel grin. "I would have been disappointed if you had tried nothing, Princess," he said in a voice so low it was nearly lost in the ringing in her ears.

Then his eyes flashed over the crowd. "Pathetic *Frails!* You truly think that you can hope to stand against the Master's Chosen? I had hoped that you would see the logic in my request, but now I understand a more practical demonstration is in order."

He turned to face the dangling Titus. "We could crush you like the impudent bug you are."

No!

Michelle started forward before Apollyon's next words to the trooper holding her husband cut her off.

"Domini—manus."

Titus' howl of pain pierced the night as the battle-suited figure wrapped its armored gauntlet around his left forearm and squeezed. Suddenly released, the Regularan prince collapsed to the ground, cradling his shattered limb with his other arm as the Nephilim slowly stepped backwards. Michelle rushed over to her husband, ignoring the suits as tears streamed down her face.

SINS OF THE FATHER

It wasn't supposed to be like this!

Apollyon stared down at them, impassive. His expression lacked any of the arrogance Michelle expected, reflecting neither triumph nor satisfaction. If there was any emotion on the Manei Domini's shadowy face that she could discern, it was vague disappointment.

"I regret that such theatrics are necessary," he said, "but there had to be retribution. Understand this, Regular Prince: we could lay this entire spaceport—and everyone within it—to waste in the time it just took to break the bones in your arm. Do not mistake our restraint for weakness. As surely as we have the power to shatter Frail bones, we have the power to shatter your entire Frail nation."

Apollyon looked up to scan the entire assembled crowd once more before turning back to them. "And just as your vaunted

military and 'warrior tradition' failed to protect you, they will fail to protect your realm if the full fury of Blake's Word descends upon it."

Pulling himself ramrod straight, Apollyon looked imperiously down at the wounded prince. "So, Prince Titus, one last time: do you understand?"

Titus remained silent for a moment, then he turned to face Michelle. His pain-stricken face softened for a second, before setting into a mask of stone. When he turned and spoke again to Precentor Apollyon, his voice was devoid of any feeling, despite the pain she knew he felt.

It was a voice Michelle had never heard Titus use, and it unnerved her.

"Yes," he spat out. "I understand."

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to our INN special report, "State of the Sphere: 3076". I'm your host, Bertram Habeas.

We at INN would like to begin today's retrospective with a salute to the late Michael Bosworth, who died in the performance of duty, in the career that he loved, nearly four years ago on Arc-Royal. May his loss—and that of so many millions who have perished in these last ten years—serve us all as a reminder of the grim cost of war.

In the last four years, we have seen the ravages of conflict burning across the entire Inner Sphere virtually unchecked. Chaos and confusion have reigned, but through it all, we have seen the lights of hope, burning ever brighter in the darkness. Indeed, these last four years may well have been the turning point in the Jihad, but only time will tell us if that is true or not. Through it all, INN continues in its commitment to offer its readers and viewers bi-annual reports to help record and examine the ongoing conflict so that we may get a glimpse of the bigger picture unfolding before us.

Presented here is a summary of events since our last special report. As ever, we have striven to accumulate data from a variety of sources—most through partnerships and unprecedented access within several organizations—to provide the widest possible view in the most personal and understandable ways. This is done without heavy analysis, as none of us can claim clairvoyance in these dangerous times. But through these snippets, we hope to show the complex and common fabric of this horrifying war and to understand its meaning not just for one people or group, but for all of humanity.

Before we begin, I'd like to take one more moment to thank our ComStar affiliates, the Interstellar Associated Press, and a host of national media outlets throughout the Inner Sphere for their help in this compilation. A heartfelt "thank you" also goes out to all of the freelance reporters, underground authors, network administrators, and others who have taken it upon themselves to not only give us reports from their own struggles, but who have gone above and beyond the call of duty to get the latest and best information to our viewers and readers.

All information presented tonight can be accessed through the downloaded media package to all personal data pads, tri-vid systems, and other media devices. When possible, we have included actual video and audio footage, as well as transcripts and copies of written documentation.

We begin tonight with a summarized perspective on the events from 3073—our last compilation report—through 3075.

—Bertram Habeas, INN Special Correspondent, Skye, Lyran Alliance, 20 January 3077





HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Jihad Hot Spots: 3076 (JHS: 3076) is a sourcebook for *BattleTech* that continues where *Blake Ascending*, *Jihad Hot Spots: 3072* and *The Blake Documents* left off, providing players and gamemasters with an ongoing first-hand look at the events of the Word of Blake Jihad from the start of 3071 through the end of 3074. To best reflect the continuing chaos and uncertainty of this period, the material presented in this sourcebook—as with the previous and subsequent *Jihad Hot Spots* books—uses the format of compiled news articles, interviews and first-person accounts. In addition, as the truth of events comes to light, this book and its successors will include a timeline describing those events known to be true from previous books while also providing additional campaign scenarios and new game rules and units based on developments in the appropriate time period.

Beginning with *War Without Borders*, *Jihad Hot Spots: 3076* reviews the events that led up to and through *Blake Ascending* and *Blake Documents*. A review of known events—removed enough from the immediate chaos to be considered fact by nearly everyone in the *BattleTech* universe—is also provided here.

The following sections take readers forward in six-month increments, using the same format as *JHS: 3072*, with a more chronological focus. Each of these sections includes scenario tracks (called *Chaos Overwhelming*) compatible with the *Chaos Unbound* and *Chaos Unleashed* campaign systems outlined in *Blake Ascending* and the *Chaos Rampant* tracks featured in *JHS: 3072*. These tracks are also compatible with those found in the *Jihad Turning Points* e-book series available through www.battlecorps.com. Gamemasters and players can use these campaign scenarios, which follow the *Chaos Unbound* system, for any number of one-off games. We chose not to reprint the campaign system in this book (which originally appeared in *Dawn of the Jihad/Blake Ascending*, pp. 133-138) so as to provide more room for articles and “hard” rules later on. *Taking Stock*, the final sourcebook section, wraps up events through 3076, covering a few remaining key happenings between early 3075 and the end of 3076.

The final section, *Jihad Hot Spots: 3076 Rules Annex*, highlights new special rules and spotlights a few new units for *BattleTech* game play whose introductions and/or use played a major role in the events preceding and featured within this book. Future *Hot Spots* books will add to these rules as the war continues, roughly approximating the pace at which new developments became widespread factors in the greater conflicts of the Jihad.

ABOUT THE CHAOS RAMPANT CAMPAIGN

The campaign tracks presented here follow the same rules as originally presented in *Dawn of the Jihad (DotJ)/Blake Ascending*. A free electronic version of this—*Chaos Campaign*—is also available on www.battlecorps.com. Players and gamemasters will also find these rulebooks handy, depending on the type of campaign run: *Total Warfare (TW)*, *TechManual (TM)*, *Tactical Operations (TO)*, *Strategic Operations (SO)*, *CBT: RPG*, and *Merc Supplemental: Updates (MSU)*. References made to aerospace units in the Tracks will refer to those aerospace unit types featured in *Total Warfare* (such as fighters and DropShips) or those covered in *Strategic Operations* (such as JumpShips, space stations, and WarShips). Additional cited sources may include *Jihad Hot Spots: 3072 (JHS72)*, *Technical Readout: 3075 (TR3075)*, and *Technical Readout: Vehicle Annex (TRVA)*.

If a track does not specify certain parameters, the gamemaster decides what is fair for his or her particular player group. The overall intent of this campaign is to present gamemasters with a framework that allows them to bring their players through the massive conflagration known as the Word of Blake Jihad. Gamemasters begin this arc of the *Chaos Campaign* with *Roman Candle*, *Dante's Dream*, or *Acid Rain*. Player groups begin this campaign arc with 1,000 Warchest points or whatever they had remaining at the end of the *Chaos Rampant* campaign from *Hot Spots: 3072 (JHS72)*.

Special Note: Because of its extreme nature, the *Dante's Dream* track is recommended only for groups that have already completed a minimum of three Tracks in the Jihad Chaos campaign.





connection/JIHAD HOT SPOTS:3076/section03: WAR WITHOUT BORDERS

WAR WITHOUT BORDERS



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WAR WITHOUT BORDERS

David:

Much of the information contained within this packet covers several years' worth of summaries and rundowns across the Inner Sphere. You'll find Bosworth's three complete programs as well; they are jammed full of material that he and his staff culled from news organizations and even military networks from pretty much every corner of known space. Even now, three years after his death, his incredible organizational and analytical skills are sorely missed.

I've done what I can in breaking down information on a year-by-year basis. There's a lot to cover, and I'm sure your team would appreciate a blanket overview of the situation so far; I doubt the Blakists let their "guests" tune in to INN on a daily basis.

Below is a scattering of notes and articles that caught Chandrasekhar's and Peter's eyes during his intel gathering efforts in '73 and '74. INN is picking up the torch that Bosworth left behind with a rundown of 3075-76, so I'll let you scan that at your leisure. It's these two years I'm sure you're most interested in, since it involves the faltering coalition that Victor was cobbling together in the bombing's aftermath. Uncle seemed to be fond of what Stone was trying to accomplish, so I'm sure if this data is of use to him, then Uncle would approve of my passing it to you.

Much thanks for retaining me and my Seeds after Uncle's unfortunate death. We won't fail you or Stone.

—Marcel Webb

ON THE PRECIPICE

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Agents within the Principality of Regulus noted an oblique reference to "Operation Vijay" while negotiating a highly restrictive contract to build nuclear and fusion power plants on Cameron. [No idea what this means, though Kirc certainly seems more unstable ever since the incident. —PA.0373]

"New Legacy Assured With Prince's Birth" <<file

THARKREG.120273.vol2>> The Alliance today celebrated the birth of a new Prince in the Steiner line. Archon Peter Steiner-Davion and his wife Marie Hussfield Steiner-Davion welcomed their firstborn Hanse into the world after a 28-hour delivery ... [Happy days. We could use some joy in the universe. —CK.0373]

Rumors of HPG signal loss from deep within the Falcon OZ. My merchant contacts have gone quiet, with no reason given. Nearly half of the OZ is silent; I've attempted a few operative missions within the Falcon's space, but to no avail. I can only wonder if the Word has effectively cut the Clan off at the knees. [Which may explain why Khan Pryde was so willing to talk with Khan Kell recently. —PA.0473]

HOUT BORDERS

THE ARCHONETTE POLICY: STEINER'S FOLLY?

Although best intentions surely guided his drastic decision, Archon Peter's assessment of the Alliance's state at the time was utterly flawed.

Richard's Commonwealth stood at the end of years of fighting—broken, battered, and depleted but ready to rebuild. Today's Alliance finds itself still in the midst of a gruesome war. An inferno with no end in sight occupies all of our resources—manpower, materiel, and dedication alike.

It is in exactly these situations where lumbering, bureaucratic empires spanning the stars provide an advantage: Due to their size they are bound to have some reserves, providing pause and relief for hard-pressed parts of their territory.

Smaller organizations—like these Archonettes—obviously have fewer resources put aside, less breathing room, and practically no maneuvering space under such pressure. Natural reaction: withdrawal. The borders are drawn closer and closer, leaving a lot of Alliance worlds alone to fend for themselves in what can be called none other than a "governmental vacuum."

What makes matters worse in the current situation is the incomprehensible assignment of the Archonettes themselves: Covering just a fraction of Lyran space—which is bad enough—they are roughly arrayed in a circle, with a big, fat, gaping hole centering on Coventry between them.

How irresponsible for a nation priding itself on its merchant tradition! Whatever interaction the Archonettes might have with others is cut short due to immensely long jump-routes through "rogue" territory. It's just as well that most of our BattleMech industry landed in enemy hands; any manufactured machines would probably not see their destinations in years.

As regrettable as it is, the conclusion is evident: In copying Richard Steiner's revolutionary directive of little, self-sufficient kingdoms, Archon Peter might have unwillingly signed the Alliance's death warrant.

—Alliance Monthly OpEd, SBC News, December 3072

"Passing of the Heart" <<file VOICE.200373.vol3.2>>

By order of the Coordinator, tomorrow is designated as a day of mourning to honor the passing of Abbess Tomade Yamiro. The Abbess left the Dragon's presence during her visit to New Samarkand ... [I'm not convinced this was as quiet as suggested. However, Jerrar's security around this has been extremely tight, which only sets off more alarm bells. Something to ponder. —CK.0473]

The news reports in the Alliance regarding my activities on Arcturus are happily nearly non-existent. Still, the losses the Blakists handed us are very worrisome. I'm not sure I can adequately cover the heavy losses to the Irregulars or the Star Guard; Keller assured me that the Brigade has other resources he

WAR WITHOUT BORDERS



can use to rebuild. Despite the surprise, the Blakist attack proved to me that I'm on the right trail regarding this "Gabriel" outpost, so while we rebuild here, I shall begin preparations for Odessa. -CK.0573

My contacts in the Star have informed me that Stone cleared their extensive background check. I'm fairly sure Davion will talk with him, considering that reports have Alys's resistance hooked with Stone, not to mention the Cats that have attached themselves to his hindquarters. Considering that Davion's star is continuing to freefall among many commanders, it may be time to look to another to find a way to pull a coalition together. Or they could look to Uncle, considering what he's done in the last couple of years ... -PA.0673

Reports from Dangan Dao on Shuen Wan are disturbing; the entire Isesaki Shipping dockyard was wiped out by Capellan nuclear artillery strikes. I'm not entirely sure what game the Confederation is playing here, assaulting hurting League worlds, but it is disconcerting the way the Capellans are tossing tactical devices with little restraint and no thought to collateral damage. -CK.0773

The news from Gibson is horrifying. The Regular task force was almost completely slaughtered; I suspect the Blakists there let the survivors escape only to tell the nightmare they witnessed. -PA.0873

Word has reached me through contacts on Caledonia of the massacre of the 22nd Skye Rangers. While the loss of a Lyran unit

isn't universe shaking, what is disturbing is the single-minded focus by the Word's 52nd Shadow in killing them to the last man. I've pieced together intel that suggests this is the same unit that wiped out the Regular task force at Gibson. -PA.1073

Rumor that Naomi Centrella was aboard the DropShip that exploded on the pad at Sian was apparently false; agents have reported seeing the Chancellor's wife in the company of heavy MIM escort a few days later. -PA.1173

Our meetings with Khan Kell have gone well. The mirza presented the evidence we had regarding Odessa, and after some consideration the Exiles have agreed to provide naval and ground support for the operation I have in the planning stages. Kell has made several suggestions, which I have taken under advisement. With Lyran support assured, it appears our Odessian campaign will go forward. -CK.1173

Stone is an interesting man. His presence demands respect, though I don't think he's really in charge of his group (and I have my suspicions as to who is). Davion is certainly enamored with him, but more so the Nova Cats. So much so that I am afraid of a full-scale defection of the Clan from our Irece Prefecture border. Hohiro took my advice and forced the demand that half the Clan return to the Dragon; they didn't take kindly to that (and I suspect we'll pay for it later). Stone won the inevitable Refusal trial, so the Clan must abide. His actions have also gained the grudging respect of the Falcon representative, and Hohiro seems to trust him. As ordered by my Coordinator, I shared with Stone my Odessian plans, and I received his full support, though no troops

TIMELINE OF THE JIHAD

**Jan. 3071 to Dec. 3074**

The following timeline summarizes the major confirmed details covered by our last Jihad overview publication (*Jihad Hot Spots: 3072*), as well as events that unfolded since that time to the end of 3074. For a more complete and contiguous timeline of events throughout the war, please check out our INN "Chronology of the Jihad" net-site.

3071

(4 January) As part of a growing effort to contain the various border conflicts and coordinate a mutual defense strategy, Precentor Martial Victor Steiner-Davion meets with General Adam Steiner and Khan Phelan Kell of Clan Wolf (in-Exile) on Arc-Royal.

(13 January) Clan Jade Falcon attacks Great X, but the fortified world quickly becomes a quagmire.

(21 January) The Word of Blake attacks Robinson.

(27 January) Magestrix Naomi Centrella gives birth to Daoshen Liao(-Centrella). As the first legitimate child born of the union between Chancellor Sun-Tzu Liao and Magestrix Centrella, Daoshen is named heir to the Capellan Confederation, slating the couple's older child, Ilsa Centrella(-Liao), for the Canopian throne.

(28 January) In an apparent act of spite aimed at the retreating Blackhearts mercenary command, Word of Blake forces on Wasat detonate a nuclear weapon in the capital city, killing an estimated 30,000 civilians.

(31 January) In the fringes of Lyran space, the Democracy Now movement led by Calvin Strauss moves to establish the Alarion Province as a democratic stronghold, with Novara as its center.

(4 February) Khan Vlad Ward of Clan Wolf, reporting a "scouring" on Tamar, proposes a truce with the Lyrans. Also on this date, the Word of Blake attacks and seizes Pesht.

(8 February) Clan Jade Falcon assaults Morges.

(12 February) The world of Arkab suffers a devastating asteroid strike that kills tens of thousands. The Azami appeal to the embattled Combine government for aid but receive no reply.

(21-28 February) Clan Hell's Horses' attacks Steelton, New Caledonia, Star's End, and Outpost, seizing all worlds from Clan Wolf